

Motivation of an Airbnb Host: Evidence from Pre-COVID Study In Sabah, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Airbnb, or also known as peer-to-peer accommodation has gained popularity in the hospitality industry. By using an online platform to align a guest's different needs with a host, a unique customized accommodation experience can be created. The guest side on motivation, perception, and satisfaction in participating in this platform have been often investigated. This paper explores the host perspective on what motivates them to become Airbnb host in the context of Sabah, Malaysia. Qualitative approach was selected with semi-structured interview were conducted among 16 Airbnb host located all over the state, in a six-month pre-COVID period (late 2019 to early 2020). Transcriptions were coded, analyzed, and structured into qualitative narrations. Using a Social Exchange Theory, intrinsic factors such as social benefits, passion on learning new culture, enjoyment in receiving recognition were identified in motivating host to participate in Airbnb. Other includes, extrinsic motivation, such as economic and monetary reasons. The findings provide insight into the host viewpoint, resulting in outcomes that can be used to draw more hosts that can provide a high-quality experience for guests in the future. At the same time, the research results are expected to contribute to sustainability of the peer-to-peer accommodation platform. Furthermore, this study recommends having a comparative study pre vs post COVID period to explore the motivations factors that could be affected by the pandemic.

KEYWORDS

Peer to peer
accommodation
Airbnb
Host motivations
Pre-COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Due to its phenomenal development, Airbnb has become a significant topic among academicians and practitioners in recent years (Dogru et al., 2019; Sainaghi & Baggio, 2020; Sigala, 2017; Zervas et al., 2017). The activity of renting out lodging to tourists among the locals has existed for centuries, but there has been remarkable transformation in the procedure following the development of technology. The adoption of modern Internet and mobile technologies have resulted in the virtual market expansion, and growing trust between the hosts and potential guests (Guttentag, 2016). The use of the Internet in the lodging business does not only facilitate the demand and supply chain, but also an evidence that traditional ways of doing business are giving

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way to newer and innovative models. This non-traditional lodging platform has transformed the way people travel (Chica-Olmo et al., 2020) and interact with one another (Johnson & Neuhofer, 2017). Contradict to traditional hotel accommodations, this platform offers closer connections with the locals and the creation of a sense of place, both of which are the competitive advantages of Airbnb (Cheng, 2016; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016). Over the course of its existence, Airbnb has provided over seven million accommodations worldwide (Airbnb Newsroom, 2021) with more than six million listings ranging from the whole residences, to shared and private rooms. This staggering figure makes it the world's largest alternative accommodation platform which equals to three world's largest hotel chains combined (Dogru et al., 2019).

Researchers have grown interests in the rapid development of Airbnb phenomenon resulting in an extensive range of research topics discussing the growth. At the initial stage of its growth, most Airbnb research focused on the operational challenges in managing an Airbnb Business (Keymolen, 2013), its impact on local communities (Gottlieb, 2013) and the comparison between Couchsurfing and Airbnb, two brands which utilized sharing economy platform (Yannopoulou et al., 2013). In 2014, more research theme has emerged to understand the emerging accommodation type, looking into regulations (Jefferson-Jones, 2015; Kaplan, 2014) and the concept of Airbnb platform (Avital et al., 2014; Nadler, 2014). More topics on Airbnb emerged later such as Airbnb experiential behaviour vs hotel (Mody et al., 2015), the impact of the emergence of this platform to hotel industry (Choi et al., 2015; Dogru et al., 2019; Zervas et al., 2017), economic impacts of Airbnb (Basuroy et al., 2020; Levendis & Dicle, 2016). Consequently, because of the significant effect Airbnb has had on the hospitality industry, further research was conducted on the regulations including those surrounding Airbnb in particular, and other short-term rental providers in general (Kaplan & Nadler, 2015; Miller, 2014; Yang & Mao, 2019).

While research on the impacts on hotel industry and economic implications of Airbnb has proliferated in recent years, academic literature on the area of why people participate in this platform is still scarce (Amaro et al., 2019; Guttentag et al., 2017; So et al., 2018). In particular, most of the studies analyze matters related to the use of Airbnb services by service users or guest (Sung et al., 2018), while researchers like Stollery and Jun (2017), Liang et al. (2018), and Möhlmann (2015a), among others, discuss cost saving, hedonic benefits, familiarity, trust, and other novelty aspects like functional attributes and utility, as some of the reasons for guest participation in Airbnb. Although studying from the perspective of the guest is critical to assisting marketers in developing informed strategies, determining how to best address consumers' needs, and adjusting their service and product offerings accordingly are equally vital (Liu & Mattila, 2017; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016; Wang & Nicolau, 2017). Without the engagement and participation of the hosts, both the Airbnb business and the guests will be unable to achieve their goals. In specific, the host's willingness to start using Airbnb platform, the advertising activities, as well as the services available to the guests can have an impact on the guest experience, the quality of the stay, and ultimately the growth of Airbnb platform. Guest aside, it is worthwhile to emphasize and research on Airbnb platform's host group.

