Can I sleep at your place tonight?

A case study on the shared economy and practices of trust assessment.

Master Thesis
June 2015

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Abstract
This thesis discusses the increased amount of information available online, and how we use it in our daily lives to make decisions. It aims to open a discussion on the complexity of accessing and evaluating digital information. As the Internet has grown, the amount of information available to the public has exploded. Not only have we gained access to what seems to be an unlimited amount of sources, but also the number of producers has grown. By means of a case study, this thesis explores practices of trust assessment within the shared economy. Through the lens of Actor-Network-Theory as well as Modern Social Imaginaries, media practices are studied by using the example of Airbnb, an online, shared economy platform for accommodation. Airbnb users as well as other travelers are asked about their media practices through an online survey with 229 respondents as well as in-depth interviews with 7 users of Airbnb. Results show that practices of trust assessment differ within and outside of the platform. There is a strong dependency on social information, produced by fellow platform users, especially in the form of reviews. In addition the study finds support for a social imaginary, in which the platform defines the accepted behavior for the users of the platform, who within the economic constraint comply with the social norm set by the organization, in order to be able to use the services of Airbnb.

Keywords: trust assessment, shared economy, media practices, Modern Social Imaginaries, Actor-Network-Theory, Airbnb
"Twenty years from now
you will be more disappointed
by the things you didn't do
than by the ones you did.

So throw off the bowlines.
Sail away from the safe harbor.
Catch the trade winds in your sails.

Explore. Dream. Discover."

- Mark Twain (or not)¹

¹ Even though this quote is usually accredited to Twain, there is no proof that it is actually his. The actual author is H. Jackson Brown's mother. He used it in his 1991 book *P.S: I love You: When mom wrote, she always saved the best for last*. More information see: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cindy-lovell/thats-what-he-said-quotin_b_4282800.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cindy-lovell/thats-what-he-said-quotin_b_4282800.html)
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Acknowledgements
I could not have written this thesis without the help of my loving sambo Paul. He was the one who understood my desire to go back to university, and encouraged me to take the jump and obtain a master. I also need to thank my mother and sister – my mother for all her confusion with digital media, and her everlasting support in my choices. Leaving a job for education may not be every parent’s dream, but my mother has always shown me how important education is to prosper in life. Her questions, about emails, log-in systems, and information desks with no people, have also kept me on my toes when it comes to digitalization. We should not forget that the Internet can complicate things, for some, all this information and technology simply do not make things easier. My sister, even though she might not always realize it, helps me make choices, and I hope one day she enjoys studying as much as I do.

I also want to thank the guys as Qasa, Eric Groenewoud, Magdalena Kania-Lundholm, and Christine Cederstrand. Mattia, Ludvig, Anton, Isaac and Fredrik. Thank you for giving me a place to write, and let me take a look into the kitchen of a tech start-up. Eric, for giving me the opportunity to have a customized programmed survey. Magdalena, my supervisor, for her support and patience, as I tried to figure out what I wanted to write about, as well her amazing feedback and great understanding, from start to finish. Last, but certainly not least, Christine, who with a great passion helped me translate my survey to Swedish, and with true diligence went through my text, proofreading my bizarre spelling mistakes. Christine, our lunches gave me strength and inspiration, and I think we both know it’s never to late to learn something new.
The e-mail said I had to take a bus from Nørreport station; it should be about 3 stops. I arrived during the day, so neither Julie nor her husband could meet me. I had downloaded the local map to my iPhone, in case I would get lost. Julie told me to go to the local grocery store; they would give me the key.

Even though I had been in this neighborhood before, I wasn’t familiar with the street they lived on. Coming around the corner, I didn’t think it looked that much like the Google Street view I had consulted in advance. I found the door, but which of the 2 keys to use? The door wouldn’t open, the lock seemed to be stuck. I checked my phone again for the address. In her last message Julie had mentioned problems with the lock; nothing to be worried about. As I went up the stairs, I wondered: is this really a good idea? Should I really go into this stranger’s apartment, all by myself? Can I really trust someone I just randomly found online? As I opened the door, everything looked just like the pictures I saw online. I guess everything will be fine.
1. Introduction and Background

1.1.1 Introduction

This thesis discusses the increased amount of information and how we use it in our daily lives to make decisions. It aims to further expand empirical research in the field of media studies, specifically around practices of trust assessment and the complexity of accessing and evaluating information online. Where before, much of the information was filtered through an organization or ‘expert’, today, we ourselves need to assess what information is truthful or not. I am certainly not the first to look at how individuals assess information they have found online, however, existing studies are often quantitative in nature, and data-analysis driven. Too often media studies focus on the analysis of static media texts, rather than look at what people do to assess information. By having a practice approach – looking at what people do in their choice process – I aim to go beyond text analysis, and instead ask the question: ‘what are people […] doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts? How is people’s media-related practice related, in turn, to their wider agency?’ (Couldry 2012, 37) I perceive a gap in media studies concerning research on practices of trust assessment, meaning how a user evaluates the relevance and trustworthiness of information online. In this thesis I will argue that it is specifically the increased usage of content generated by other users, shown side by side with official information, which complicates the act of trust assessment.

As the Internet has grown, the amount of information available to the public has exploded. Not only have we gained access to what seems to be an unlimited amount of sources, but also the number of producers has grown. As corporations provide users with platforms that enable them to publish professional looking, but in essence personal, information, it is not just the content that needs to be assessed, but also its sender or source. One may wonder: does it matter? Does one need to differentiate between content produced by organizations, and content produced by private individuals? I believe the answer is yes: as the amount of information, as well as the autonomy of the reader, continues to grow, for many people it will be essential to differentiate between accredited, official information, and content produced by peers. An additional challenge lies in the objective of the corporations that provide these digital frameworks. More often than not, they create these frameworks to monetize from. This thesis does not aim to discuss the ‘hidden agenda’ of monetization of organizations online, but does acknowledge that the fact that many of these platforms were created to make a profit plays a role in their existence and how they are programmed.
In order to exemplify this merge of an organization that provides the platform, and the users who provide the content, this thesis uses the case of Airbnb. Airbnb was founded in 2008 and is an online platform for accommodation with users from all over the world. Every night, thousands of people spend the night in a strangers’ home. They have found each other online and paid for a bed and roof over their heads. The platform on which users can connect is created by a corporation, however the homes as well as the information about these homes, have been provided by other users. This specific website therefore can be seen as a good case of a website where the boundaries between consumers and producers of content have been blurred and where the information they provide and consume is standardized within the framework of a commercial organization.

1.1.2 Research question
By means of the case of Airbnb, this thesis explores why and how individuals decide to stay in a private individual’s home – how their choice is made and the role of the platform where the service is provided. Also, what practices are applied to assess trustworthiness of information, so as to finally come to the decision to put their personal safety in the hands of the system, and take the step of entering a stranger’s home. It does so through the following research questions:

Main question: How is trust negotiated on Airbnb?

Sub question 1: How does the online platform of Airbnb influence practices of trust?

Sub question 2: How do the users of Airbnb negotiate practices of trust?

Using Airbnb as a case allows for the concept of the shared economy to be explored. As Airbnb was founded in 2008, the service is well established with over 1 million listings of homes, and over 25 million guests who have used the service over the years. The digital platform that is used is constructed by the organization, but its users provide much of the content. Also, Airbnb is a good example of a case where most of the decision-making and trust assessment is done online, but where the actual result of the decision is an offline activity. An exchange is made between two private individuals: on the one hand, the one who offers his/her home, and takes a risk by allowing a ‘stranger’ into their private sphere, and on the other hand the person who takes the risk of entering another person’s home, without knowing too much about them or their background. The main form of mediation is done online, partly on the Airbnb platform, but most likely also by means of other media sources.

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2 Information from the Airbnb Website (“About Us - Airbnb” 2015), no exact information about current user amount was found.
1.1.3 Relevance and contribution
As media saturation increases around the globe, the question is no longer if we live with media, but rather how we live in media (Deuze 2012, x–xi). Our day-to-day lives have become saturated with media usage, and the boundaries of what is and is not influenced by media are becoming more and more unclear. We live in a media culture3, where media practices are no different to any other practices we apply to make sense of the world we live in (Couldry 2012, 159–160). With media playing such an important role in our daily lives, one has to ask the question how production and consumption influence our choices. In increasing amounts, online content is created by other consumers, so called User Generated Content (UGC). Many of us frequently create content – we write a comment on Facebook, share a picture on Instagram or leave a review on a website. In effect this information becomes a source for other users, who are able to use it as part of their decision process. As it becomes unclear who is the producer, and who is the consumer4, I believe we need to go beyond the analysis of how and what type of information people produce online. That is, not focusing on the analysis of media texts, but rather look at what users do in relation to a text. We need to go past the idea that the mere existence of information provides us with insight, and rather ask ‘how can we ever know that particular media text changed the behavior of audiences in a particular way?’ (Couldry 2012, 36) Therefore this research acknowledges the work on text analysis that has been done so far, and contributes by providing an angle of media practices.

In addition, the discussion of practices of trust assessment becomes more relevant than ever in the context of the shared economy. The case used, Airbnb, is one of a shared economy – a business concept that allows private individuals to utilize a private good, such as their home or car, for a financial reimbursement. It does so through a single online platform, created by an organization that aims to monetize from it. This organization sets the rules, and provides a framework. The users are the ones who provide and create the product, by means of filling the platform with content that they themselves create. With User Generated Content, in the form of text and images, the users fill the platform with content, be it within the boundaries set by the organization. By doing so, they blur the boundaries between consumer and producer. It also raises the question of how much of this is orchestrated by the owner of the platform. This research aims to explore practices of trust assessment in the context of a shared economy through the case of

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3 This refers to collections of sense-making practices, whose main sources of meaning are the media (Couldry 2012, 159)
4 So called ‘prosumption’. I will elaborate on this concept in the background section.
Airbnb, and how user generated content and the platform it’s provided on influence the users’ decision process.

1.1.4 Background

In order to explain how prosumage, that is consumption and production by a single user, has come to be, as well as the emergence of the shared economy, I will provide a short review of the development of media.

**Media - from old to new**

Originally, media was seen as a ‘mean of mass media’ (Oxford English Dictionary Online⁵), where the focus was mainly on newspapers, radio and television. The creation of content was done by ‘the reporters, journalists etc. working for organizations engaged in such communication’ (ibid). This dictionary description dates back all the way to 1923, and describes a phenomenon often referred to as ‘old media’. There were clear roles, where companies produced the media and audiences consumed it. So, if ‘old’ media is an intermediate, a static object with a sender and a receiver, what is so different about new media? As opposed to old media, which is singular in producers and often aimed at national audiences⁶; new, or digital, media has a multitude of producers and is believed to reach audiences on a global scale through a digital network; the Internet⁷.

From its privatization in the mid 1990s, the Internet set into motion a decentralization of communication. The nature of the Internet: multiple senders; two-way communication; and many receivers, required a more active, engaged and aware audience. ‘One that has to make choices, make decisions and formulate opinions from the wide variety of information sources at his/her disposal. Media in the digital age becomes a “lean forward” instead of a “lean back” medium’ (Poster in Miller 2011, 13). In order for this “internet model” of media to work, more is required from those who use it (ibid., 12–13). No longer do we merely consume media, we now actively partake in the creation of the content. The architecture-like way in which the Internet is

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⁶ For a long period of time, the media was an important tool in the creation and confirmation of the nation/a group. Today ‘society can no longer be confined with national boundaries’ (Couldry 2012, 1). As individuals, we now choose what groups we belong to.
⁷ The story of the Internet dates back to the early 1960s. The U.S. Defense Department, together with other government organizations, started to build networks so that ‘their researchers could communicate and share data’ (NSF 2003). Over the course of almost 30 years, the Internet developed into what is now an unlimited source of information, from a closed network only used by the government and academia. Only in the mid-90s, the Internet was privatized and introduced to the wider audience (NSF 2003). Already then the notion of an old and new media was introduced. According to Mark Poster, the main difference between the old and the new was the role of the audience. Where before they had been passive, they now needed to be active participants. (Miller 2011, 12).
constructed, where one can build sites and add personal touches, ‘suggest a collapse of the distinction between consumers and producers’ (Poster in Miller 2011, 12–13). Already at the start of the commercialization of the Internet, Mark Poster (ibid) expected for this medium to decentralize media production, to be less hierarchical and to be more like a network.

With the introduction of the Internet, four processes have been set in motion that enable the user to ‘produce’ media; (1) Information has gone from a push to a pull base, (2) the means of production and distribution have become much more “democratized”, (3) networking technology enables collective means of organization and engagement, and (4) digital content is easily produced, copied, modified and used by larger groups (Miller 2011, 87). As the Internet has grown to play a greater role in the life of individuals, it has shifted from ‘being at the forefront of a new frontier of communication technology, to being for most people an incredibly unremarkable part of our culture and daily life’ (Miller 2011, 1). Media has become omnipresent, we consume media in placeless spaces⁸ (Deuze 2012, 8) such as online chatrooms, and we, the users, are telepresent⁹ (Miller 2011, 31–32). We can be at three locations at once, merely though digital communication. Through media, we can find our life partner (Match.com), get inspired for travels (Tripadvisor), connect to potential business contacts (Linkedin) or just relax and watch a show (Netflix). Media as a concept can have multiple meanings. In this thesis, rather than discuss these meanings, I follow Couldry’s definition, one that includes and merges both ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, a definition ‘encompassing not just traditional media […] but all the other media platforms, mobile or fixed, through which content of any sort – both institutionally and individually produced – is now accessible or transmissible.’ (Couldry 2012, 35). The reason that such a broad definition is used is that my objective is not to define media, but rather see it as the landscape in which practices take place. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize and highlight what I see as the ‘tangibility’ of media platforms, that is how the platforms that portray media are in this case a non-human object that functions as a mediator within practices of trust assessment, which means that the users can interact with it, and develop media related practices.

**Towards a prossuming society**

As society moved from a consumption-driven media, to a produsage-driven media, users have in an increasing amount obtained the tools to be the ones who produce. This shift did by no means

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⁸ This is the idea that one is connected in person with someone who is in a different location, so despite the fact that both are in their own locality, the connection (social) is mediated through a digital device (Deuze 2012, 8). This also enables us to perform activities outside of their ‘traditional’ location – for example work in a public space, such as in transport or in a café.

