



# Motivations and constraints of Airbnb consumers: Findings from a mixed-methods approach

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- We investigate a comprehensive set of motivations and constraints of Airbnb consumers through a mixed-methods design.
- Reconciling the literature and our qualitative findings, we propose and test a conceptual model in a national survey.
- Motivations including price value, enjoyment, and home benefits significantly explain overall attitude toward Airbnb.
- Distrust is the only constraint factor that predicts overall attitude.
- Insecurity and subjective norms such as social influence and trend affinity predict behavioral intentions.

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## ABSTRACT

Airbnb is widely recognized as a disruptive innovation in the tourism industry. While separate studies have examined various factors affecting consumers' adoption of Airbnb, the literature has largely focused on a handful of factors in isolation. Adopting a sequential mixed-methods approach, this study proposes a comprehensive conceptual model integrating the literature and findings of a qualitative study and subsequently tests the model via a national survey. The results suggest that, for motivations, price value, enjoyment, and home benefits significantly explain overall attitude toward Airbnb. As for constraints, distrust is the only factor that significantly predicts overall attitude, while insecurity is directly related to behavioral intentions. Overall attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms, such as social influence and trend affinity, predict behavioral intentions. This study contributes to the literature by simultaneously examining the predictive power of both motivations and constraints of Airbnb consumers in explaining overall attitude and purchase behavior.

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## 1. Introduction

The rise of the sharing economy is significantly impacting the tourism and hospitality industry (Zhu, So, & Hudson, 2017). In particular, peer-to-peer business platforms such as Airbnb have emerged as a 'disruptive innovation' enabling consumers to participate in what is termed 'collaborative consumption' in which they jointly share underutilized resources such as cars and rooms (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2014). Collaborative consumption is "a peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services,

coordinated through community-based online services" (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016, p. 3). As one of the most widely cited examples of such consumption model, Airbnb provides an alternative way of renting an accommodation through an online community marketplace and allows short-term rentals of choices of different room types – entire home, private rooms, or shared rooms (Zervas et al., 2014). Airbnb specifically fulfills travelers' needs, such as accommodations with lower prices and opportunities to interact with the local community (Guttentag, 2015). Recent data from Airbnb (2016) show that more than 200 million total guests have used Airbnb, and the company has 10 million bookings and is used by more than 50,000 renters per night (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015).

The growing popularity of Airbnb has resulted in an emerging body of literature examining the factors that drive or deter

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consumers from choosing Airbnb (e.g., [Guttentag, 2015, 2016; Tussyadiah, 2015](#)). While in the context of the sharing economy consumers' perceived value is a significant factor in determining their attitude as well as adoption intention toward the innovation ([Zhu et al., 2017](#)), adoption of peer-to-peer accommodation could also be motivated by social factors such as social benefits ([Tussyadiah, 2016](#)) and social interactions ([Guttentag, Smith, Potwarka, & Havitz, 2017](#)). Research shows that price value, community, home atmosphere, sustainability are major factors motivating consumers to choose Airbnb ([Guttentag, 2015; Liang, 2015; Tussyadiah, 2015](#)), while distrust, efficacy, unpredictability, and lack of cost savings have been found as constraints for using Airbnb ([Liang, 2015; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a; Tussyadiah, 2015](#)). Furthermore, separate studies found that authenticity ([Guttentag et al., 2017](#)), novelty ([Guttentag, 2016](#)), social interactions ([Stors & Kagermeier, 2015; Tussyadiah, 2015](#)), home benefits ([Guttentag, 2016](#)), and trend affinity ([Möhlmann, 2015](#)) affected consumers' decision to adopt Airbnb. Other factors such as insecurity, uncertainty or perceived risk ([Mao & Lyu, 2017](#)), distrust ([Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a](#)), and unfamiliarity ([Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a](#)) also seem to play an important role in the same context.