In this respect, using Social Exchange Theory, the purpose of the study is to identify what motivates Airbnb host to participate in this platform for the benefit and long-term success of Airbnb. Various studies on host motivation to participate were mostly concentrated on other types of business models such Coachsurfer, small family hotels, homestays and other small tourism businesses, however yet very few studies have examined host motivation to participate in Airbnb context. Another prominent gap worth to be examined is various studies on Airbnb were conducted in big cities such as Rome, Beijing and Germany. Otherwise, we address this gap by focusing on a small city, Sabah, one of the states in Malaysia. It is obvious that majority of the

studies mentioned, together with this research were clearly completed prior to COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted not only domestically but the entire world.

In 2020, COVID-19, the disease which represent an atypical pneumonia that started in China, eventually spread all over the world in a matter of weeks. This has resulted in a significant number of related infections and deaths across the globe. Besides, it has also had a huge impact on global economies, resulting in massive job losses (Chen et al., 2021; Lee & Deale, 2021). Specifically for peer to peer accommodation, Airbnb, revenues started to show a decline in summer 2020 (Roof & Carville, 2020). Situation became worst where pandemic-related travel restrictions around the world were imposed, causing a collapse in Airbnb booking (Chen et al., 2021). Many Airbnb host, especially those with large amount of mortgages are struggling to maintain their income and keep their business (Hu & Lee, 2020). As the travel banned started to be lifted, big changes which focused on the flexibility for the guests and simplicity for the hosts with the aim to increase the volume and diversity of the supply side of the operation were applied for the sustainability of this platform in the future (Crook, 2021).

The article is structured as follows. First, the study explains on Social Exchange Theory as a basis for host motivation to participate in Airbnb. Next, the growing body of literature on host motivation to participate in sharing economy, focusing particularly on Airbnb was outlined. Next, the study introduces the Sabah context and the research approach used before presenting the results and findings. The final part of the paper highlights the discussion, managerial implication, limitation and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Various theoretical models have been developed to predict the hosts- tourists' interactions such as using Theory of Planned Behaviour, Prospect Theory, Expectation- Confirmation Theory and few others. The Social Exchange Theory (SE), on the other hand, is commonly used in studies related to tourism and hospitality. The SET originated from the economic theory that examines the host-visitor relations (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Capistrano & Weaver, 2017; Moyle et al., 2010) includes the combination of social psychological and sociological perspective theory. Homans (1958) inferred that the SET explains the behaviour of goods exchange among the members from four different perspectives, namely, behavioural psychology, economics, propositions about the dynamics of influence, as well as proposition about the structure of small group (Homan, 1958). The two vital rules employed in most social exchanges are mutual understanding and reciprocity. The exchange processes must involve interaction and positive experiences in order to create reciprocity that benefit both parties (Moore & Cunningham, 1999). The key components in SET involve both economic and social outcomes (Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016) while reciprocity is predicted as a prevailing means of social exchange, and is less likely than generalized exchange to promote solidarity or bonds of trust and affective regard.

The highlight of an earlier study by Homans (1958) on social exchange is on the behaviour in the process, while a later study by Emerson (1976) emphasizes on the involvement of two persons who are reliant on the exchange that benefits each other. This theory also describes the importance of concept of power (Emerson, 1976) and how the individuals involved in an exchange relationship need gain benefit from the exchange (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Based on the discussion by Homans (1958) Homans (1958), SET is based on human behaviour and social interaction involving

exchange activities of tangible and intangible goods, and these include rewards and costs in particular. Molm (2006) argues that the patterns of interaction in SET analysis are affected by the structure of rewards and costs, but the fundamental elements of SET are mutual respect and commitments between the parties, followed by loyalty and trust. However, each transaction is bound to conform to specific rules and norms (Emerson, 1976) for a successful exchange process between the host and the guest. Findings by Andereck and Vogt (2000) and Long and Richardson (1989) emphasize the focus on the hosts' needs in the social exchange, by maintaining reasonable and practical balance between costs and benefits. The hosts should administer the cost-benefits analysis to determine the delivery of their service (Urn & Crompton, 1990).