⁹ Similar to spaceless place, telepresence too enables the user to be ‘present’ outside of where they are physically present, by means of communication mediums.
happen out of the blue or overnight. When one looks at how the media offering has changed over the years, one can identify that ordinary people increasingly have become a part of the media we consume. ‘Over the past 15 years, viewers have increasingly acted as participants in game shows, quizzes, talk shows and make-over programmes’ (van Dijck 2009, 43). In 1998, the movie The Truman Show turned an ‘ordinary life’ into a movie, but also showed that aired personal or local media have contributed to the personalization of media (ibid., 43). In these examples, one can argue that there was still a clear producer – the broadcasting network – who allowed its’ viewers to take a peak into another individual’s private life. However, the borders of who is steering whom are becoming less and less clear on the Internet. Many Internet users have surpassed Truman. Today, individuals voluntarily share their personal life stories on Facebook, share their opinion and thoughts with peers on forums, and produce information for those who need it, or anyone who is willing to listen. In all of this, just like Truman we are the product being sold; we have become prosumers\(^\text{10}\) and be it conscious or not, find and connect to our peers with whom we co-produce and consume from one pool of information.

The interactive nature of Social Network Sites (SNS), that guide the user into the creation of content, has led to a culture of intertwined production and consumption, so called produsage, by the same user. Corporations provide us with a digital framework, and we, the ‘consumers’, are or create their product, content. ‘One of the most striking characteristics of the social media is that they blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication’ (Van Dijk 2012, 182). Facebook is a great example, where many of the messages are aimed at ‘friends’ they can be consumed by the masses. As Bolin (2014, 159–164) highlights, we might have left behind the concept of ‘mass’ audiences, but digital media still serves a large group of likeminded individuals. Where the content produced on Facebook may be very personal, the environment that it is created in is in essence an institutionalized digital media platform that can reach masses. With a single click we can reach a global audience, and market ourselves or our product.

The notion of connectivity has become an inherent part of our culture (van Dijck 2013, 142). We are not just able to produce content, the Internet also allows users to connect with like-minded people and access information and content from around the globe. These connections are often through weak ties (Granovetter in Miller 2011, 198), loose connections outside a direct social circle. Someone on our Twitter list, a friend of a friend on Facebook; often people we do not know so well, or have never met in person. Connectivity and the ability to easily connect has become accessible to a larger group of users and is no longer just shaped by economic or legal

\(^{10}\) ‘Since the 1980s, the term ‘prosumer’ has been deployed by various academics to denote how users’ agency hovers between the bipolar categories of producer versus consumer, and of professional versus consumer. New hybrid terms such as ‘produser’ and ‘co-creator’ have meanwhile entered academic parlance to accentuate users’ increased production prowess (Bruns, 2007)’ (van Dijck 2009, 41–42)
frames – rather it is the users themselves and the content that they create, often through Social Media, which enable them to expand their network (van Dijck 2013, 142).

It is our personal knowledge that has become commoditized and is a resource for consumers around the globe. As our information has become a commodity, it was only a small step to also commoditizing other items that were previously seen as private. Out of this a new global movement derived, the shared economy, which I will further introduce in the upcoming chapter. We are now able to earn money from what was once considered private. The Internet and its technologies made it possible for us to reach a global audience and ‘to send electronic money, or any other kind of information, around the planet in a blink of an eye’ (Miller 2011, 72). We have commoditized almost everything, from our thoughts to our possessions. No longer is the media a channel of mass communication, which functions as an intermediary between the producer and the consumer. Today, the media has become a tool for users to connect to others and mediate themselves, products and each other. The media has enabled us to coordinate social, economic and political processes on a large scale (Couldry 2012, 25). We have become the media, and the media has become us.

1.1.5 Disposition
This thesis is structured in the following way: in the first chapter, the societal problem was presented, first as an introduction, followed by research questions, and a short background on how this problem has come to be. Followed by this is the second chapter in which I will present previous research, in the form of a Literature Review. The third chapter, the Theoretical Framework, will highlight how this study is theoretically positioned. In chapter four, Methodology, the approach of the thesis is presented, both on how data is collected and techniques used to analyze the data. This chapter also includes an introduction to the case, Airbnb, as well as considerations around ethics and limitations of the study. In the fifth chapter, the main results in the form of empirical data will be presented, followed by an analysis of the four research questions. The last chapter, Conclusion and Discussion, summarizes the main findings, and presents potential further areas of research.
“You know what this reminds me of?” Christine says. This article I read in the newspaper this morning. “Have you heard of Darknet?” “Darknet?” I ask her, “let me write that down”. I make a note in my log.

“Yes, Darknet. It is an online platform. Apparently, you can even find drug dealers there, and order your drugs online, which they then just send you home by post. The police recently closed a large group of dealers down, and you know what“, Christine continues, “the crazy thing is they have reviews! There are actually drug users who review their dealers! Apparently the site has some information on the dealer, like a personal profile, with information on how fast they deliver and reviews of the quality of the drugs. Dagens Nyheter even published some of the reviews. One just commented on the quality of the drugs, but another actually said “thanks for showing me the way to the hospital”. Apparently that guy purchased bad drugs. Isn’t it crazy, that even drug dealers and users have gone online, with a profile and reviews?!”

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11 Dagens Nyheter is a National Swedish Newspaper
2. Literature Review

This literature review is based on the notion that media is seen as a source of information that is defined by the user. In this review, first the concept of the Shared Economy will be introduced. This is followed by an overview of existing research from specifically the hospitality industry. Lastly, the concept of trust assessment is introduced.

2.1 The Shared Economy
In the Background chapter, the shift from old to new media was discussed, as well as how the Internet opened up a platform of connectivity. This enabled anyone who had access to the Internet to be a content producer. It is the user who is the product being sold, and what is sold is often private information. Over the years, many users have gotten used to producing content, and to utilizing knowledge from their peers for free. As mentioned above, this has led to the monetization of organizations who provide digital platforms, on which the public can share their private possessions, so called shared economies. Shared economies started to appear in the mid 2000’s. Despite their existence for almost a decade, there is not a lot of academic research available on the subject.

One can say that a shared economy or collaborative consumption (Cohen and Kietzmann 2014, 279) is a new type of business, that has shaped itself over the last decade. People offer and share underutilized resources and in this way are able to acquire income through these assets. A shared economy is all about utilizing a tangible asset owned by one individual, and allowing a larger group to share this item. The challenges stemming from the economic crisis of 2008 were important factors behind the emergence of these shared economy business concepts. Also, a general concern for the environment and the possibility of using the Internet to easily connect on a large scale with other potential sharers (ibid., 279) were important factors. One of the explanations of the ‘shared economy’ would be that of idealism – however, this is too simple and I would say also an explanation that does not take into account the financial reimbursement that is a great part of the shared economy. Assuming that there is a global community of individuals who are all out to live in peace and harmony and therefore just ‘blindly’ trust each other would be great, but also unrealistic.

The development of the shared economy is in many ways similar to other social and economic developments we have seen. For instance, the ‘importance of the economic model in the modern understanding of order must reflect what was happening on the ground, for instance,
the rise of merchants, of capitalist forms of agriculture, the extension of markets. This gives the correct, “materialist” explanation’ (Taylor 2004, 31). Seeing social and economic changes as two separates entities that can develop in isolation is a mistake. The rise of the shared economy, digitalization and the changing behavior and perceptions of the people who use and create these concepts are all intertwined. As Taylor says ‘what we see in human history is ranges of human practices that are both at once, that is, material practices carried out by human beings in space and time, and very often coercively maintained, and at the same time, self-conceptions, modes of understanding’ (ibid., 31). Where the changes in the economy were important drivers behind the shared economy, the Internet also played an important role. Through the Internet, users could reach a far larger audience than with the traditional media channels (Couldry 2012, 14).

The shared economy is not about presenting new, innovative products, rather it is a new way of utilizing existing possessions. ‘Where the content of an industrial economic enterprise is primarily material goods, the content of a post-Fordist, networked and globalized economy is increasingly informational, and increasingly maintained by communication networks in both production and consumption’ (Miller 2011, 64). Thus, the role of what Miller refers to as ‘weightless goods’ becomes increasingly important for the economy. With the term ‘weightless goods’ he refers to intangible objects, such as knowledge or services. What is interesting here is the intangible nature of knowledge, and how we produce and consume it. Who can ‘own’ knowledge, and how has the increasing exchange of knowledge between private individuals online changed our perceptions of sharing? This may in effect have prepared us for a society more open to sharing. When information is free, and we produce this free information, why not provide our peers with other items that we can share? It is the role of IT within the post-Ford era that allows for individuals to target a global market. It is not as much the need to transport physical commodities to its owners, but rather the ability to connect to the right audiences in order to utilize an already owned commodity. It is the network and the ability to connect that ‘creates a situation in which intangibles become more necessary to the success of the circulation of goods and the creation of profit’ (ibid., 64).

2.2 Knowledge Communities in the Hospitality Industry
Knowledge communities exist for a great range of subjects. The hospitality industry offers a rich source of various academic researches on the subject of User Generated Content (UGC) and information assessment. In the last few years, the hospitality sector has seen some rapid changes in how travelers obtain, consume and produce information, as well as in how travel is booked. The use of social media in the hospitality and tourism industries has increased rapidly over the
last few years. Digitalization has not only affected how users access information about travel, but also how travel is booked. A new type of traveler has emerged – one who takes control of his or her own trip, and creates an individual holiday (Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 438). Where these individuals used to rely on accredited service providers, such as official (online) travel providers, today they are more inclined to use sources of UGC, or travel knowledge communities. And, often without mediation of a travel intermediate, they book and plan their own trips (ibid).

A review of the recent studies within this field shows a range of quantitative studies (mainly online surveys) which focus on the credibility assessment of UGC; an examination of online travelers’ perceptions of the credibility of UGC sources as used on Tripadvisor, and how these may be utilized in the planning process (ibid., 437); along with a study evaluating the four cues of credibility assessment of an online review (UGC), argument quality, source credibility, review consistency and review sidedness (Cindy Man-Yee Cheung, Choon-Ling Sia, and Kuan 2012, 618). Some studies focus on how websites are used in the decision process and how websites containing UGC are used in the process of selection (Cox et al. 2009). In addition, there is a range of studies that focus on content analysis of social vs. institutional information; how the perception of a destination brand is created by UGC videos or commercial videos (Lim, Chung, and Weaver 2012); and a study on how content was evaluated based on the producer, a site-official or another user (Sparks, Perkins, and Buckley 2013). Lastly, there are studies that focus on content analysis; a study conducted on ratings and reviews found on either hotel websites or Tripadvisor showed how travelers greatly value cleanliness and that the location of a hotel influenced how positive their reviews were. The researchers indicated that this information could be used by hotel managers to improve brand perception and reputation (Barreda and Bilgihan 2013). What most of these studies have in common is that they focus on existing content or do a quantitative review of how the source is seen as credible or not. Most studies do not look at the practices that people apply to evaluate trust in an environment that is both institutional and social.

**User Generated Content and The Independent Traveler**
As the amount of information sources is growing, the users’ assessment of this information has also changed. Increasingly, users are skeptic of information that is produced by and benefits the same corporation. As a result, more and more travelers want to use ‘independent’ information that may help them make their choice (Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 438). As travelers’ preference of using ‘independent’ social information increases, marketers have also discovered these channels and are increasingly using the same ‘independent’ channels to market their own commercial messages. The trustworthiness of information found on knowledge communities such as Tripadvisor has frequently been questioned in news media. Due to serious allegations,
Tripadvisor was ordered to rewrite their trust claims, and was no longer allowed to claim that all their reviews are honest and trustworthy (ibid., 437). This was a big setback for the organization, and its’ reputation. The anonymous and low production-threshold nature of UGC evokes some credibility concerns. As a reader, one is suddenly confronted with the need to assess information provided by a complete stranger (Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 438) who may or may not have a neutral opinion on the subject. The existing body of research, of which some is mentioned above, does not take this notion into account. Too often, the existence of information is considered equal to the usage of it, rather than asking a critical question regarding how users assess and use the content in their choice process.

Being online, many cues that we normally use when we assess a personal opinion, such as body language or even style of clothes, are not available. We have no reference to how skilled these people are in evaluating a specific service or product. We don’t know if they have a professional background in it, a lot of experience, or if they are just first time users who lack the proper training or background to understand how something works (Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 438). This, in combination with the possibility to ‘fake’ one’s identity online, and the ability to create reviews under a number of different names, turns UGC into a wild west of information. Putting trust in the corporation who provides the platform does not help either. As they merely provide the digital framework, they do not provide any guarantee as to who contributes to the open source platform. There is no incentive for the private content producers to act according to the values of the corporation (Preece in Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 438). In their study, Kusumasondjaja et al. discovered that negative reviews are seen as more credible than positive (Kusumasondjaja, Shanka, and Marchegiani 2012). This automatically skews how a user uses information. As Ayeh et al state (2013, 437) ‘understanding of the role of credibility perception in the context of UGC is limited, notwithstanding the rising interest in social media’. Therefore, it is necessary to increase our understanding of practices of trust assessment in the online sphere.

2.3 Practices of Trust assessment

Trust and trustworthiness are subjects that are receiving an increased amount of interest within online research. We constantly evaluate information; be it consciously or subconsciously, in order to assess if we believe it is trustworthy. It is important to distinguish between trust and trustworthiness. Trustworthiness deals with how an individual assesses the producer of the information. Trust on the other hand enables us to move from intention to action. Dickinger (2011, 380) presents the three dimensions of trustworthiness as defined by Gefen:
'(1) integrity, the belief that the information provider adheres to accepted rules of conduct, is honest, and keeps promises; (2) benevolence, the belief that the information provider wants to help the customer; and (3) ability, the belief that the information provider is competent. Not all of these dimensions are equal. Integrity, for instance, is effective with purchase intentions’ (Gefen and Dickinger in Dickinger 2011, 380).

Choices are a part of our everyday life; whenever we are to take an action, we have to make a range of trust-based decisions. (Adali 2013, 1). Trust is not a single universal truth – it is based on an individual’s calculation and evaluation of what risk may be involved in taking a specific action. It involves a personal assessment of what the (negative) consequences might be when one decides to take a specific action. (Höhmann and Welte 2005, 20). Trust is a psychosocial construction, defined as ‘the subjective expression of one actor’s expectations regarding the behavior of another actor (or actors)’ (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 95). Political economist Francis Fukuyama sees trust as ‘the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and co-operative behavior, based on commonly shared norms’ (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007, 677–678). This means that trust is constructed based on the perspectives and interests of those who are involved in the process. Thus, trust is not a static concept; it is something that can be negotiated, and that can change over time, depending on who is part of the process and what type of action is to be taken.

Much of the idea of trust is connected to the level of trustworthiness of a source. This means that much of a trust assessment has to do with an individuals’ own background, their own experiences and the amount of risk they are willing to take (Sztompka 1998, 20). When we assess new information, or when trust needs to be established amongst strangers, it requires more effort than amongst people or sources we are familiar with. The main reason for this is that when it comes to strangers we lack a known past history and a future perspective. If one has no prior information or knowledge of a person, it becomes difficult to place him or her in a social context and to define what his or her place would be in a specific group or society. For example, one does not know what is at stake for this ‘stranger’ if they would choose to act in an ‘irresponsible’ way (Resnick et al. 2000, 46).