Although these studies have contributed to the early understanding of Airbnb from the consumer perspective, what is lacking is a holistic view of how those reported factors jointly and relatively determine consumers' attitude and other behavioral responses regarding Airbnb. More specifically, prior studies have mainly focused on examining a handful of factors in isolation or ignored their predictive power in explaining consumer related outcomes, without providing a broad perspective on the issue. For example, [Guttentag \(2016\)](#) conducted a motivation-based segmentation study and found that respondents were strongly attracted to Airbnb by practical attributes, and less so by experiential features. However, they did not test any predictive conceptual relationships between motivation and/or constraint factors and theoretically relevant outcome variables. While [Tussyadiah and Pesonen \(2016a\)](#) explored drivers and barriers of peer-to-peer accommodation, only two motivation factors such as social and economic appeals showed relevance to consumer decisions, and the explanatory power of these factors was not examined. In a more recent study of why consumers chose Airbnb again, [Mao and Lyu \(2017\)](#) found that unique experience expectations and perceived value positively determined consumer attitude toward Airbnb, whereas perceived risk had a negative effect on such attitude. Their model, however, did not consider several other established motivations such as social interactions, enjoyment, and home benefits and constraints such as distrust. While relevant and contributory, these studies are fragmentary in that they did not capture the full dynamics of how a variety of factors relate to consumers' overall attitude and purchase-relevant behaviors toward Airbnb. Studies providing a more complete account of what drives and deters consumer decisions to adopt Airbnb are in great need for theoretical advances at this point. Such studies will also need to reconcile and integrate various study results in their first step.

This study aims to address the critical paucity in the extant literature by employing a mixed-methods approach with a qualitative study followed by a quantitative national survey. Three specific goals motivated this study. First, the fragmentary results and inconsistent findings from previous studies needed a thorough reexamination and reconciliation to (a) avoid duplicated conceptual efforts in future research and (b) develop a comprehensive but parsimonious set of the motivation and constraint factors for the purpose of building an effective measurement model. A series of focus group interviews were conducted to reaffirm and complement the previous studies, redefine several concepts needing additional refinement and reconciliation, and (re)operationalize

these concepts toward greater practical applications. Second, based on the critical review and preliminary qualitative results, this study proposes a conceptual model geared to a more holistic understanding of the motivations and constraints of consumers in choosing peer-to-peer accommodation of Airbnb. Furthermore, to facilitate future theoretical development around the sharing economy, this study examines the relationships between the motivation/constraint factors and purchase-relevant behavioral indicators in the framework of a widely adopted, proven theory, the *theory of planned behavior*. By doing so, this study attempts to add meaningfully to the literature by offering a conceptual framework as well as an integrated view for future investigations into consumers' choice decisions for Airbnb.

## 1.1. Theoretical background

### 1.1.1. The theory of planned behavior (TPB)

To investigate consumer motivations and constraints affecting attitudes and behaviors, this study relies on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The TPB was developed to predict an individual's behavioral intentions toward a specific event ([Ajzen, 1985, 1991](#)). Behavioral intention represents an individual's readiness or willingness to behave in a certain way ([Ajzen, 1985](#)). The TPB holds that behavioral intention is determined by three antecedents: Attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms ([Ajzen, 1991](#)). TPB posits that the individual's behavioral intention is influenced directly by motivation factors in their decision-making processes ([Ajzen, 1991](#)). Empirical studies have found that such motivation factors have predictive power in explaining attitude as well as subsequent behavioral intention ([Hsu & Huang, 2010; Lam & Hsu, 2004](#)).

The TPB has been extensively adopted in tourism and hospitality research to understand travelers' behavioral intentions. For example, scholars have used the TPB to study travelers' intentions to stay at green hotels ([Chen & Tung, 2014; Han & Kim, 2010; Teng, Wu, & Liu, 2013](#)), to visit a destination ([Lam & Hsu, 2006; Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010](#)), to spread negative WOM ([Cheng, Lam, & Hsu, 2006](#)), as well as to take a wine-based vacation ([Sparks, 2007](#)). Several researchers conceptualized motivation factors as antecedents to the theoretical components of TPB to predict tourists' behavioral intentions (e.g., [Chien, Yen, & Hoang, 2012; Hsu & Huang, 2010](#)). As the focus of this study lies in the examination of motivations and constraints of Airbnb consumers, TPB was deemed relevant as a guiding conceptual framework.

## 1.2. Motivations

### 1.2.1. Price value

Price value or economic benefits are a main factor driving consumer decisions to use Airbnb. Unlike the summary construct of perceived value, which represents "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given up" ([Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14](#)), price value is often conceptualized as a value dimension together with emotional value, social value, and quality value (see [Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Walsh, Shiu, & Hassan, 2014](#)). Price value is a cognitive tradeoff between the perceived benefits of the offering and the specific monetary cost for using it ([Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012](#)). Studies show that such monetary value is critical in choosing Airbnb ([Guttentag, 2016; Mao & Lyu, 2017; Satama, 2014; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a; Yang & Ahn, 2016](#)). Similarly, in a recent study examining ridesharing, [Zhu et al. \(2017\)](#) found that consumers' perceptions of value significantly predicted their attitude toward the application. [Tussyadiah and Pesonen \(2016a\)](#) also support the significance of the cost saving features, thereby suggesting that

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