In line with this, we adopted SET as a foundation for this study as it can adequately reflect the characteristics of relationship between host and guest in peer to peer accommodation. Most importantly, both participants received social relationships as a result of sharing behavior. Other than that, this theory has been widely adopted as one of the most influential theories to explain social interaction information systems (Chen, 2013; Stafford, 2008). In peer-to-peer accommodation, social exchange involves the transfer of valued resources such as goods and services between parties who likely have never met face-to-face before (Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016). However, according to Fang and Neufeld (2009), it is impossible to predict how long an individual's intention to participate in any activity will last during the early stages of participation. This can only be discovered once a human connection is established. As a consequence, persons may be exposed to a variety of sources of uncertainty. Making decisions with new and unknown individuals rather than the same partners can result in uncertainty (Cheshire et al., 2010). This is where third-party (or platform) confirmation comes into play, acting as a binding force in the agreement, eliminating the need for interpersonal confidence between the two primary parties (Cook & Cheshire, 2013). In other terms, two people do not need to trust one another to carry out an arrangement if the contract can provide a complete guarantee by the assurance structure. Indirectly, assurance structures in an agreement allows for individuals who are risk-averse or more cautious of others in general to take an initial leap of faith by interacting with unfamiliar exchange partners (Cheshire et al., 2010). Thus, based on this context, SET is faithfully applied in this study as the underpinning on what makes host motivated to participate in Airbnb.

Previous Studies on Motivation Factors of Hosting via Airbnb

Scholars' interest on what influences people to take part in different types of behaviour arose long before it was researched in the tourism area (Page & Connell, 2006). Motivation explains the reasoning for people's action (Reeve, 2017). There are generally two types of motivation and they are internal and external motivation. Internal motivation is related to a person's interest or enjoyment in the task itself, while external motivation refers to exterior factors that influence the person to do something. In peer-to-peer exchange platforms, most studies identified motivation to participate was made possible by allowing individuals to monetize their resources, including possessions, skills, and time (Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016). Other studies such as study in food sharing communities (Ganglbauer et al., 2014) and timebanks (Bellotti et al., 2014; Carroll & Bellotti, 2015) identified that money was not the prime motivation for people to participate. However, later study posited that, it is challenging to differentiate between members with instrumental in comparison with idealistic and altruistic motivation as both goals cannot be satisfied concurrently (Shih et al., 2015).

Further studies on motivation in sharing economy shed some lights on either the user or the provider in terms of motivation to use services provided by these types of platforms (Boecker & Meelen, 2016; Gazzola et al., 2019; Hamari et al., 2015; Martínez-González et al., 2021).

Particularly, majority of these studies explored the perspective of service users and their reasons on why they used sharing economy services. Research on the provider or host's motivation is still lacking especially in Airbnb context (Fischer et al., 2019; Sung et al., 2018). In 2019, Guttentag compiled a detailed literature review in order to view the progress of Airbnb research. From all the reviewed literatures, only two relevant peer-reviewed papers on host motivation were identified, and it is far less than the studies on its guest counterpart. The first study was by Karlsson and Dolnicar (2016) on Australian hosts. They were asked with an open-ended motivation questions where three primary categories were identified namely income, social interaction, and sharing. The first category, which is the 'income', includes information on the expenses or earning additional money, while 'social interaction' includes enjoyment in meeting new people, and the 'sharing' category involves information about utilizing unused space and sharing one's world.

The following year, Ladegaard (2018) carried out interviews with Airbnb hosts originated in Boston and found that hosting was considered an opportunity to interact with the foreigners and indirectly cosmopolitanism can be achieved. Fischer et al. (2019) combined and analyzed all the motivational factors that host experience ranging from financial, safety, security and many more and finally came up with his own interpretation. A model of 4Ps of Airbnb host motivations which consist of pain, people, psychology and profit emerged after a through thematic analysis was conducted. However, it is well noted that certain motivation factors identified were found overlapping, mixed or interrelated between the categories.

Prior to these studies, most research conducted on host participation motivation did not specifically mentioned Airbnb. For example, (Hawlitsek et al., 2016) studied on P2P rental participation on the supplier side and found that enjoyment, income and social experiences are the main motivations. In addition, Böcker and Meelen (2016) studied both service users and providers concurrently on their motives for participation in s sharing economy and posited that economic, social and environmental motivation are the vital attributes in participation. Study by Wang (2019) differentiated between motivation to become a host in lodging-industry sharing economy platforms, namely Coachsurfer and Airbnb and found that Coachsurfer host's motivation are more into social, cultural and self- development in comparison with Airbnb's host which are more into monetary reasons because Coachsurfer is free to the guest. Visser et al. (2017) conducted a study among Cape Town Airbnb's host and the most prevalent reason for hosting was discovered to be economic rewards. In term of sustainability factor, although Hamari et al. (2015) posited that it is one of the important factors in the formation of positive attitudes towards hosting, financial benefit has a stronger influence on the intention to participate in this type of hosting.