This does not mean that trust amongst strangers cannot exist, for example a sense of confidentiality – the idea that a user knows that their information is safe and cannot be accessed by just ‘anyone’ (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 100) – will increase levels of trust. In addition, personal networks may also play a role in the verification of trust: when one shares personal information or allows people to come ‘closer’ to a private setting (such as the family) trust can be constructed. To establish trust, there needs to be a certain level of ‘common ground’,
something that people share, and the knowledge that they can both benefit from a situation (ibid., 94, 100). By communicating on a more personal level, rather than official transactional negotiations, individuals are able to increase their level of trust, even when they are at different locations and have different cultural backgrounds (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 101). Social dependency and consideration can be drivers for trust. When people care about each other and want to help each other, trust levels may increase (Baba in English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 100). Think about the popularity of forums or online networks where users share their experiences, or helpdesks that are run by fellow users who are so passionate about a product that they want everyone to have as great of an experience as they themselves. This notion of people who are committed to their cause (a subject or company) provides a more human and personal touch, and through their personal stories trustworthiness increases.

Where many existing studies, as summarized above, specifically focus on direct personal contact and trust assessment, they lack the assessment of how one deals with static information produced by a non-accredited private source. In this case, the user will have to resort to other practices in order to assess the social position of what is nothing more than a comment on a knowledge network.12

**Trusting a source: official or peer-produced information**

The fact that digital media enables users to produce content and co-create, creates a new set of challenges. How can a user assess what information has been accredited by the organization responsible for a certain site, or what information has been produced by a peer; and if it is produced by a peer, how does one know if that individual has knowledge on the subject? According to Ayeh et al. (Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 439) the assessment of trustworthiness has to do with the level of confidence one has in the source’s ‘intent to communicate the assertions they consider most valid’ (ibid., 439). In addition, users tend to give less attention to information that they themselves perceive as less credible (Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 439), which means that the mere presence of information does not necessarily result in the same level of trust assessment for each user and for each bit of information. When there is a multitude of producers, which is often the case on a review site such as Tripadvisor, it is the user who needs to evaluate both the type of content and how it is presented to them on a specific website (Sparks, Perkins, and Buckley 2013).

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12 Most often knowledge networks will allow some sort of profile, but one is not able to contact those who create the content – nor can one really get to know the producer.
Information online can be placed in two different categories: information that is produced by corporations (Institutional) or by peers/other users (Social). From this can be derived two corresponding categories of trust. The first, institutional trust, is the trust or level of confidence individuals have in the economic, political and social institutions that they have to deal with: ‘this form of trust is established when there is a critical mass of individuals trusting in the system.’ (Höhmann and Welter 2005, 22). Examples of institutions run from commercial enterprises, to political bodies or NGO’s. ‘Institutional’ refers to anything that is not a private individual. As our society has become more individualized, we (specifically in the Western world) have learned to utilize established institutions in order to feel safe. We trust that we will get treated in the hospital, we trust that our politicians will represent our best interests, but we also hold trust in brands. A common saying in the corporate world is ‘You don’t get fired for hiring IBM’. This means, that when you use IBM, you know what you get. The sender, in this case a brand, has a certain reputation, and those who know the brand know what to expect. Just as in the example about assessing a stranger mentioned earlier, this expectation simplifies choice. Based on their reputation and behavior, institutions (both profit and non-profit) can create a specific association in our mind that enables us to evaluate whether we trust them or not.

The second, social trust, refers to how much we trust those around us. Here we refer to the level of trust one has in people outside of the family or close social circle. Specifically, modern welfare states are characterized by ‘broad social trust beyond the intimate sphere of family, clan, and friends’ (Lundåsen and Trägårdh 2013, 110). In this case, social trust is still constructed around individuals from a similar cultural (or national) background. When one translates Social Trust to the digital sphere, questions around anonymity and information processes become relevant. In the online sphere, social trust can be a tool to help the user evaluate if they should or should not interact with an unknown fellow user. Specifically in the case of information created by other users (UGC), ‘trust is often not an issue of security or reliability, but a matter of opinion and perspective’ (Golbeck 2009, 2). For example, when there are many reviews available on a website, they are likely to range from very positive to very negative. It is not enough for a user to just ignore the most extreme ones. In the process of selection, one needs to decide which information is relevant and which is not. Social trust in that case is about ‘finding people whose opinions are like the user’s’ (ibid., 2). The question here is if users will use this

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13 There is also a form called Personalized trust (Höhmann and Welter 2005, 22) which refers to the relation we hold to representatives of an institution. This is needed to establish a relationship. However, in this case, the person is expected to represent the institution.

14 There are, of course, plenty of cases where popular opinion or a central authority can help establish trust. A website with Verisign credentials, for example, can be given some added degree of trust that it will protect the user’s sensitive information. Peer-to-peer networks use measures of reliability for each peer as a measure of trust. However, these instances say more about the broad definition of “trust”. (Golbeck 2009, 2)
social information, such as reviews, or rankings, more or differently than the official and credited information. And, in effect, who is the one to take the blame when things go wrong and trust is broken.

**Source assessment and building trust**

Up until this point, the discussion of trust has mostly been around public and static information that is used to make a choice. There are however also elements of trust that can derive from how information is used or produced. If a user is not able to assess the level of trustworthiness of every specific individual who makes up a network, they will rather ‘draw on information based on the reputations of other network members and evaluate the extent to which sanctions can be applied’ (Höhmann and Welter 2005, 21). In order to negotiate trust, there needs to be a consensus on what is the norm within a specific network. Norms tend to be managed by applying accountability – only when one has defined what is not ok in a network, can one define the difference between who is trustworthy and who is not within the network (Sztompka 1998, 24; Höhmann and Welter 2005, 21). Where this definition of norms often works well on a local scale, in situations where people do not live close to each other, as is often the case with online networks, the members of a network rather look for things they share or have in common to negotiate trust. This can range from religious background, to common interests (Höhmann and Welter 2005, 21). ‘Trust breeds trust; trust received is usually reciprocated’ (Sztompka 1998, 14). Whether this is also the case in the online realm is the question, as there is little research on this subject. As mentioned before, many networks are constructed on weak ties, where the members of a community have very little dependency on one another. What we do know is that trust can also exist without a strategic calculation. Trust can be what one would call a ‘gut reaction’ (Höhmann and Welter 2005, 21) where people apply trust out of habit. It enables us to move on with what we do, without having to assess the trustworthiness of an individual or a group (ibid., 21). This is a practice that most likely will also be valid online, in relation to the habits one has formed online, based on previous experiences.

An anthropological study that for ten years looked at work relationships in high-tech communities and how trust was constructed amongst individuals who worked together but were located in different (remote) locations, showed that ‘the management of interpersonal and organizational expectations that is embodied in the concept of “trust” is an example of how locally constructed cultural realities are enacted on a global stage’ (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 90). In their study, the researchers highlight that it is specifically the multitude of global locations that provide a risk, which locally constructed networks do not (ibid., 92). These international working networks were mediated through media technology. The technology
enabled employees to work together and communicate in their daily working life, no matter where they were located. When we come into contact with a new person, and we want to build trust, we tend to rely on a cultural understanding that fits a specific institution that we are part of. When this is not possible, as we might not be in the same location as this individual, or know very little about them, then our trust assessment falls back on assessing what we ‘expect’ them to do (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 21, 106). The idea of predictability helps us when we are in a process of building trust; we need to listen and respond to the needs of others in order to build trust (ibid., 99).

Trust, therefore, can depend on many factors: the individual, the group, the cultural background or even the sender of the information. Trust is not static, and the norm of trust that may be set by a society can be broken by a commercial market force that evokes new forms of group activities (Höhmann and Welter 2005, 21). Whenever trust is negotiated it is the context that dictates what elements of trust are credible. Where an honest personal confession may build trust in some occasions, there are also contexts where it has the opposite effect (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 96). For example, when you share with a friend that you spend half of the day at work online searching for accommodation for your upcoming trip, this may strengthen your trustworthiness to this friend. If you would provide the same information to your employer, they will most likely not trust you anymore as being a good employee.

When direct social information is scarce, for example when contact is mediated through a digital platform, the establishment of trust requires a fair amount of social effort. It is about giving and taking and for all parties to engage in and interact. When there is interaction in the network, there is a certain level of expectation involved – if I act in this way, the recipient should do the same. This way of reciprocal trust-building may be problematic, especially in digital environments, as the nature of the technique can work for and against the social interactions (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 96).

Trust is something that can be constructed. It ‘evolves as people engage in a complex symbolic dance, assessing and developing cultural constructions of risk, delineating accountability, and negotiating trust’ (ibid., 94–95). When an individual becomes part of a community that is hosted by a brand, it is through identification with that community that the level of trust in the brand increases (Marzocchi, Morandin, and Bergami 2013, 96). The more that they feel a part of the community, the stronger will be the trust towards the brand. And in effect

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15 Trust can also be studied through the lens of the two-step flow (Weimann 2001), which indicates that the mass media do not have a direct effect on the general audience, but rather that it is mediated through opinion leaders. This means that media influence is filtered through interpersonal communications. In this research, this model is less relevant, as the study aims to explore how trust is assessed across all media, rather than use a pre-set notion that there is an interpersonal mediation, through for example a social network.
the members of the group create a stronger bond not only to the brand, but also to the fellow members of the specific community (ibid., 96). An important element to keep in mind though is that studies that have been conducted on credibility or trust assessment have been about online information. A big question remains in what of the information is actually used in the decision process. As Golbeck (2009) highlights, it is not the mere existence of information that creates the trust. Rather it is the selection that a user makes, and how this selection resonates with their personal experiences or viewpoints, that constructs practices of trust assessment in a time and age where for all information content, there are several other digital sources.

2.4 Chapter Summary - A network of Sociality
This chapter started with the introduction of Knowledge communities, where previously private knowledge has become free public information. This drive to share what was once private, has through many social changes led to what is today referred to as a shared economy. Despite the existence of this phenomenon for almost a decade, there is still a limited amount of research available on the subject. The emergence of this new industry, where individual goods are commercialized and can be shared by many, can be contributed to the notion of our earthly resources being limited, as well as the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. An important element of the shared economy is the sense of peers, and the power that lies with the users, who can decide who does or does not obtain access to their personal assets. Often these economies show similarities with knowledge communities, where there is a heavy reliance on the users – it is their personal opinions that set the norm.

The power is in our own hands, ‘the law is now on Google’, and individuals find the information that they need by themselves. As we have seen, especially in the hospitality industry, the emergence of knowledge communities has had a profound impact on how individuals travel. No longer is it necessary to have a professional travel agency intermediate for travel. Travelers can take matters in their own hands, and create their own personal trips (Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013, 438). In making their choices, travelers often shy away from accredited and official travel service sources, such as hotels or travel organizations. Rather, choices are made based on personal and socially created content, where it is the experience of peers that guides the decisions. Here it is the user who needs to evaluate both the type of content and how it is presented to him or her on a specific website (Sparks, Perkins, and Buckley 2013). How we assess the trustworthiness of information online is a question that is receiving an increasing amount of attention. A range of studies have been conducted on existing information, however, these lack the perspective of what users actually do with the information, and even more importantly, if all the content is even used in the decision process.
Deuze discusses the change in urban planning, which enables *Networked connectivity": the creation of hybrid spaces that enable interaction between people and things regardless of place (Deuze 2012, 16). This development is applicable to many areas of our lives beyond city planning, as mobile devices together with an increased opportunity to connect to the Internet, no matter where in the world you are, enables individuals to always connect with both people and things. It is this ability to connect at any moment in time, with what in all essence are weak ties, or even strangers, that makes practices of trust become essential. Trust is not a static concept; it is something that can be negotiated, and that changes over time, depending on who is part of the process and what type of action is to be taken. It can be constructed through restrictions, communication or becoming familiar with a stranger, or, as I would argue, even with a source. An important part of the social process is that of communicating. Rather than look at what people say in their communication, I focus on how the process unfolds and where people are when they communicate (Deuze 2012, 232), as well as the potential usage of intermediaries in the process.

Many of the studies conducted on the subject of trust have been in an offline realm, focused on interaction, how individuals place a stranger in a social realm and determine, based on the strangers’ position, how they asses their persona. Online, there are many factors that make this assessment more challenging – one cannot see the person, might not be able to contact the source or identify the producer, with production being scattered amongst corporations (institutions) and individuals (social). In the next section, I will address the challenges related to media becoming an activity, and not just something that we consume, as well as how this has created a complexity around sender identification. Is it the digital platform, the individual producer or someone else? I will also explore how users relate to this – do they differentiate between static information found online or that obtained offline, between information obtained through a friend or through an accredited source? Lastly, I will discuss questions regarding the definition of a specific social norm that is agreed upon by a group with economic dependency, and how this could influence practices of trust assessment as we have seen in this chapter.

**Contribution**

This thesis aims to contribute in two different areas. The first is that of the social aspect of the shared economy. Being a new, emerging sector, the research on shared economies so far has been focused on what it is, and how it emerged. I will contribute by looking at how the participants within a shared economy establish practices of trust within a social setting. Here, I especially look at the role of the corporation that manages the connections online, by asking two questions. The first is how trust is negotiated on Airbnb, especially by its users. Secondly, I look at practices of trust assessment. Previous studies have mostly looked at static information, and have not taken
into account the role of the platform that the information is found upon, by asking how the technical platform influences practices of trust. In addition, this research also expands the work of practices of trust assessment from an off to an online realm, specifically when it comes to ‘strangers’ who need to trust each other in order to obtain their goal.
I ask Karin about her digital behavior. She tells me: “I am online all the time, I met my husband online, I bought this apartment more or less online, I do basically everything that is essential in life online.”

It is a Friday afternoon, we are sitting together on the couch of her living room, next to me her iPhone 6 Plus that has a pink cover around it. It falls in-between the cushions; she does not pick it up. Karin continues: “I knew this would be the apartment we would buy when I saw it online. After you have seen over a 150 apartments you know straight away that it is right. You kind of start to understand what it is you see.”

She continues and tells me how now that she has a child, she actually buys even more online. “I don’t have the time to run around to several stores and find the best deal. I go online, often to a store like H&M which also exists offline. But I more and more often buy from stores I have never been to in my life. I do look out for the known brands, this way you know you can trust the stores. It’s a combination of Brand recognition and price.”
3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1 Actor-Network-Theory
As mentioned in the literature review, much of the existing research focuses on isolated on or offline initiatives, and lacks a combined perspective of the social and the technological. More specific, it may look at the social, but too often does not take into account the role of non-human actants, such as the technological systems that mediate the communication. I believe that it is important to acknowledge the role of the digital platforms on which information is shown. Old media was an intermediate; that is a newspaper was a static object that transported the information. I see online platforms as mediators, that is, through code and programming, the sites are able to negotiate the social. Even though these platforms are constructed by humans, this per se does not make them ‘human’. I see these platforms as a destination, a space or location where one can go, that is constructed out of streets, squares, houses and rooms. As one navigates through this platform, it is the programmer who has decided where one is allowed to go or not, they have set the direction. If a user lacks a log-in (or a key), access to certain areas can be denied. If one would like to ‘write on a wall’, one cannot always do this, as the system has been programmed so that users can contribute to the content of the site, but not everywhere. It is specifically this sense of restrictions and symbolism within the platform, that I see as a crucial factor in media studies. I have mentioned before that I believe studies too often focus on (static) digital content, and do not take into account if users actually use the content, or how the system influences their behavior. When it comes to studies of choice behavior; (production of) information, and information platforms on the one hand and an individuals action on the other should not be seen as isolated entities, but rather as constant influencers of one another. Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) allows researchers to do so, as media is not seen as a complimentary realm to the social, but rather as part of it.

For me, media is a ‘technological network’, which is just as much a part of our everyday life as for example a highway. This means that there is no need to see how the media relates to the social space, rather it is a natural part of the social (Couldry 2012, 101), and thus by its existence influences an individual’s actions. According to Latour: ‘technological networks are nets thrown over spaces, and they retain only a few scattered elements of those spaces. They are connected lines, not surfaces. They are by no means comprehensive, global or systematic, even though they embrace surfaces without covering them, and extend a very long way’ (Couldry 2012, 101; Latour 1993, 117–118). In this sense, media is more of a ‘net thrown over social space’ (Couldry 2012, 102) that is, it is there, but at the same time it is not, we are aware of the Internet, but at the
same time, it holds a certain symbolic power over us in interaction. Actor-Network-Theory enables a researcher to surpass the traditional deviation between the social of human society and the non-existing social of objects. As the Internet has evolved into a natural intermediate, it is ANT which allows us to include information that is found online, and may not have been retrieved from a ‘person’ in the direct social sphere or space, and include this static information as part of the social construction.

Just think about it: if you are about to board a flight, is it only the employees of the airline who enable you to board successfully? No, you are able to act and move in a coherent way with the help of signage boards, your boarding pass or the mobile app on your phone, all informing you where to go and what to do (Latour 2005, 7). Thus, we cannot claim that the social is a ‘special domain’ (ibid., 7) that exists next to that of objects (created by man). Rather it is how we re-assemble or re-associate information for our own movement. Through ANT, one can discover how relations fit together, and reveal patterns of how individuals connect things, rather than take a single frame and try to fit data into it (Latour 2005, 24). In ANT, the concepts as presented by the actors are stronger than those seen by the analyst. This means that in this thesis, it is the subjects who guide the practices, it is their experiences and how they see things that guide analysis (ibid., 30), rather than the researcher pre-defining clusters and filling these with behavior. As this thesis is a case study of an online platform of the shared economy, where users come together with a purpose and goal, ANT opens up the opportunity to look at the role of the digital platform in the negotiation of a social construction, as well as how technology may contribute to the establishment of a trustworthy online environment. If the location that one visits, and the interaction that takes place there is seen through the lens of ANT, that does leave the question of what one is looking at. This is why this theoretical framework needs to have an approach to both practices, and the sociality that is found on the platform.

3.2 Media Practices and the Social
‘Media has become the fabric of our lives. Once upon a time, our family and other social relations were the fabric of our lives, […]. But in the postmodern era, nothing is real until it’s on one of the major networks, cable news, the Internet or another media feed. Proximity if nothing; connectivity is everything’ (market researcher Jim Spaeth in Deuze 2012, 34). As discussed in the Background chapter, media is no longer merely a static content produced by a select few and consumed by the masses. It has a social symbolism and value that is negotiated by its users. Digital Media allows consumers not just to consume, but also to interact with and produce content online. This also means that, as we learn how to interact with our peers, we can also learn
how to use media; media can be seen as a practice. Seeing media as a practice enables one to evaluate it as ‘something human beings do… a form of action’ (Pitkin in Couldry 2012, 33). Some established media practices include: (a) Searching and search enabling, (b) Showing and being shown\(^\text{16}\), (c) Presencing\(^\text{17}\), and (d) Archiving (Couldry 2012, 45–52). As I see it, these practices are enabled through the technological programming and development of Internet service. In addition, Couldry defines a set of more complex media-related practices. Which I believe are closer to how users decide to behave, as they themselves are far more in control when it comes to the content or consumption of content. These practices are constructed out of several smaller practices and have become their own categories: (1) keeping up with the news, (2) commentary\(^\text{18}\), (3) keeping all channels open, and (4) screening out\(^\text{19}\).

There are four basic advantages for researchers in looking at media as a practice: it allows one to see practices as (i) a regularity of action, one might say our ‘daily routine’ of interaction with media, both in context and resource; (ii) a social construction, which is held together through language and provides a toolbox for understanding information; (iii) human needs, such as the shaping of media in relation to needs for coordination, interaction, community, trust and freedom; (iv) it allows you to think normatively about media, asking the question how we should live with media (Couldry 2012, 33–34). One may ask, is our relation to media this conscious? Yes and no. We maintain the illusion that we can control our media, for example by pulling the plug, pressing the off-switch on a remote control’ (Deuze 2012, xiii), but also by learning how to operate and handle media. Just think about the courses that are being taught on for example creating your own webpage or how to operate a specific computer program.

‘Online connection changes the space of social action’ (Couldry 2012, 2). On a theoretical level, this could explain why sociality now transcends the logic of space, that is, one can share a space without physically being in the same location. However, this does not provide any answer to why individuals would act differently. Couldry argues that in this way, the internet creates an infinite reserve for social organization to change in space everywhere (2012, 2). Rasmussen sees the ‘Internet as a model for contemporary society’ (Deuze 2012, 49), one that makes us live in what he refers to as ‘a distributed society’ (ibid.) where due to its network-like nature, the internet ‘encourages people to create and maintain a sheer endless variety of personal and impersonal relationships and networks fulfilling all kinds of goals and functions’ (Deuze 2012, 49), Couldry’s vision on media practice is as I see it about how we interact with and use media. Even

\(^{16}\) This means using imagery or video to visualize what is happening (Couldry 2012, 47)

\(^{17}\) The ability to show that you are simply there

\(^{18}\) Today’s commentary has become a way to signal what is or is not relevant for us. The comments help us in selecting information. (Couldry 2012, 54)

\(^{19}\) There is a lack of research on what people do NOT consume when it comes to media (Couldry 2012, 56)
though he acknowledges the benefit of ANT in relation to media practices. I believe he does not put the theory into action in relation to media practices, nor does he clearly acknowledges the role of the system as a technological actant that is part of the social, and how the intermediaries influence and individuals media practices. This is why I believe it is important to combine media practices with ANT, as it establishes the technological systems as a social actant, but in this case also highlights that I see it as non-human. The question does remain how individuals would negotiate the norm and how to behave in this transnational web of interaction, where the person one interacts with often has different cultural norms and values, and may in turn know very little about oneself. Modern Social Imaginaries may provide some explanations on how individuals, in addition to their own culture, are able to partake and belong to a variety of other social groups at the same time.

3.3 Modern Social Imaginaries

At this point, I have defined how I see the role of the technological platform that provides the service and how I will look at the behavior of the people on the platform. Last, I would like to discuss how I see the way the social norm is defined with the users as well as the digital platform. The Internet enables us (more than ever) to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds, who might have similar goals as us. It enables us to interact with people we might never meet and have little in common with apart from one common interest or goal. In an increasing amount, one can now also find examples of cooperations who not only build these platforms for individuals to connect, but also to capitalize on this phenomena. In this thesis, I see the gathering of users on one platform as a Modern Social Imaginary. Modern Social Imaginaries are basically concepts to which we as individuals feel we belong, and according to which we can act in compliance with the moral standard (or norm)\(^{20}\). ‘The social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society’ (Taylor 2002, 91). This means that the norms that are negotiated aren’t idealistic concepts, rather they are closely connected to ‘what one might call the “ontic” component, identifying features of the world that make the norms realizable’ (ibid., 95). Similar to trust being something that can be negotiated, a social norm is also an agreement of a group that needs to be negotiated and agreed upon by those who are part of the group.

Where before there were clear ranks in order of society, now it is more about mutual respect and mutual service to those who make up the society (Taylor 2002, 96). According to

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\(^{20}\) Taylor’s work is very much drawn upon the work of Benedict Anderson’s thinking in *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 2006), but also that of other scholars such as Jurgen Habermas, Michael Warner, Pierre Rosanvallon and others (Taylor 2002, 92).
Taylor, what is central to Western modernity is the new conception of the moral order of society (Taylor 2004, 2). ‘The picture of society is that of individuals who come together to form a political entity against a certain preexisting moral background and with certain ends in view. The moral background is one of natural rights; these people already have certain moral obligations toward each other. The ends sought are certain common benefits, of which security is the most important.’ (ibid., 3–4). In his book Social Modern Imaginaries (2004), Taylor discusses how Western society, throughout the last century, has gradually shifted the concept of moral from a theory to an integral part of the social imaginary. He introduces the idea of a “moral economy” (Taylor 2002, 94) where it is the peasant community who criticize their landlords and burdens placed on them by the state, but also the moral order that is organized around hierarchy in society and the cosmos. A society where norms were often related to religion and other ‘untouchable’ concepts. However, morals are changing from a ‘set of norms’ to being more applied to what humans do. As societies slowly let go of the norms set by the church, we enter a time that is focused on the people themselves deciding and negotiating the norm of how they live.

According to Taylor, the social imaginary is not created by structures of power, or repression, rather it comes to be through an unspoken form of consensus where the greater and in that case dominant group defines the norm. ‘A strong economy eventually came to be seen as the collective goal of society’ (Taylor 2002, 102). Even though those that own the enterprises have their businesses for commercial purposes, good policies by what Taylor calls the ruler can help towards building a better common good (ibid., 102). This idea of mutual benefit is important when one wants to find a positive meaning of life. The concept of mutual benefit is also seen in practices when negotiating trust – we assess a stranger’s intentions, figure out what they are and how they will influence the social group that they are part of. Seeing the economy as a system, and a thriving economy as an important agenda point for society, both parties involved in a transaction need to have a sense of gain in order for economic collaboration and exchange to work.

In order for a social imaginary to work, and to be able to transform a society according to their own set of rules, those who belong to the society need to (1) know what to do, ‘have to have practices in their repertory that put the new order in effect; and (2) the ensemble of actors have to agree on what these practices are’ (Taylor 2004, 115). When these things are in place, it is possible for a new group to form that has agreement and understanding on specific norms valid for their group. Even though this sounds very straight-forward, the social imaginary is at any given time complex, as it incorporates a sense of normal expectations we have from our daily lives, as well as those that are valid for a specific group. ‘Such understanding is both factual and normative; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea
of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice’ (ibid., 24). There are many similarities within practices of trust assessment, where individuals also utilize their existing moral standards to judge the trustworthiness of a stranger. It is also the individual and the ‘group’ that the newly found information belongs to, which will determine whether to trust it or not.

3.4 Chapter summary – Theoretical Framework
As the media has become an integrated part of our lives, we do not live with, but rather in media. The time has come to stop seeing social actants as something that can only involve ‘humans’. As technology has taken a greater part in our lives, the social is constructed of human and non-human actors equally. In this thesis, I therefore specifically look at the role of the technological platform, a non-human actant, and how this influences and shapes media practices. Seeing media as a practice, allows me to ask the question what it is people do in relation to media, all types of media, and how users have learned how to act and behave within the media. I argue that we should not merely look at the text that is produced, but also try to understand the context in which it is used, we need to centralize the user, and take into account how a digital platform steers content creation as well as interaction. The more we are exposed to different types of media, the more we develop our personal style and opinion of media. In addition, Digital Media, or more specifically the Internet, has allowed us to connect to social groups that surpass our own local community. In this day and age, with the click of a mouse, we can connect to like-minded (and not so like-minded) people all around the world, share information and interact. Where ANT centralizes the user, and introduces non-human actants such as technology, media practices allow one to look at behavior, it is the Modern Social Imaginaries that in this case allow us to explain why and how the users of a shared economy are able to come to a sociability and shared norm. It allows us to look at the individuals’ personal morals and standards, and how these may be re-negotiated by the group, and platform, as well as evaluate the role of public social norms which decide who is included or excluded in a group or community.
I start to type, www.Airbnb.com in the search field. I have been to this site before, so my browser fills in the URL automatically. I press enter and land on a familiar page. Over the past few months the design has changed. I get a bit confused over the moving image in the background. Someone who lies in a bed suddenly starts to move.

I am supposed to research the help section, obtain a better understanding of what Airbnb has to offer. But I can’t help myself; all the homes and the people who share their home on this platform fascinate me. As a voyeur, I allow myself a short peek into the world of the shared economy that is Airbnb. Many unknown people who allow anyone to take a look into their homes, and, provided you pay the right price, even allow you to come and visit their homes. I decide to ‘travel’ to New York, zoom in on Manhattan and look at the pictures, read the reviews, get inspired by the interior design, and read up on the hosts. I am fascinated by the amount of apartments on display. A million questions shoot through my head, who are these people? Where do they live when they rent out? How did they find Airbnb? How can they afford to have several apartments?!

I remind myself of the task at hand. Leave this oasis of strangers, scroll down the page and click ‘terms & privacy’. I end up on what is probably the most boring and ugly page of text ever, and slowly start reading…
4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction and Research design

This study is an inductive exploratory case study. One could argue that every social science study is a case study, as it always analyses a specific social phenomenon in a specific time and place (Ragin and Becker 1992, 2). Nevertheless, there are some specific reasons why this research benefits from being a case study, that is grounded around a corporation that can be seen as the link to a social phenomenon. A case study allows the researcher to examine a specific network or smaller community (Harper in Ragin and Becker 1992, 140). When a community is constructed out of the norms of the group, it becomes particularly important to be able to portray the voices of those who make the community (ibid., 145).

A case study is particularly useful when a researcher wants to understand actions and processes that are outside of a researchers control (Hellgren 2012, 53). As I have no influence on what the corporation does, nor on what its users do, questions around how and why are particularly useful. This confirms the choice of case study, as according to Yin (1989, 13), case studies are particularly useful when a researcher asks questions about the “how?” and “why?” of a certain phenomenon, and when the focus is on ‘a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context’ (Yin 1989, 13). In this thesis, the social phenomenon is that of Airbnb, an example of the shared economy – a timely phenomenon created both by social and technological changes.