In a study on motivation to participate in hosting, Hamari et al., (2015) found that host's intention to host are driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivations refer to doing something inherently interesting and enjoyable (Cini et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It frequently defines as "doing something for its own sake" (Reiss, 2012) and is a more direct form of compensation to meet one's immediate satisfaction or needs. This includes a sense of achievement, completing tasks for their own sake, or for commitments associated with one's identity (Lepper & Greene, 2015). It is a multidimensional construct consists of three attributes namely: interest/enjoyment, felt pressure and tension and feelings of relatedness. It is also deemed as a strong determinant of attitude (Hamari et al., 2015). Meanwhile, extrinsic motivations, in contrast, refers to the pursuit of an instrumental goal, that can be satisfied through indirect compensation, for instance, money (Osterloh & Frey, 2000a) or also known as to doing something because of an outcome that is separable from the activity itself (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). It can be referring to people's aspirations and life goals such as meaningful relationship and community contribution (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). In this study, the motivational dimensions are divided and operationalized

into intrinsic (enjoyment, sustainability) and extrinsic motivations (economic benefits, and reputation or image).

An Overview of Peer-to-Peer Accommodation in Sabah

Sabah is located on the northern part of the island of Borneo and is one of 13 member states of Malaysia and it is the second largest state in the country after Sarawak, which it borders on its south-west. In the south, Sabah shares a border with the province of East Kalimantan of Indonesia. Besides heavily dependent on the export of its primary and minimally processed commodities (Sayed Mahadi, 2015), Sabah is also well known for its eco-tourism products such as white sandy beaches, lush green forests, exotic wildlife just to name a few (Mayan & Nor, 2017). Besides, tourism has grown tremendously in popularity and become one of the major generators of economics and employment creation. The increased amount of tourist arrival contributes to the growth of hotel industry in Sabah. There are about 82 hotels of wide-ranging star rating in Kota Kinabalu itself, the capital city of Sabah (Khoo, 2019). This figure does not include chalets and villas on islands and highland. Along with the continuous growth of tourism, comes the arrival and development of the non-traditional lodging which is peer to peer accommodation, specifically Airbnb.

Yusof (2020) reported, based on the Oxford Economics report, Airbnb in Sabah shows an increased in national GDP contribution from 4.0 per cent to 9.3 per cent and 4.9 per cent to 10.7 per cent, respectively from 2015 to 2019. In 2016, Sabah reported a total of 65,000 visitors stays in Airbnb. According to a study by Property Hunter (2020), most Kota Kinabalu properties listed in Airbnb are located in the coastal areas or within the vicinity of the city centre, offering convenience and scenic views for the stay. From all the listings, 78% offer the whole unit with a rental size of 1 to 3 bedrooms.

Although Airbnb is experiencing positive growth in Sabah, the Sabah government banned the online platform from operating in 2017 in order to protect the interest of hotels, especially the international hotel chains (Miwil, 2017). However, in 2019, the government decided to life the and allowed the properties that are under commercial titles such as serviced apartments to operate as peer to peer accommodations, on condition that they abide the existing Hotels and Lodging Houses by-laws and other regulations. In addition, according to Kota Kinabalu City Hall, only land zoned for commercial or commercial mixed-use developments are allowed to be used as Airbnb accommodations with another condition that the buildings is designed for commercial use under the development plan. License is required prior for peer-to-peer accommodation operation to be deemed legal, issued by the city council and additional safety requirements are imposed such as ensuring operators to comply with fire escape and safety rules set by the fire department. Furthermore, property developers must clearly state in their sales and purchase agreements whether a property is legally permitted for short-term rental prior to operating the business.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a purposive sample of 16 face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted in person with Airbnb hosts where experiences of interest are most likely to be observed. This approach was based by Mackay (2012) where such deliberately non-rational and approaches minimize bias of responses by the question or the researchers. In addition, this method is appropriate for use in sharing economy research, where entirely new factors or forces may

influence the reasons of participating that must be detected rather than placed on study participants (Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016). This section describes the participants in the study, research location, the interview and content analysis procedures.

Participants

All the host participants involved in this study were recruited through the Airbnb platform, Airbnb Host Facebook Page, as well as through expert recommendation from local contacts who are familiar with Airbnb hosts in Sabah. An email invitation to participate in the study was sent to every potential host and a recruiting announcement was posted and shared easily in the Facebook Page. Interview participants were required to undergo some screening questions as proposed by (Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015), where eligible hosts were required to host their Airbnb listings in Sabah and had received a minimum of one guest before agreeing to taking part in the discussion with the research team. In real situation, the researcher found difficulties in getting participants as some of the hosts were not willing to share information on their Airbnb property, thus, only 16 hosts in total agreed to participate in this study.

Face to Face Semi Structured Interview

All the 16 interviews were collected over a period of six months in late 2019 to early 2020 (October through April) and conducted at the place recommended by the interviewees. There was no monetary compensation for voluntary participation in this research. The interviews started with a conversation about how the participants first learned about Airbnb and the reasons that made them interested to know more about this platform. The interview protocol then turned to specific research questions regarding the participant's motivations for hosting. The demographic information summarized in the Table 1 was collected at the end of each interview. The length of each interview was 30-50 minutes. The interviewees were told that they were allowed to quit at any time during interviews. To control method bias, anonymity was guaranteed for the respondents. They were also advised that there were no wrong or right answers, and therefore, they should respond to the questions with openness in a way that indicated their real feelings.

Study Location

The choice of Sabah is considered relevant in this study as Sabah is one of Malaysia's fastest growing state in Malaysia. Previous studies in Airbnb focuses on big cities such as Los Angeles, Berlin, Barcelona and Rome but less attention was given in smaller towns and rural areas (Adamiak, 2019; DiNatale et al., 2018). Therefore, it makes sense to conduct this study as data were collected at the four main divisions of Sabah namely West Coast Division (Kota Kinabalu, Putatan, Penampang, Papar, Tuaran and Ranau), Kudat Division (Kudat, Kota Marudu and Pitas), Sandakan Division (Sandakan and Lahad Datu) and Tawau Division (Tawau, Kunak and Semporna), representing a data collection on city, smaller town and district. Figure 1 plot the research area.

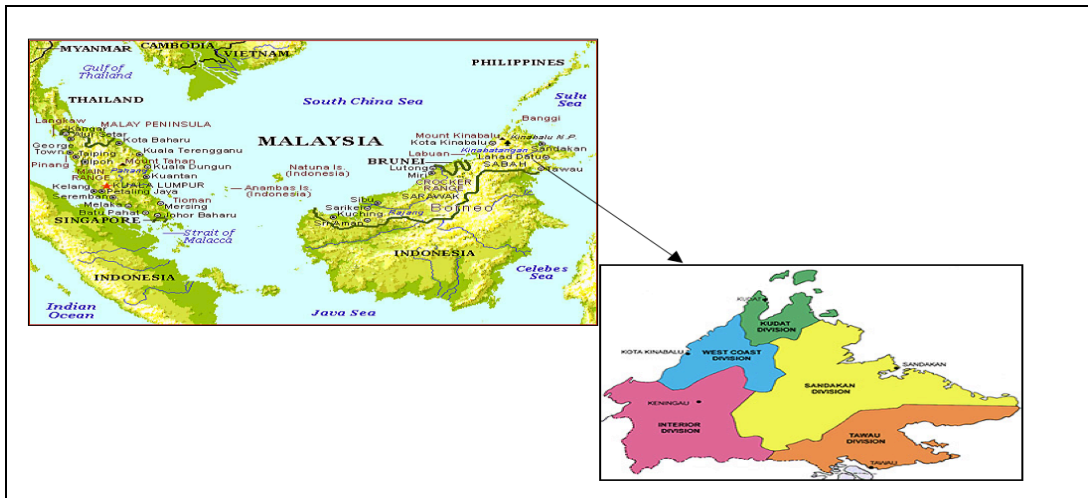


Figure 1. Location of the study area

Content Analysis

The analysis started by reading the transcripts, in order to identify any emerging trends that may reveal themes on host motivation for participation that address the research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Next, all the audio-recorded materials were translated (if necessary) and transcribed into English. Next, data were sorted into different codes line by line, manually and thematically. 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 and the coding excerpts on motivations was based on studies by (Lepper & Greene, 2015) and (Osterloh & Frey, 2000b) which has been used in previous study by Lampinen and Cheshire (2016).

RESULTS

Respondent Description

The discussion of the result begin with demographic of the respondents. The following table (Table 1) sketches the profile of the sample in terms of gender, age, occupation, listing types and location and total number of years hosting via Airbnb. Participant hosts to this study are 16 in total and their age varied from 35-68 years old. All hosts were selected after satisfying the previous prerequisite. In total, eleven out of sixteen participants are male. Participants are found to come from various occupational backgrounds, such as lawyer, teacher and computer network engineer, thus treated hosting in Airbnb as a secondary income generator. All hosting locations are easily reachable by public transportation namely, Kota Kinabalu (6 listings), Sandakan (3 listings), Penampang (2 listings), Ranau (2 listings), Kudat (2 listings) and the least is Tawau (1 listing). Out of the sixteen respondents with hosting experience, 13 hosted in entire house or apartment, 2 hosted in shared room and 1 in private bedroom. In term of experience in Airbnb hosting, most (9 respondents) have more than 2 years to 5 years of experience, followed by less than 2 years of experience (6 respondents) and 1 respondent has just started hosting less than 2 years.