In short, a case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- ‘Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
- multiple sources of evidence are used’ (ibid., 23).

The choice of Airbnb has to do with the fact that I ‘believe that “world systems” (networks of interacting and interdependent human societies) are fundamentally important empirical units for understanding history of human social organization’ (Ragin and Becker 1992, 9). My profound interest in anthropology, and anthropological methods, makes a phenomenon such as the shared economy a very interesting subject. As this phenomenon appears in more and more industries, for example transport or domestic services, I believe that we need to look at how we as individuals act, interact, and create meaning in this social and economic context. A case study is often a mix of different types, in this thesis it is a mix of what Bryman (2012, 70) refers to as a exemplifying case and a pathway case (Gerring 2007, 238 – 239). That is, on the one hand I chose this case as
it exemplifies a broader category of cases, those of the shared economy\textsuperscript{21}. On the other hand, it is a pathway case, as I knew what I wanted to study, practices of trust assessment, and selected a specific case that fitted the criteria of an online mediation through a technical platform, which resulted in an offline physical activity\textsuperscript{22}. The broader category of the shared economy, of which Airbnb is an example, fits these criteria. I believed that selecting a relatively mature case, that of Airbnb, which was founded in 2008, would provide me with a good base of users, as well as an established platform.

\textbf{4.2 Data Collection}

This case study is constructed with a mixed-method approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, such as an online survey, ethnography and interviews.

\textit{Quantitative – Online survey}

The objective of this survey was to obtain a general understanding of how individuals booked accommodation, and specifically how respondents perceived and used Airbnb. For respondents who were or had been Airbnb users, there were customized questions about how they interacted with the system and made decisions. The objective was to reach a sample of 200 completes. The survey was open to all respondents, provided that they were the main responsible or part of the process of booking accommodation. In addition to general questions about how and where individuals booked accommodation, a range of Airbnb-specific questions were asked. The survey was programmed with the help of the company Survey Sampling International\textsuperscript{23}. This enabled the researcher to create customized ‘routes’ of questions for specific target audiences, which meant that not all respondents were asked the same questions. Rather they were divided into three groups; (1) respondents who had never used Airbnb; (2) respondents who had used Airbnb as a host; (3) respondents who had used Airbnb as a guest (note that one respondent can be both 2 and 3). The data was collected between March 6\textsuperscript{th} 2015 and March 27\textsuperscript{th} 2015. To invite respondents, a single link was used, which was distributed via Social Network Sites Linkedin and Facebook. In addition, several personal emails were sent out\textsuperscript{24}. The link was also shared on three of Airbnb’s community pages, which are mostly used by Airbnb hosts (‘Hospitality in Amsterdam’, ‘Airbnb Hosts Stockholm’ and ‘New Host Forum’).

\textsuperscript{21} As my main contribution is practices of trust assessment, I have focused on a single case of a mature shared economy. Had my main contribution been to shared economies, I would have selected several and done a comparison on how practices differed amongst shared economies.

\textsuperscript{22} SSI is a global provider of data solutions and technology, such as programming and hosting surveys online. For more information see http://www.surveysampling.com. SSI has not been involved in the writing of the questionnaire, nor in any of the analysis. They have no stakes in this research and have not provided any type of financial contribution.

\textsuperscript{24} The researcher, friends and family helped out in sending out personal emails – it is estimated that around 150 to 200 people have been contacted through a ‘personal’ email.
In the two weeks that the survey was open, 231 answers were collected. However, on March 7th a routing problem was discovered\textsuperscript{25}, which required a change in programming. Two respondents had filled in this route prior to the change; subsequently these data sets were removed. This resulted in a final analysis that was conducted on 229 completes. The survey had a total of 31 questions and was available in English and Swedish [see appendix I]. Despite the quantitative nature of an online survey, eight open questions were included. Open questions have the benefit that a respondent does not have to choose from a pre-determined set of answers. The downside is however, that they are more time-consuming and respondents are often reluctant to fill them in.

The data retrieved from the closed questions was analyzed in SPSS, which resulted in an overview of Frequency tables. The open answers were coded with ‘the aim of categorizing and / or theory development’ (Flick 2002, 176). Per question, all open answers were read and with the technique of memoing (Bernard 2011, 435), the answers were clustered in mind-maps. When memoing, one writes down one’s thoughts while reading. This is a method frequently used in anthropology. One could say that it is a form of taking field notes as one is reading. Open coding in accordance with this method allows you to create themes or concepts (Flick 2002, 177; Bernard 2011, 435; Strauss 1998, 101) and as you are moving along, patterns start to appear. These patterns or groups of associations are then used in the analysis of all data. It is also important to look at the negative cases, that is cases that do not fit in with any of the themes that have been established (Bernard 2011, 435). By acknowledging the negative cases, one is able to disconfirm parts of the model, but also to explore potential new connections that can be made in the future. That is, new areas of research can emerge from the answers that do not fit the pattern. Open coding is not recommended when analyzing complete interviews, however, as it is in use for sections the open answers are particularly instructive (Flick 2002, 178), and allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the text (ibid., 178). Given the lack of context when asking open questions in an online survey (one cannot ask the respondent for clarification), this method is appropriate for open answers and will allow me to explore concepts or themes that are relevant for the respondents.

\textit{Qualitative – interviews}

A total of eight individuals were interviewed in seven interviews. The interviews were meant as a means to obtain respondents’ personal experiences and views on Airbnb. The approach was a

\textsuperscript{25} Respondents who answered that they had not used Airbnb but were familiar with it were asked questions about their experiences, where they were instead supposed to be asked questions about how they perceived Airbnb.
semi-structured interview (Bernard 2011, 157 – 158), that is, there was an interview guide with general topics and concepts that had to be covered. However, the choice was made not to treat this guide as a formal list, where questions were asked in a specific order. Rather the approach was taken of an unstructured or ethnographic interview (ibid., 157). Here the focus is on a specific subject, and both interviewer and interviewee are aware of this subject. Ethnographic interviews are a particularly good method of gaining more knowledge on cultural meanings (Atkinson and Coffey 2001, 369). They require a multiple amount of meetings, most specifically for both to get comfortable with the subject of study. As I have had personal experience with Airbnb, both as a host and guest, it was easy to establish rapport, and despite the single meetings, the casual nature of ethnographic interviews turned out to be useful.

All respondents were informed that it was their personal experiences that were most important. This primarily since it is difficult to directly ask people about their practices or habits, while these tend to appear when people tell stories about what they have done. In order to maintain focus, a rough interview guide was used (common for semi-structured interviews) [see Appendix II+III]. This allowed the researcher to maintain focus on the various areas of interest, but also allowed for following the respondents’ storylines without having to rigidly stick to a preset interview guide. What stands out is that in all interviews, the informants covered the areas of focus almost naturally, that is, in all stories there were overlapping patterns of behavior and decision-making. What differed was what meaning they gave to these things. This in effect confirmed the choice of ethnographic methods in this study. Notes were made during the interviews, and all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts were read and used in the analysis.

Where possible, the interviews were conducted in the home of the interviewee. This choice of location was made both to meet the interviewee in their own home, but more specifically due to the nature of the subject, Airbnb. Conducting the interview at home was not possible in four situations. One of the interviews therefore took place in my own home, and another in a café which was selected by the researcher due to its’ ‘home-like feeling’. The reason given why the interview could not take place at home by these two respondents was ‘my home is a mess’. Two interviews had to be conducted online (both in the US). One took place over Facetime Audio. In this case, both the respondent and I were at our respective workplaces in a private room. The last interview took place over Skype with video. The interviewee was at home during the interview (I believe in bed), which did mimic the homelike feeling.

As part of the online survey, respondents were asked if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview on the subject. This allowed the researcher to select the interviewees based on their experiences with Airbnb. The selection of interviewees was done to try and achieve a
good mix of different Airbnb users. This mix was based on gender and age, but mostly on how Airbnb was used, that is, host and guest, individual travel, group and couples. Despite the high amount of individuals who had indicated an interest in being interviewed, over 10 individuals did not respond when requested to book an interview time. Nevertheless, the individuals spoken to represented a variety of users, who had experience both with renting a room, or complete homes, in various parts of the world. The subjects interviewed were:

- Karin, Guest, one time user, stayed in private home alone
- Mikael, Guest, experienced member, stayed in both private home as well as rooms
- Micke, Host and Guest, experienced member, had rented both room and complete home, had stayed in both private homes as well as rooms, active member of Airbnb Amsterdam community
- Sara & Amanda, Guests, upcoming users (first trip planned), private room
- Jessie, Host, experienced member, rented out a complete home
- Kenneth, Host and Guest, experienced member (specifically as host), rented 3 apartments in 3 cities, had stayed in both rooms and complete homes
- Shannon, Guest, first time user, stayed in a private home with group

Qualitative – virtual ethnography
In order to gain a better understanding of the user experience of Airbnb, the website was the subject of a virtual ethnography. In virtual ethnography the researcher visits an online destination – place – where ‘culture is formed and reformed’ (Hine 2000, 9) by means of online practices. I believe this method is particularly helpful when examining an online location and when one aims to ‘develop an enriched sense of the meanings of the technology and the cultures which enable it and are enabled by it’ (ibid., 8). The website was in this case seen as a ‘location’ that one can travel to. Data collected served as the base for some of the questions used in the online survey. But more specifically it was used for the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the platform that the users interact with, this to be able to place data into context, both from open answers as well as from the interviews. Small extracts of the virtual ethnography have been used throughout the analysis section, both for clarification of some of the comments by respondents, as well as for background information on the phenomenon of Airbnb. Examples are their legal policies, the help section and how the system works. Below is an overview of the site, and Airbnb as a case.
4.3 Ethics, Reflexivity and limits in this study

Ethics
This thesis is in line with the code of ethics as set by the International Sociological Association\(^{26}\) (ISA). Throughout this thesis, I have been open to all respondents and informants on what my intentions are with this study. Both in the survey as well as in the interviews I clearly stated my intent, and was transparent about what I planned to do with the material (Davies 2008, 54), as well as that all material will only be used for academic purposes. I have been very aware that my actions as well as the conclusions in this thesis may have a profound impact on society, however, I do not believe that the subject of this thesis is of such controversy that it may have a negative impact on any of the respondents or other parties involved. Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have had the help of friends and organizations, none of which sources have sponsored or financed this thesis in any way. Nor have they contributed to any of the content or direction of the thesis, rather they have facilitated in the programming and hosting of the online survey, the running of the outcomes and converting the SPSS data into xls tables for the researcher to analyze. Lastly, a spell check has been conducted.

The data gathered through the online survey was based on voluntary participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured anonymity. The informants who participated in the interviews were found through the online survey, where at the end respondents were asked if they would be interested in a follow-up interview. Those who were could leave their name and email address. This contact information was treated with confidentiality, and not shared with any third parties. Interviewees were not financially reimbursed; two of the informants however did receive a small token of appreciation in the form of Easter eggs (as these interviews took place just before Easter). They received this after the interview and were not informed in advance. All informants were asked if their first name could be used in the thesis, and if the interview could be recorded on tape, and none of the informants objected to this. Lastly, all other information obtained about Airbnb was from public websites that are accessible to anyone who has an Internet connection, hence there is no need for specific consent (Davies 2008, 65). The interview conducted with Airbnb was in writing, and here as well Airbnb was informed about the purpose of the interview.

Reflexivity
When selecting a research topic, one often looks at one’s own interests, as Davies says ‘we cannot research something with which we have no contact’ (Davies 2008, 3). My personal

\(^{26}\) As found on http://www.isa-sociology.org/about/isa_code_of_ethics.htm (accessed 06-05-2015)
interest is, and has been since I applied for this program, in how individuals from different cultural / national backgrounds come together and utilize the same information. Be it, even interact with each other, meet each other and make choices based on this information. I am very aware that this interest has steered my selection of the subject. In addition, my personal experience with Airbnb, both as guest and host, made me feel this was a good basis for establishing rapport in the interviews, as it allowed me to share some of my experiences, and I also noticed that it built a certain level of trust in relation to the participating hosts. My insider knowledge in this case made the interviews more personal, as I was able to invest in them as well (Davies 2008, 113). At the same time, this did present challenges of contextualizing (ibid. 2008, 119), where my personal experiences might take over that of the respondents. I was aware of the fact that I should not blend my personal viewpoints with those of the respondents. In addition, over a year had passed since I had used Airbnb, and I quickly learned from the informants that some of the metric of the system had changed, which made it easy for me to disregard many of my own opinions (as they felt outdated).

In line with Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) and general ethnographic work, I have been critical to what is my own and the respondents’ views (Davies 2008, 9). The very nature of research, which is the writing down of data obtained from third parties, will always have a certain level of involvement of the researcher. However, I have tried to be aware not to draw conclusions that have not been said by the respondents. That is, I have not drawn conclusions that could be seen as an underlying message retrieved from the empirical data (ibid). This includes the fact that some translation was necessary, and that this will have an effect on the data analysis (Davies 2008, 125). Material collected was in Dutch, English and Swedish, where Swedish respondents were asked to conduct the interviews in English (the Dutch interviews were in Dutch). Nevertheless I do not believe that the usage of multiple languages has had a negative effect on the analysis of the data.