Table 1. Demographic profiles of respondents

No	Id	Gender	Age	Occupation	Listing location	Listing type	Experience with Airbnb
1	AA	Male	46	Teacher	Kota Kinabalu	Entire House	Less than 2 years
2	BB	Male	43	Marketing Manager	Kota Kinabalu	Entire House	More than 5 years
3	CC	Male	51	Lawyer	Kota Kinabalu	Entire House	More than 2 - 5 years
4	DD	Female	47	Engineer	Kota Kinabalu	Entire House	More than 2 - 5 years
5	EE	Male	68	Pensioner	Kota Kinabalu	Shared Room	More than 2 - 5 years
6	FF	Male	38	Banker	Kota Kinabalu	Entire House	Less than 2 years
7	GG	Female	48	Child-Care Owner	Penampang	Entire House	More than 2 - 5 years
8	HH	Male	46	Teacher	Penampang	Entire House	More than 2 - 5 years
9	II	Male	45	Agriculturist	Ranau	Entire House	Less than 2 years
10	JJ	Male	39	Financial Advisor	Ranau	Private Room	More than 2 - 5 years
11	KK	Female	50	Administrator	Kudat	Shared Room	More than 2 - 5 years
12	LL	Male	48	Entrepreneur	Kudat	Entire House	Less than 2 years
13	MM	Male	37	Accountant	Sandakan	Entire House	More than 2 - 5 years
14	NN	Female	47	Entrepreneur	Sandakan	Entire House	Less than 2 years
15	OO	Male	35	Network Engineer	Sandakan	Entire House	More than 2 - 5 years
16	PP	Female	48	Financial Advisor	Tawau	Entire House	Less than 2 years

Motivation for Hosts to Participate in the Airbnb Business

During the face-to-face interview, few respondents provide overlapped (intrinsic and extrinsic motivations) reasons in hosting. The researcher rephrases the question to what is their primary or main motivation that drives them to be an Airbnb host. As a result, four major motives for individual to participate in Airbnb hosting were identified: enjoyment of interactions, social benefits, economic benefits and reputation. These motives were then divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation

From the total of 16 respondents, 7 mentioned intrinsic motivations was their main reasons why they become Airbnb host. Intrinsic benefits which reward that arise within the person who is doing the activity or behavior are tend to be intangible in nature. For example, the social benefits received by being a host, as DD put it *“Meeting people is fun. I feel happy assisting them during their stay”*. This was echoed by FF as *“Different people has different character(s). You never know who will be stepping at your front door. Meeting them is such an exciting experience”*.

Other than social benefits received, enjoyment has also been well-regarded as an important intrinsic benefit for a host. For example, the oldest host among the respondents, 68 years old EE, mentioned that he feels motivated to do hosting as he in dire need of social interaction *“This house belongs to my late wife. She passed away 5 years ago, and my kids are all in “Semenanjung” (West side of Malaysia). I feel lonely and need someone to interact with me. I feel occupied if someone come and stay with me. My kids want to hire someone like “amah” (a domestic helper) to stay with me, but I don’t want because too long together (staying together) will end up “gaduh” (fighting)”*. EE shared his view while giggled in between conversation.

In addition, the passion in learning other people culture is also another motivation for participation for respondent OO. *“My Airbnb unit is in Sandakan city. People comes to Sandakan to see the nature such as Orang Utan. I enjoyed meeting them because they are usually tourist from different countries. I remember one of my guests was a couple from Korea. They taught me how to*

make bibimbap (local Korean food). I learn something new about their culture. I also received local guest, but mostly they won't stay long, 2 nights the most".

Enjoyment can also be referred as the extent to which participating in the sharing economy is perceived to be enjoyable in its own right, apart from any performance consequences that may be anticipated (Davis et al., 1992; Kim & Min, 2015; Liu et al., 2015). As mentioned by CC, a 51-year old lawyer feel motivated to be a host as he feel happy receiving good comments from his guest. CC who is also an Airbnb's Superhost, a recognition given by Airbnb to those accommodation owners who are passionate making guest trip memorable (Airbnb, 2021). Indirectly, the award motivates and gives them higher status within the Airbnb community of owners, and in return, the host is more likely to receive positive reviews (Liang et al., 2017). CC stated *"Airbnb mentioned about the Airbnb's Superhost benefits, how to qualify for it in their websites. I like the idea and decided to give it a try and become a host. However, I only received the Airbnb's Superhost status after 12-13 months hosting via Airbnb. It is not easy to get that (Superhost status). The host needs to receive at least 10 bookings in a year and must follow certain other conditions. I feel honored and happy receiving it and motivate me to continue hosting in Airbnb"*. Same goes to the next respondent, KK. She has been hosting for more that 2 years and responded that the factor that drives her is, the good vibes she is getting from being a part of the Airbnb host community. She is from Kudat, a place located 190KM north of Kota Kinabalu which has a small number of Airbnb listings. According to KK *"Kudat is a small area, not many of us (Airbnb Host) in this area. Because of the small number, we tend to know each other and feel connected instantly. We tend to meet quite often and exchange ideas and sometimes problems too"*, while giggling. These are some of the intrinsic motivations that drives host to participate in peer-to-peer accommodation.