Limitations and risks
The choice to explore practices comes with some risks. Practice Theory tends to ‘normalizes everyday common sense and so ignoring both the actual uncertainties of evaluation in everyday life and institutional strategies of building authority from particular claims to reality’ (Boltanski in Couldry 2012, 64–65). Practices do not have to be, but often are, very similar to habits: ‘habitual repetition is one way actions get stabilized as practices’ (Couldry 2012, 53). Habits do not stand on their own, rather do they fit into much larger webs, or basically they are a part of our day-to-day being and living. Due to the scale of this thesis, I will not be able to present ‘complete
media practice stories’. In that case, I would have had to start from the individual, and follow him or her to study their daily behavior. Rather I have focused on a specific case, Airbnb. In addition the subject of media provides some challenges as increasingly ‘people tend to forget most of their media use’, mainly as they are exposed to it all of the time, and it has become such a part of the daily routine (Deuze 2012, 61). I am aware of these two risks. This has also led to my choice to have a theoretical and epistemological approach driven by ANT. ANT has been critiqued in how it tends to ignore ‘cultural aspects of content and form’ (van Dijck 2013, 151). I believe that I address this risk by on the one hand an ethnographic perspective, specifically in my interview method, and on the other by seeing the Airbnb users as Modern Social Imaginaries (Taylor 2002; Taylor 2004). That is, I respect that these individuals have their own social norms and values as fitted with the societies that they come from and have grown up in. I expect that on the other hand, in line with Taylor’s theory, when they are interacting with Airbnb, they have a set of ‘morals’ or ‘norms’ that comply with that of the site/service. It is through the ethnographic interviewing, where my focus is very much on the informant’s personal experience that I hope to uncover if such social norms exist and are being used on Airbnb. In addition, I believe I need to acknowledge that my choice to use a quantitative study may be surprising, given my critique on the existing research in the field of trust assessment. The reason I have chosen this method is that I do believe it is a good way to obtain a large amount of data. My usage of the quantitative findings have mostly been to explore if there are issues with trust, and obtain some insight into the scale of some of the ideas. The quantitative questions have not been the basis of this research. The quantitative data is also not external valid, and should not be seen as representative. Most specifically as I, to a large extent, used my own social network, as well as the fact that the group of individuals less comfortable with the Internet was underrepresented. When it comes to the qualitative data obtained through the online study, the analysis showed a very strong overlap between the answers collected online, and those in the interviews. Here I believe the data is credible (Bryman 2012, 390) as triangulation: when comparing the open answers from the online survey to those from the interviews, they showed a very similar pattern of practices of trust assessment. Last, I believe the study was constructed in such a way that there is external reliability (ibid.) as another researcher could replicate the study, even though this does raise the question if one can ever really duplicate research where the social position of the researcher plays a role. But that is to be discussed in a different study.
4.4 Case study: Airbnb

**Introduction: Airbnb**

Airbnb is an American corporation that was founded in August 2008 and is based in San Francisco, California, USA. The company is founded by three co-founders; Nathan Blecharczyk, Chief Technical Officer (CFO); Brian Chesky, Chief Executive Officer (CEO); and Joe Gebbia, Chief Performance Officer (CPO) (“Founders - Airbnb” 2015). The company is privately owned and operated by Airbnb Inc. and Airbnb Payment Inc. for residents in the USA and Airbnb Ireland for users who reside outside of the USA (“Terms of Service” 2015). Airbnb describes itself as ‘a trusted community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book unique accommodations around the world — online or from a mobile phone.’ (“About Us - Airbnb” 2015). At the point of writing this thesis, Airbnb has listings in over 34,000 cities, in over 190 countries and serves over 25,000,000 guests all over the world. Worldwide, they have over one million listings. In essence, Airbnb does not own any property that can function as accommodation. Their sole product is an online platform that provides a service that allows individuals to connect, book accommodation and manage payments.

Airbnb was contacted for an interview [see appendix IV], which resulted in a written interview correspondence 27 with Even Heggernes, country manager for the Nordics & Netherlands. In the interview, he informed me that on any given night, 50% of the guests are new and 50% returning. In addition he informed me that despite the common idea that most Airbnb guests are ‘young hipsters’, it is actually mostly people in their 30’s that use the service. Even writes: “When you think about it, staying in someone's home has a very good value proposition to for instance families, who might enjoy having a kitchen and a washing machine when they travel. And likewise, we see a lot of diversity among hosts as well. It appeals to students who might need a little extra income to get through school, but we also see a lot of hosts whose kids just moved out of the house and now they have all this extra space and might really enjoy some new company from near or far.” Concerning the matter of trust, he indicates how this is the foundation of their business, the whole community is built on trust. He states how the reviews are an important element in building trust. When asked about big moments in the organization, he refers to the Airbnb trust team: “We’ve built a world-class Trust and Safety team of more than 150 people with a wide range of expertise and experience, including former government investigators,

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27 It was not easy to find any contact information on the website, no email address or phone number was found. The ‘help’ section is constructed of pre-fixed forms. Finally, I decided to contact the Airbnb press contact. This resulted in a quick reply from the Danish office. Airbnb informed me that it was not possible to conduct a verbal interview, but they were willing to answer questions in writing. In general, the whole experience was one of a closed organization, which was very surprising in relation to the presumably open concept of Airbnb.
criminal prosecutors, and law enforcement. They work around-the-clock in every time zone to protect our community and monitor suspicious behavior.”

Airbnb and the Media

In the last few years, Airbnb has had its’ fair share of media attention. The existence of Airbnb’s trust team is something that is frequently mentioned in the media. Often the stories are either ‘horror’ stories of guests destroying a host’s home, or news coverage of Airbnb’s battles with local legislation. One of the horror stories is as recent as April 29th 2015, when a Canadian host found his home thrashed by his guests. Four individuals had indicated that they were in town for a wedding, and therefore needed accommodation. In reality, they hosted a party with over 100 guests, ruining the floors with alcohol, breaking furniture and clogging the toilets (“Airbnb Nightmare Renters Leave Calgary Home Trashed” 2015). At the end of the article, Airbnb’s host guarantee is mentioned, and how the organization is doing everything to find this guest and help the host.

Coverage of sublet legislation issues is something that is seen in many cities around the world. The city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands for instance. In the Dutch media there has been a fair amount of discussion on how Airbnb creates illegal competition to hotels. Housing cooperations have been very vocal in the media on how renters from social housing have been evicted after illegal subletting (“Ymere Zet Vrouw Uit Woning Om Airbnb-Verhuur” 2014). In these cases, Airbnb actually tries to help the hosts, and holds discussions with the municipality. Negotiations between the Amsterdam municipality and Airbnb have now lead to the fact that Airbnb will charge and pay tourist taxes on all transactions in Amsterdam (“Airbnb Gaat Toeristenbelasting Innen Voor Amsterdam” 2014). This does not solve the illegality for those in social housing, but the risks of prosecution have been reduced for homeowners. At the same time, Airbnb is present in the media, and tries to make real changes in society. Many other media stories are more positive, for example that of popular online magazine Wired, which in 2014 published a story on the positive effects that shared economy initiatives such as Airbnb have on the American society; ‘How Airbnb and Lyft finally got Americans to trust each other’ (Tanz 2014). This article specifically sees the positive impact on society of different social initiatives, all united under the umbrella of the shared economy.

Using the website – creating a profile

In the terms of their offer, Airbnb indicate that the organization ‘provides an online platform that connects hosts who have accommodations to rent with guests seeking to rent such accommodations’ (“Terms of Service” 2015). Two key terms are introduced here: (1) Hosts,
which ‘means a Member who creates a Listing via the Site, Application and Services’; and (2) Guest which ‘means a Member who requests from a Host a booking of an Accommodation via the Site, Application or Services, or a Member who stays at an Accommodation and is not the Host for such Accommodation’ (‘Terms of Service’ 2015). It is through this online platform (website or mobile app) that Hosts and Guests are able to come into contact with one and other. One can only be a host when one offers some type of property (accommodation) via the Airbnb website. Three types of accommodation are defined by Airbnb; (1) An entire place, this means a complete home28, (2) Private Room, this means a room in a host’s private home, and (3) a shared room, this is a place to sleep in the apartment but is not a private room (often a living room).

In order to use the site, users have to create a profile and become a member of the Airbnb Community29. Airbnb describes a profile as ‘a résumé or curriculum vitae for others in the Airbnb community. Visiting someone’s profile is a great way to learn more about them ahead of a booking’ (“Why Do I Need to Have an Airbnb Profile or Profile Photo? | Airbnb Help Center” 2015). The profile is part of a user account that is created through an individual’s email address or Facebook login. On the profile, members are encouraged to have a profile picture, their name, and a short description about why they have joined the Airbnb community or any other information that they would like to share (see Figure 1). It is also possible to create a ‘verified ID’. Verified ID’s have been introduced to build trust within the Airbnb Community. When one has a verified ID, the member gets a distinctive icon added to their profile (see Figure 1). An icon can be obtained by uploading an image of an official ID document (passport, ID card, Drivers license), connecting an account to Social Network Sites, and by uploading a profile picture and connecting to a phone number or an email address (“What Is Verified ID? | Airbnb Help Center” 2015).

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28 This can be a studio, apartment, villa, castle or garden-house. The main criteria is that the host is not present when the guest is renting the accommodation.

29 It is possible for all users to search the website and look at accommodation – however, in order to use the service, list accommodation or contact a host one has to become a member by creating a profile (no costs are connected to the creation of a profile).
Becoming a host
Once a profile is created, a member can now become a host and/or guest. When one wants to become a host, one can easily do so by selecting ‘List your space’ on the landing page. This option will take the user to a section where basic information about their home can be indicated.

The page is a combination of Airbnb messages, such as ‘Airbnb lets you make money renting out your place’ (“Rent Out Your Room, House or Apartment on Airbnb” 2015), and interactive forms which enable the user to share their personal information about their home (Figure 2). At the bottom of this form, the user is reminded again of Airbnb’s main benefits, ‘Trust & Safety’, A ‘Host guarantee’ and ‘Secure Payment’. As the user fills in the information, the site responds to what is filled in, by giving some more information about how the facts of the home resonates with the guests (i.e. potential ‘customers’) of Airbnb.

Figure 1 - Example of Profile page (as seen 26-04-2015)
Directly after this step, the user has to sign in to the website, either through an existing account, or by creating one. If one creates a new account, six steps remain in order to be able to publish a home. These six steps are: (1) calendar, when is the property available; (2) Pricing; (3) Overview, a short description of the accommodation; (4) Photos, pictures of the accommodation; (5) Listing, amount of rooms and beds; and (6) Location. After this, the ad can be listed. However, prior to the listing being published, a profile needs to be created (Figure 3). A profile picture needs to be added, as well as a phone number, which then will be verified through either a phone call or text message. If this information is not supplied, it is not possible to continue creating an ad. The system restricts the user from further interaction. After the phone number is verified, a space can be listed and a host is able to use the system.
Being a guest
As a potential guest, the site provides a lot of interaction. Once arriving on www.airbnb.com the first message one sees is ‘Welcome Home’ followed by ‘Rent unique places to stay from local hosts in 190+ countries’ (“Vacation Rentals, Homes, Apartments & Rooms for Rent” 2015). In the background are moving images of individuals who are in different homes, or cities, often in pairs, maybe taking a walk, enjoying a meal or just getting out of bed. Right below the image is a search field that states ‘Where do you want to go?’ (Figure 4). It is through this search engine that users are able to find accommodation at specific locations, and on specific dates.

![Figure 4 - Landing page (as seen 26-04-2015)](image)

Once a user has filled in a location, and potential dates, an overview of listings is shown (Figure 5). The user is then able to specify their search, for example by indicating what type of home they would like and their price range, but also the amounts of beds or bedrooms that are required, language capabilities of a host, or any amenities such as WIFI. Once a user has seen a home that they like, they can click on the image, and will be able to see more pictures of the home and read information about it – all has been provided by the host. This page will also show feedback provided by any previous guests, in the form of a five star rating system covering: Accuracy, Communication, Cleanliness, Location, Check in, and Value, as well as in the form of reviews. If

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30 Do note, that Airbnb offers professional photographers who come to a home to take pictures of it. When a host decides to use this service, the images will have a small Airbnb logo in the corner, indicating that they have been verified by Airbnb.
a user is interested in a specific property, they can ‘request to book’. This does require an indication of the specific dates that a guest would like to visit. An overview is shown of costing, and if the user decides to continue, he is required to create a profile in order to further use the system and interact with the host.\textsuperscript{31}

Figure 5 - Overview listing Amsterdam (as seen 26-04-2015)

It is these basic interactions that make up the gross of the site. In addition there is an extensive help section, and additional information on how the concept works. Several of the areas of the site are dedicated to promoting specific cities, through so called ‘neighborhood guides’ or show stories of ‘community members’ and what motivates them to be a part of Airbnb. There is also a specific section on trust and what trust means for Airbnb. The choice has been made not to report on these specific sections. As long as informants have not referred to any specific ‘deeper’ areas of the platform, they will not be part of this analysis.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} At this point I chose not to explore this signing-up process – mostly as it might result in contacting a host, which would not be ethical as it implies potential new business.

\textsuperscript{32} All other steps, such as creating a profile, creating a listing and search have been named in each interview, and are therefore introduced in more depth.
We are sitting at my living room table, Micke has a cup of coffee in front of him, I have a cup of tea. I ask him about the first time he used Airbnb. He doubts: “I don’t know when I got my account, but I think the first trip I took with Airbnb was probably 2012.” We talk about why he started using the service, and he suddenly says: “I can look up the actual date if you want, I have the app.”

He grabs his phone off the table, and asks me for the WIFI code, this surprises me, I thought everyone in Sweden had 3G on their phone. I stand up and read the WIFI code off our router. He types it in and connects. I sit down, and see him move his finger over the screen of his iPhone. “Ok, let’s see, member since January 2012, so I guess that is around the time I read about it in the newspaper. And, well, my first trip, we can check that as well.” He continues to search in the app, “My first trip was to… Berlin, July 2012.” Micke puts his phone back down on the table, and we continue talking about Berlin.
5. Results and analysis
The results and analysis section consists of 3 parts. The first is a presentation of the results of the quantitative data, the second is a reporting of the results of the interview data and the third part has a stronger focus on the analysis and aims to answer the research questions. The first part is data retrieved from an online survey. The main focus here is on the open answers. Due to the amount of answers and the content, it is worthwhile to present categories derived from the open coding. The second part is an analysis with data retrieved from interviews; this section aims to introduce the order of action and interaction. It is worth mentioning that the interviews showed similar patterns and categories as the open answers from the survey, however, in the interviews respondents were able to complement the categories with underlying reasoning and explanations.

5.1 Reporting of Quantitative Data

About the respondents
The survey was aimed at the general public, however, one screener question was asked: respondents who indicated that they never took part in the selection of accommodation [Q1], were informed that they were not suitable for this research, and were not able to fill in the survey. Out of all responses, 54% of respondents indicated that they were the main responsible for booking accommodation, 46% was part of the process of booking (n=229). Some basic information about gender [Q2] and age [Q3] was also collected. The gender deviation was almost equal: 42% of the respondents were male and 58% female. Age deviation was less balanced: the smallest group of 4% was up to 24 years old, followed by 15% 45 to 54 years, 19% was 55 years and above, 22% 35 to 44 years and the largest group 40% was 25 to 34 years old. A reason for this may be that the largest age group is my own, and I therefore may be connected to a larger group of respondents in this age group. However, no conclusions on age can be made drawn from the available data.
The respondents were also asked about how they assessed their own online capabilities [Q5]. Respondents could choose from perceiving themselves as a ‘digital genius’ to ‘I try to avoid the Internet’. None of the respondents answered that they tried to avoid the Internet. A mere 1% indicated that they felt they need some help online, the other 74% of respondents indicated that they could find their way online and 25% saw themselves as digital geniuses. These results indicate that the respondents should be skilled enough to comfortably answer the questions asked about their digital behavior. Lastly, respondents were asked about how likely they would be to trust a person they had come in contact with online [Q6]. Apart from 8% of the respondents (2% very likely, 6% highly unlikely), most respondents indicated to be in the middle of the scale of trusting or not trusting individuals they had only met online. None of this data was used to segment any of the findings of other questions, and no conclusions can be drawn based on this general information on the respondents.