Extrinsic Motivation

While intrinsically motivated users are driven mainly by enjoyment derived from the performing activities, extrinsically motivated users are driven by the expectation of external rewards (e.g. economic reward) (van der Heijden, 2004). The majority of research on the factors that drives people to become Airbnb hosts points to profit or money as the primary motivator (Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016; Sung et al., 2018; Wang, 2019). In this study, not surprisingly, monetary reason was mentioned repeatedly by 9 out of 16 respondents. For instance, AA mentioned *"The money that I get from hosting is quite attractive. The price differs from weekdays and weekends. I can make more money on weekends"* while HH, *"I wouldn't do this if it is not because of the money. Letting strangers staying in your place for free, no way!"* and PP responded, *"I just started hosting less than a year, and to my surprised, the money I am getting is kind of attractive"*.

Other than monetary reasons, four respondents (BB, JJ, MM and NN) mentioned that having an extra space to rent makes them participate in Airbnb. *"I am not from here (Ranau). I was posted to teach in nearby school, so I need to find a place to stay. I am single, not married, I rent a whole house with 3 rooms and 1 room is unoccupied and I list that room in Airbnb"*, said JJ. While BB, *"that house belongs to my parents, they are now in Kedah. I don't want to stay there because it is far from my work place, so I list it in Airbnb"* and both MM and NN who are from Sandakan mentioned *"I have extra place to stay and decided to list it in Airbnb"* and *"that house is meant for my kids when they are grown up, currently nobody stays there, so I list it in Airbnb"*.

In addition, two respondents (II and LL), have less than 2 years of experience agreed that they are driven by extrinsic motivator which is to pay for their mortgage. II mentioned *"It is very difficult to find tenant for my house due to its location, thus, I list it to Airbnb and I can pay my mortgage using the income I get from hosting. Not fully, but it is sufficient"* and LL *"that house is*

meant for investment. Getting a guest once or twice a week is better than not being able to rent the place full time. I can use to pay the mortgage”.

DISCUSSION

This research tried to fill the knowledge gap regarding the motivation of host to participate in Airbnb business. The identification of motivation is crucial for the future of the hospitality industry, given the prevalence and development of the sharing economy in general and Airbnb in particular. Findings of the study are parallel in supporting the Social Exchange Theory and the intrinsic motivations served the behavioral aspects of this theory and consistent with Hawlitschek et al., (2016)'s study. In this perspective, it is clearly shown that respondents are involved in hosting because the benefits expected that can be received by others (guests). Specifically, the study indicates clearly that hosts expect economic or/and social benefits to exchange with guest in peer to peer accommodation platform. The finding is consistent with past finding in SET where, the decision made were based on the concept that will maximize their rewards and minimize their cost (Boateng et al., 2019; Hamon & Bull, 2016). Furthermore, this theory accurately highlighted the feature of peer to peer accommodation, which involves interpersonal exchanges between the host and the guest, and where participants have the option to keep or terminate the connection based on the benefits gained (Kim et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2016). Thus, from this theory, it can be argued that hosts are motivated to do hosting because it offers them both/or economic and social benefits.

Next, most of the host are highly motivated in meeting their guests and enjoyed their presence. Consistent with the theory, the host are accepting interaction and experiences and benefiting this social exchange as part of the reciprocal process. It is obvious that participants are enjoying themselves with the hosting experiences. They showed positive and happy facial experiences, giggle and laugh though out the interview sessions. The hosting experiences also provide them the opportunities to interact with guests from different backgrounds and places. Not only guests, platform such as Airbnb also allow and even facilitate the hosts to share their experiences, interact and learn from each other, although some of the hosts will interact with other hosts outside of the platform (Reinhold & Dolnicar, 2017). Interestingly, the findings also indicate the needs for recognition could drive Airbnb hosts' performance. For instance, some hosts are trying to improve their performance to win the Superhost award. This is in line with other studies where host participation in peer to peer accommodation is driven by other factors such as enjoyment, reputation and value (Hamari et al., 2015; Möhlmann, 2015b)

The findings also noted that economic benefits received from hosting is the primary motives that encourages the host to participate in Airbnb business. The study is supported by previous studies that conformed the extrinsic motivation of monetary rewards (Boecker & Meelen, 2016; Hawlitschek et al., 2016; Visser et al., 2017) is a pull factor that attract them in this business. However, not all host are highly motivated by money since the findings also showed that intrinsic motivations are equally important to some host. This result could confirm that depending on the host background, i.e., age, years if experiences and the host income (other than from hosting) could also influence either the intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors to participate in Airbnb business. From this data, it is apparent that, motivation to become a host are not uniform across socio-demographic categories. This study showed that older, stable income earners and longer year of experience hosts are motivated intrinsically as compared to younger, low-middle income and less years of experience in hosting. The result is in the lines with the earlier literature (Böcker & Meelen, 2016; Hellwig et al., 2015) where an influence of age on motivation are expected in peer to

peer accommodation. A plausible explanation as to why older hosts showed higher intrinsic motivations could be explained by the fact that they have more time to host than those who are employed and this age group's network of social relationship is significantly deficient in either quality or quantity which lead to loneliness. This finding is consistent with (Farmaki & Stergiou, 2019) where older hosts are believed to experience loneliness in their daily lives and proven to be one of a key drivers in participating in peer to peer accommodation. This is also supported by Cornwell et al. (2008), to curb this feelings which was the decrease in interpersonal network connectedness, older people tend to engage in associational networks and sharing economy platform can be seen as one of the available options.

However, this finding contradicts with studies conducted by Abdar and Yen, (2017) and where it is stated the majority of sharing economy providers are at the age range of 18 to 34 years old and the least was at the age range of 55 to 64. while another study by Quinones and Augustine (2015) mentioned that in total 62% of people under 44 are the most participant that were ready as providers in peer to peer sharing economy. One of the reasons for this was because these generation are the one who drives the growth of the sharing economy and is increasingly influencing social and economic conditions (Godelnik, 2017; Kim & Park, 2020) Meanwhile, the reason why younger, low-middle income and less year experience hosts are more extrinsically motivated could be explained by the fact these generation ample access to new technology, open for new complexity of work life with global opportunities and the constant problem-solving attitude (Dembkowski, 2006).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

The findings of the study have several important managerial implications. First, this study advances our understanding on Airbnb in small city, Sabah and bridges the gaps in the peer to peer accommodation literature by examining the motivation factors from the hosts point of view. It is common for peer-to-peer rental accommodation networks to entice both guests and hosts to use their services. For hosts, the networks have to entice the hosts to use their unused or underutilized space (Dolnicar, 2017). Airbnb uses slogan such as "Your next chapter: made possible by hosting" in their official webpage and provide various supporting information such as how to get started with the hosting services, the space requirements, hosting regulations, as well as host protection programs. The platforms also provide other information such as the reasons to host in Airbnb and how the hosts can make money from hosting services and host referral program.

The peer-to-peer accommodation market is highly competitive market, in which smaller providers might encounter more issues with trust. Due to their small size, the providers could be less attractive to both hosts and guests due to limit in choices. Hence it is imperative for peer-peer accommodation networks including Airbnb to benefit from the findings by focusing on the factors such as enjoyment, fun and opportunity for social interactions to entice new and potential hosts. Hosts are not only enjoying the social interaction with their guests, but also among the hosts. Hence, the platforms should provide information that empower the hosts and guests to let them have the feeling that their voices are heard (Dolnicar, 2017) or even creating a review history for both guests and hosts which allow all network members to assess the transaction risks and stimulate networks to socialize, help and assist one another (Dolnicar, 2017). Furthermore, it is also imperative for the networks to create and promote various award categories to attract and motivate the hosts to actively involved in getting more sales or involve in customer engagement activities.

The world is currently battling with the COVID-19 pandemic and undeniably, peer to peer accommodation is one of the industry which was badly hit. Airbnb, both platform and hosts, were arguably the most to lose and the one who faced severe challenges. This pandemic raises questions regarding the future of Airbnb. Indirectly, by understanding what motivates host to participate prior to COVID-19 pandemic, it can provide an opportunity for a positive transformation in the platform, moving towards a more sustainable future in a post-COVID-19 era (Dolnicar, 2021).

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study presents the findings of a qualitative inquiry into the motivational factors driving the hosting via Airbnb in Sabah, Malaysia, building on the foundation of Social Exchange Theory. The findings indicate that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are pertinent in motivating people to become an Airbnb host. Enjoyment, opportunity for social interaction, and self-actualization needs are among the intrinsic factors identified; meanwhile monetary benefits and availability of resources are the extrinsic motivators identified. Despite the fact the study was conducted prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, which the pandemic has greatly impacted the tourism and hospitality industry, the study presents an empirical examination of the motivating factors in a normal condition. Comparative study could be conducted in the future to examine whether the underlying intrinsic and extrinsic motivators could be affected by the pandemic and if the Airbnb hosts were driven by different sets of motivating factors pre vs. post COVID period.

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