Table 3 - How likely are you to trust a person you have come into contact with online (n=229, single answer)
Practices of Trustworthiness Assessment of Information Online

When asking respondents if they do anything to check if information they find online is true [q8], 87.3% confirmed that they did. Respondents were then asked what it is they did. This lead to four categories: (1) Social confirmation; (2) Comparing content; (3) Social Network / Media confirmation; and (4) Institutionalized sources. The first one is: (1) Social confirmation, that is, ask a social contact. Contacts were selected based on their previous contact or ‘experience’ with a source or subject. In that case they were used as ‘knowledgeable by experience’. The person would be consulted to confirm information, most often based on their personal experience.

“I would check other sources, ask someone who is close to me, double check who the person is, and if anyone knows them.”
– Female, non Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, Sweden (translated from Swedish)

“I’ll look up reviews online or ask friends if they have experience with such services.”
– Female, non Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, USA

In addition to asking individuals who may have first hand experience with a subject, it is also common to ask someone who is seen as ‘knowledgeable’ on the subject.

The second category is: (2) Comparing content. Here the credibility of the main source, that is, the producer of the information, was checked through institutionalized channels. The respondents themselves did this search, by means of the Internet.

“Double checking via Google.”
– Male, non Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, The Netherlands

“I try to find the same information from different sites.”
– Female, Airbnb host, above 55 years old, Russia

Other Internet services would be consulted to cross-confirm information. For example: to look up the person who had produced the information on information sites such as the yellow pages (in Sweden, Eniro.se or Hitta.se). When a name of a source was available respondents indicated that

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33 This was an open question – all quotes used in the online survey part of the analysis are direct citations from open answers. If the answer was in Swedish the researcher translated the quote, if this is the case it is indicated at the quote.
the checking of a name to be ‘real’ was important. If there was a connection to a company, the company was reviewed on its’ financial stability and trustworthiness. In Sweden this is fairly easy to do, through a website called ‘allabolag.se’. This enables the user to access the general financial status of Swedish companies. Individuals would also confirm information on a multitude of websites, to compare if the information was similar, or if they could allocate the original source. If all information found ‘matched up’, this would increase levels of trustworthiness. 

The third category was: (3) **Social Network / Media confirmation.** What is different here from the first category is that the first one was aimed at a specific social contact that was known to be knowledgeable on the subject. In the third category, Social Media was used primarily to confirm information. It was common to read up on a person who may have produced the information, or see if there were shared connections on a SNS.

> “**Asking a friend, or a general shout out on Facebook, Tripadvisor, Flashback etc. and general Googling**”
> – Female, Airbnb guest, 25 – 34 years, Sweden

The existence of a profile on a SNS was seen as a verification of an individual’s existence. An additional group rather used SNS to post a question and to check their own social network for their experiences and obtain confirmation on the quality of the information (similar to offline practices seen before). Information would be confirmed on Blogs or Forums, where respondents would check group discussions on the subject of interest. If the information found was in line with what the original source indicated, the original source increased in trustworthiness. Reviews and references were also indicated as important sources. These reviews could either be about the person who produced the information or of the website where the information was found. Last, these reviews could be on the subject of a ‘product’ or ‘service’. Here again the opinions of others were of value.

> “**I always look for other reviews. I tend to trust reviews. However, only after doing an assessment if the reviews I read appears real (and not faked).**”
> – Male, Airbnb guest, 35 – 44 years old, Sweden

The last category is that of (4) **Institutionalized sources.** These are information sources that have been produced by for example governmental institutions, or a known and trusted media source. Governmental institutions mentioned were: administrative authorities, tax authorities, or other sites that were affiliated to the nation/state. The media sources were mostly newspapers,
both national and international (on and offline). Similar to category number (2) Comparing content, the sources were used to compare information.

“Asks friends/acquaintances, read in the newspaper, search for other sources online, for example news dailies, governmental sites and other official websites.”

– Female, non-Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, Sweden (translated from Swedish)

Other media related trust assessments were based on the amount of (mass media) advertisement. For one respondent, the amount of advertising indicated that a specific organization was well established, as they were able to invest in marketing related communication.

“Forum, does the site feel credible, references from others who have used it. Can I find any partners that they are connected to, do they have advertisement in a broad selection of media, this requires investments = slightly more credible.”

– Male, non-Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, Sweden (translated from Swedish)

The last media source was Google, and specifically Google-owned services such as Google Maps or Google (search engine). In this case, Google was seen as an official source. But also the search engine was a catalyst to obtain more information. For example, by conducting a search with the word ‘fraud’ to see what affiliations were shown.

“Searching the subject and adding the word fraud to see what pops up.”

– Male, non-Airbnb user, 35 – 44 years, Norway

“Checking the place through Google Maps and/or Earth. Checking the names through the Internet etc.”

– Male, non-Airbnb user, 45 – 54 years, The Netherlands

**Motivations for trying Airbnb**

The survey was routed in such a way that it enabled individuals who had used Airbnb in the past, and those who had not, to answer customized questions [Q13]. A group of 143 respondents had never used Airbnb. Of these respondents, 39,2% had heard of Airbnb and understood the basics of how it worked, 19,6% was familiar with Airbnb but did not know how it worked, and last 41,3% was not familiar with Airbnb (n=143). The respondents were introduced to what Airbnb
is\textsuperscript{34} and asked if they would consider Airbnb to find accommodation. Out of the respondents who had never used Airbnb (n=143) 64,3\% could imagine using this service, 35,7\% could not. As a follow-up question, both groups were asked to explain why. They were probed to discuss the concept of trust, if they believed this was relevant for their choice.

For those who could imagine using Airbnb [Q14], the open answers created the following three categories: (1) the ability to create a unique travel experience; (2) a tailor-made travel accommodation and (3) value for money. The first category; (1) the ability to create a unique travel experience revolves around the idea of having a small scale, new experience. The experience would be more personal than commercial accommodation, which was appealing to many respondents.

“More value for money and personal than living in a hotel. More freedom to shape your own travel experience.”
–Female, non-Airbnb user, 35 – 44 years old, Swedish (translated from Swedish)

Airbnb would allow the respondent to experience something new, and enable them to get a better understanding of a foreign culture. It could spark curiosity in a more ‘real’ way, as one could get closer to people who really know what it is like to live in a certain location. Respondents stated that they could imagine that the individual they rent from provides the guests with good tips, such as recommendations for restaurants and leisure activities. For a select group of respondents it was the idea of meeting new people that was appealing.

“Fun to get to know different cultures for real. An added value for a trip is to meet someone who knows the [local] culture well. Eat authentic food, get good tips on what one should be doing, like a personal guidebook.”
– Female, non-airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, Swedish (translated from Swedish)

The second category was; (2) a tailor-made travel accommodation. Respondents indicated it was more practical to be in a home, as it had a range of amenities, such as a kitchen, separate rooms or outdoor space to use.

\textsuperscript{34} Airbnb is a digital marketplace that enables private individuals to rent out (for payment) their home to people from all over the world. Airbnb provides the website which connects so called ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’. A host is basically anyone who has a room, apartment or house available to be rented out. Guests can be people from around the world, who choose to pay to stay in another person’s home. (from survey)
“I have three kids, it’s hard to find a hotel that’s child friendly and cheap enough for longer stays. I’d be interested in renting from a family with children so the kids could borrow the toys etc and the home is rather kids friendly”

– Female, non-Airbnb user, 34 – 45 years old, USA

The sense of ownership was also appealing; the idea of ‘having a second home abroad’ where one can live a different life. Respondents expected that Airbnb accommodations are better located, that is, closer to where ‘real’ people live, rather then touristic locations. Respondents indicated that they could imagine ending up somewhere special, a hidden gem, something one would not find through traditional travel providers. The size of a home (in comparison to a hotel room) was also a plus, especially when one travels with a larger group or a family. Respondents expressed that it would be ‘easy’ to stay in a home that was also meant for a family.

The third and last category was; (3) value for money. Especially when it was a larger group traveling, respondents imagined that the costs would be lower than staying in a hotel (there was a constant comparison to hotels).

“Seems like a cheaper option (than hotels) but since it’s less “official” there is the possibility of getting scammed or something going wrong and that is the last thing you want to deal with on a vacation.”

– Female, non-Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, Romania

Several respondents imagined that Airbnb would be cheap. Respondents who had friends who used the service confirmed this idea. The comparison to a hotel was often in relation to price and expectations of quality of the accommodation. Some of the respondents specifically referred to the reputation of Airbnb, and how in the media and through stories from friends, they had obtained trust in this organization and therefore could imagine using it. Often they had friends who had used the service and recommended it. It was the experience of these acquaintances that gave them trust to potentially use the service in the future.

The answers regarding reasons for potentially trying Airbnb were very much in line with the motivations current Airbnb guests (n= 86) had for trying the service. Most of the respondents, 29%, indicated that they had ‘other reason’ to use Airbnb. In the open answers, respondents expressed the benefit of low or good prices especially in comparison to a hotel.

“It is sometimes cheaper if we are several people traveling together”
From the pre-selected answers, 21% of respondents saw Airbnb as an opportunity to stay in a unique place, and 20% indicated it made them feel like a local. 14% liked to stay in a place that is non-commercial, 11% liked to be in a place that feels like home when traveling and last, 5% felt it was a good way to help others. What stands out though, is that none of the respondents indicated that it made them feel like they belonged to a community, despite this being a strong message on the Airbnb homepage.\(^{35}\)

What stands out in the open answers is the importance of control that is expressed by the respondents, that is, the possibility to customize an experience tailored to ones’ own preferences and needs. This stands in contrast to institutionalized accommodation, where respondents expect that things can’t be customized to their personal needs. Even though the gross of the respondents indicated that they would be interested in trying the service, a small group was more skeptical; their main concerns were concerning scams or their personal safety when physically in the home.

“My main concern is the scams. Nonetheless, I may have this concern because I have not get how this site work.”
– Female, non-Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years old, Cyprus

“I hope it is safe and the owner won’t come home.”
– Female, non-Airbnb user, 25 – 34 years, The Netherlands

In general, respondents who were more skeptical yet open to using the service, indicated that their concern is most likely based on a lack of information about Airbnb. The respondents indicated that if they would have more information, they would be more open to Airbnb.

“I know that these types of services exist. If the service has been tried and tested by someone I know, or has been tested on for example TV, my trust would increase.”
– Male, non-Airbnb user, above 55 years, Sweden (translated from Swedish)

\(^{35}\) On the main landing page, there are references to ‘Our community’ (“Vacation Rentals, Homes, Apartments & Rooms for Rent” 2015) as well as specific initiatives such as #onelesstranger which showcases the Airbnb community (“#OneLessStranger” 2015)
**Why I would never use Airbnb**

In addition to the group who could imagine using Airbnb, another 35.7% indicated that they could not imagine using Airbnb. Despite being probed on issues of trust, out of the 41 respondents who had left a comment on why they would not use Airbnb, only about a quarter indicated that it was due to an issue related to trust. A more frequent response was in essence the opposite of why individuals would use Airbnb. For this group, this service simply did not fit their personality, and they would rather take a ‘traditional’ route and stay in a hotel where they indicated they knew what to expect.

>“Because I like to sleep in a hotel because this is more comfortable and I like a good breakfast. And most of the time a hotel is easier to find in town.”
>– Male, non-Airbnb user, above 55 years old, the Netherlands

>“I want to live in a hotel because of the luxurious feeling also I am uncomfortable to live in someone else’s private home. I would feel a certain sense of insecurity about who the person is who is renting out. For example, I would prefer renting from woman.”
>– Female, non-Airbnb user, between 24 – 35 years old, Swedish (translated from Swedish)

The group of respondents who expressed that Airbnb ‘just didn’t fit their personality’ had concerns that can be affiliated to trust issues. Respondents indicated that for them Airbnb as an organization and their service was too new. There were worries about who to contact in case of a problem. Respondents indicated that they would be concerned about laws and regulations, the (assumed) non-paying of taxes by hosts, and the neighbors that one would have to deal with (what if they complain?). Here too, a small group was worried about scams and loosing money. One respondent had a very specific objection to Airbnb and their practices:

>“They don’t pay taxes and there are people who misuse it.”
>– Female, non-Airbnb user, above 55 years old, the Netherlands

**Airbnb users, hosts, guests and frequency of usage**

Of all respondents, 38% indicated that they had used Airbnb, either as a Guest or Host [Q17]. Out of these 86 respondents, 84.9% were guests on Airbnb, and 36% were hosts\(^\text{36}\) (n=86). Both hosts and guests were asked how they had first heard about Airbnb [Q16]. More than half, 57% had learned of the service through a friend. This was followed by an online news channel, 12%,

\(^{36}\) Multiple answers possible, some respondents were both a host and a guest.
Social Network Sites, 11%, and 10% of other (which were a small selection of newspapers, specialty magazines or tech sites). A search engine, 8%, and review site, 2%, were the least common. This is an interesting contrast to the 62% who use review sites for finding accommodation [Q10]. Out of the respondents who were guests (n=73), 40% had been using Airbnb less than a year, 56% between 1 and 3 years, and 4% had been guests for more than 4 years [Q18]. Out of the 36% who were hosts (n=31), 58% had been hosts 1 to 3 years, 39% less than a year, and 3% had been hosts for over 4 years [Q19]. Guests were also asked how frequently they used Airbnb for accommodation [Q20]. Most of the respondents, 35%, had only tried Airbnb a few times, or had a profile but didn’t use it too often, 29%. A quarter of all guests tried to use it for every trip. There was also a small group who did not have a profile themselves, but still had used the service, either by having someone else book on their behal, 3%, or by traveling with someone who had a profile, 7%. Guests most frequently traveled with a larger group, 39% traveled with their partner, 34% with friends, 12% with family (including children). 11% traveled alone, and the last 4% traveled with another group [Q21].

**Airbnb users: how do guests choose accommodation?**

Respondents were asked: what are the three most important things they do to confirm their choice when they choose accommodation? [Q24]. Reading of reviews is the most common practice, 74% of all respondents do this, followed by 62% who read the description of the accommodation. Another practice that takes place within the Airbnb system is the usage of verified pictures, 33%. The first action that is outside of the Airbnb system is 34% checking Google Streetview. Contact with the host is less important, 10% confirm choice by asking questions and 16% try to get to know the host.

Respondents were also asked, in an open question, how they select their accommodation [Q23], and probed to think about what it is that makes them trust or distrust a specific listing, and if there are specific actions that they take before they consider booking. The four categories of actions are: (1) reviews and recommendations; (2) apartment esthetics; (3) the location and neighborhood; and (4) the host and communication with the host. The first category is; *(1) reviews or recommendations* (these terms seem to be used interchangeably) that are part of the listing. Respondents indicate that there is a certain level of ‘own responsibility’ in the selection.

“The only bad experience I had I could have foreseen in advance because it was readable in the reviews that this apartment wasn’t quiet clean. I took the chance because the location was fantastic and indeed it was very messy!”

–Female, Airbnb guest and host, above 55 years, the Netherlands
It is not just the content of the reviews that matters; also the amount, frequency and how many years of reviews are available. Respondents indicate that the number of reviews says something about how serious a host is about their listing.

“I select based on location, price and amenities. I will always read the reviews for any risks of bad experience. More reviews = more better.”
–Male, Airbnb guest, 35 – 44 years, USA

Amongst the reviews, there can also be automated messages that a host canceled a reservation. This is seen as a warning that a host might not be very reliable. In general, reviews are seen as an important source for a choice – it confirms that other people have been there, which implies that the location does exist, and that things were ‘fine’ for them. Respondents indicate that the idea that others guests have tried an accommodation provides a sense of security. In general the level of trust in reviews can be seen as high, since they signal that others have had the experience already and have shared their opinions. In line with reviews/recommendations, ratings were also mentioned. Respondents indicated how the ratings are part of the website, and help to give a first grade to a listing.

The second category is (2) apartment esthetics (the look of the apartment). Pictures of the accommodations are prominent on the Airbnb website. Respondents indicate that pictures are seen a mean to increase trust, as they reflect if an accommodation is well taken care of. In addition to the content of pictures, the way in which pictures are taken also plays a role. Among the criteria with which respondents evaluate pictures are: Are they clear, can one see what is in the pictures, do they feel like they are professionally taken, are they inviting?

“Photo of the accommodation – Photo of the owners.”
–Female, Airbnb guest, under 24 years, the Netherlands

In addition to the style of the pictures, it is especially the look of the apartment that is important for respondents when selecting. Does it evoke a ‘good feeling’, is the apartment clean, does it

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37 This refers to an automated function on the website. If a host cancels a booking without a clear indication to a guest, there is an automated message displayed in his or her review area.
38 As the system only allows individuals who have booked and paid to leave a review.
39 Ratings are a five star system in the categories; Accuracy, Communication, Cleanliness, Location, Check in, and Value.
40 Airbnb offers its’ hosts the service of a professional photographer to come and take pictures of the home. These pictures in that case become ‘verified’ by Airbnb (as they have seen the accommodation). This was only mentioned by one respondent.
have a private bathroom (presumably most important with shared accommodation) and what is the quality of the bed?. The general style of how an apartment is decorated is an important driver for choice. Some of the respondents indicated that the offered amenities are important, where specifically the availability of WIFI was mentioned frequently.

A third category is; (3) the location and neighborhood. Proximity to the city, transport, shopping, restaurants and bars are seen as important. The prioritization of what is most important depends on the personal criteria of the respondent.

“Location plays a big role. Even if it’s a trustworthy representation of the accommodation, with many pictures.”
–Male, Airbnb guest, 25 – 34 years, Sweden (translated from Swedish)

Apart from proximity to a specific location, respondents indicate that they make a selection based on the neighborhood that an accommodation is in. They will use Google Street View to see the street, examine if it is a nice and safe area. Here, a connection to price is mentioned, where even if the location and proximity is very good, it still needs to be affordable – but not too cheap. When the cost of an accommodation is too low, respondents indicate that this makes them doubt the quality of an accommodation.

The last category is (4) the host and communication with the host. Respondents indicate that they look at the type of host, is it a private person or real estate agent? How do hosts present themselves? Do they use their real names, and what do they share about themselves? Is there a sense of ‘welcoming’ guests?

“I would read about what the person wrote about himself – what does he do, his character, hobbies, field of interest etc.”
– Female, Airbnb guest, 25 – 34 years, Israel

Respondents indicate that they read the profile to find out more about a host. Does the host have a personal message, are there profile pictures of the host? The time that is spent creating a profile is also seen as an indication of trustworthiness. The more (perceived) time spent on a profile, the amount of information available along with how well the text is written, increases trust. Language and language abilities are also mentioned. For many, spelling and grammar are important, both in the hosts’ profile and in the description of the accommodation. Respondents evaluate criteria such as: how the host has presented their home, have they set house rules? Is there warmth in the text, is the information consistent, does the text come across as honest?
A second part of the ‘host’ concept is related to after contact has been initiated. Where existing text is used to form an opinion about a host (and accommodation), as soon as the contact is initiated\(^\text{41}\), value is placed on how a host acts (replies). Respondents indicate that they evaluate the host based on the speed of reply/response time\(^\text{42}\).

“Responsiveness, or lack of, of the host helps me know if I trust the location. If a host does not reply rather quickly, I question their commitment to hosting me.”

–Female, Airbnb guest and host, 45 – 54 years, USA

The length of responses was also mentioned; it should not be too short, the content i.e. formulation of text as well as language capabilities were also criteria to assess a host. Respondents also indicate that they look at the attitude of hosts, how they come across in communication and how they deal with practical matters, such as picking up a key. Respondents indicated that if the communication is satisfactory, this is a reason for pursuing a pre-booking. Lastly, there is mention of looking up a host on Social Network Sites, especially Facebook and Twitter or, less frequently, Google.

Respondents were also asked if they consulted any other digital sources, other than the Airbnb site, when choosing an accommodation on Airbnb [Q25]. 42% of respondents did so, the other 58% did not. Those who did most often consulted TripAdvisor (8*), or commercial booking sites such as Booking.com or Hotels.com (10*). Google was also named as a source (3*) and Facebook (2*). Apart from these, it was mostly smaller websites that also mediated in accommodation. In general, when it comes to selecting a specific accommodation, most practices are applied within the Airbnb platform, where the opinion of others (reviews) is most frequently mentioned. The look (esthetics) of the apartment and the location also play roles. Only when all of these steps have been taken and results are satisfactory, guests seem to take the next step and contact a host. After this contact, a host is evaluated on their communication skills. There was no clear indication on what the consequences might be if these are poor.

**Motivations for being a host**

Respondents were asked to select their main and supporting reasons for being a host [Q28]. The main reason was financial: 77% indicated they saw Airbnb as a good way to make extra money. This was followed by 13% prioritizing the idea of providing people a home away from home.

\(^\text{41}\) When a guest is interested in renting an accommodation, they can start a conversation in the Airbnb system. Through a messaging system built into the site, hosts and guests can communicate with each other.

\(^\text{42}\) The response time is also something that is embedded in the system. On the listing of an accommodation one can see how fast a host replies and what their response rate is. This was not clearly mentioned by respondents though, as a criteria.
Similarly to guests, a very limited number of hosts, 8%, indicated that they participated to feel like they belonged to a community.

Table 4 - Reasons for being a host (n=31, main is single answer, supportive multiple *2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for being a Host</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It makes me feel like I belong to a community</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a good way to make some extra money</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to enable people to stay somewhere that is non commercial</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want people to have the opportunity to feel like a local when traveling</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to provide people with a unique place</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the idea to provide people with a home away from home</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Airbnb users: how do hosts select guests**

Respondents were asked what they assessed to determine if they trust a guest in their home [Q29]. Out of the 31 hosts who responded, 3 indicated that they did not check anything – if their accommodation was available they would accept anyone. The other 28 respondents indicated that most important is (1) reviews. They looked at reviews that were written about a guest, but also what type of reviews a guest had left for other accommodation that they had used before. Some also indicated that they would look at the type of accommodation that a guest had stayed in before. The reason for this was to get an understanding of a guest’s expectations. A guest’s personal profile was also reviewed – here the focus was on verifications, specifically mentioned is a verified ID43. Several hosts also indicated that if a guest did not have a verified ID, they would ask a guest to get this, prior to accepting the booking. Some hosts also mentioned that they required a picture of the potential guest.

A second category is (2) communication. If a guest is pro-active with information, trust increases. In addition, speed of reply and the general attitude a potential guest has (friendly) was important. The hosts indicate that they ask questions, and require what they refer to as ‘complete information’, for example why people are visiting and who is part of the group who will be using

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43 Airbnb has a service where they provide verified ID’s. These batches include the check of email, phone number, social network and an offline ID (“What Is Verified ID? | Airbnb Help Center” 2015)
the accommodation. These conversations are seen as a way to learn more about the guests, and to find out who is visiting and why.

The last category is; (3) Personality assessment. Hosts indicate that they conduct an assessment of the type of person that is requesting to rent the accommodation. Hosts prefer not to have ‘party people’. Hosts who offer a shared accommodation want to assure that a guest fits in with them and their family. Basic elements such as age, gender, or country of origin are also asked, where country of origin is seen as an indication of what the guest may expect from this rent. Some respondents indicate they have a preference for families, and want to know if there will be children traveling. The amount of travelers and how individuals are connected is also seen as relevant for trust assessment. Some of the respondents indicate that much has to do with a ‘gut feeling’ and personal experiences with assessing people, whereas a small group does review the guests on Social Media, either through their Facebook profile or by a general search of their full name.

Summary: Quantitative data – practices of trust assessment on Airbnb
The data above represents two sides of becoming part of Airbnb. The first concerns the reasons for joining Airbnb. Motivations for trying the service are similar for those who could consider it as for those who are currently using it; (1) the ability to create a unique travel experience; (2) a tailor made travel accommodation; (3) Value for money. There were some considerations about potential scams, which worried respondents, however, there was an overall idea that this was mostly due to a lack of knowledge about the system. There was a select group of respondents who could not imagine using Airbnb. Their reasoning behind this was fairly unanimous – the idea of staying in another person’s home simply did not fit their personal preferences.

When respondents had already overcome the threshold to try Airbnb, and become a guest, the question concerned what it was on the platform that they used to negotiate trust. Four categories were found; (1) reviews and recommendations; (2) apartment esthetics (3) location and neighborhood; (4) host and communication with the host. Out of these four categories, only the third required assessment from media sources outside of the Airbnb platform. The last category is also fairly subjective, as it only becomes apparent how a host communicates after a guest has initiated contact due to interest in an apartment. For hosts, the selection of a guest is only possible after the guest has shown interest and reached out to contact them. In that case, there are three categories that can be identified to check if a guest is suitable: (1) reviews; (2) communication; (3) personal assessment. What stands out in general is the high level of responsibility and interaction of the users. It is up to them to make a selection and evaluate if
information is correct or not. Airbnb merely facilitates and groups information, but much is left to an individuals’ own preference and ability.

5.2 Reporting of the Qualitative Data
If one looks at the general decision process of Airbnb users, much is based on elimination. Users seem to arrive at the service after they have decided that the more ‘traditional’ type of accommodation is not suitable for them (most often a hotel). The motivations are often that of a personal style: one simply chooses not to take the traditional route but rather tries something different. What is seen as different is not the concept of a shared economy. The notion of sharing a common good did not appear in any of the data. Airbnb users have not indicated that there is a specific idealistic idea behind using this service. If it was mentioned, it was in relation to news reporting, which informed individuals of this sharing trend.

“It’s certainly been one of the sites that I have heard from other friends that used it and really liked it. But again, it is not really just Airbnb, it is just the idea of doing like a Verbo or a HomeAway where you're actually renting from the person who owned it, as opposed to staying at a hotel.”
– Shannon, Airbnb Guest, one time user, traveled in a group

For most guests, it is rather the idea of trying something different, or new, something that allows them to come closer to the ‘real’ everyday life. Another group of guests also decide not to use a hotel, but often for more practical reasons: a group may have an odd number of travelers, or there are children in the group. A hotel is in that case seen as ‘inconvenient’ as it does not allow for any flexibility. The possibility to book alternative accommodation, in a similar way that one would book a hotel, is in that case seen as attractive. Respondents highlight benefits such as freedom to do what you want, having sufficient rooms and access to an own kitchen as important criteria for selecting Airbnb.

It was mentioned before that much of the trust assessment is done based on a elimination method. That is, an individual who seeks to be a guest via Airbnb will have a specific set of criteria. The Airbnb system caters to selection based on different criteria: the traveling dates, the number of people in the party, the type of property to rent.
“I think, what we looked for the most, that we wanted in a certain neighborhood. Because we wanted to be in the neighborhood that we had already lived in before. So, I think first of all it was the neighborhood. Then we really wanted a terrace, and it’s me and Sara and Sara’s boyfriend. So we wanted it to be at least one bed and one sofa bed.”

– Amanda, Airbnb guest, first time user who has not yet traveled (booking was made)

Also more specific criteria, such as price, the number of beds, bedrooms or amenities, such as WIFI or air-conditioning can be important.

“I look at cleanliness, yeah stuff like that. Also it has to have WIFI.”

– Mikael, Airbnb guest, frequent traveler both rooms and complete home

What this selection process does is create the idea that the user is in charge: it is the guests themselves who need to indicate what they want, and based on the criteria that they have set, they are presented with a smaller selection of potential accommodation. Some direct benefits are that through interaction with the system, we make it our own. We are the ones who set the boundaries and as we get more familiar with how a system works, our level of trust in the outcome will increase. After all, if the outcome of our search isn’t what we expected, we will most likely alter our search, rather than assume that there is something wrong with the system. The fact that we indicate what it is that we as guests are looking for, assures that what we are provided with is in line with our expectations. Hence we have a positive attitude to the options presented to us.

As the guests have already pre-selected their own ‘hard’ criteria, that is the criteria that are deal-breakers if they are not met, the main thing that remains is to find an accommodation that suits the guests’ personal style. Here again, it is the user who is the filter. This part of the selection however is more subjective; the platform is designed in such a way that the user sees an image of the interior of the apartment. Respondents indicate that it is through these images that the first selection is made. If there are many choices, potential guests seem to select based on their personal style preferences, which can be a certain type of interior, or maybe when one searches in a cheaper price range a look that resonates with the cost of the accommodation. It is in this process that the guests imagine themselves in the home, pictures are viewed to obtain an idea of what to expect and the guests make a personal choice if this type of home fits to whom they are. It is during this process that the guest starts to get to know the host a bit. Respondents indicate that they are likely to comment on the home, compliment the host, and in that way the first step towards a relationship between the two parties is taken.
Despite a first interest being evoked by imagery, pictures alone are not enough for a guest to feel safe in their choice. They will scan over the information about the home, which is produced by the host as well as the ratings, and the reviews. Ratings are a star system, where a maximum is 5 stars. Most accommodations seem to have a high amount of stars. The more advanced Airbnb guests will know that if something is not a full 4, 5 or 5 stars, this is a bad sign. This means that the ratings are not as clear-cut as when it comes to for example hotels, where an independent organization has set standards and criteria for how many stars a hotel can have. Here, the ratings are personal opinions of previous guests. Last, potential guests will scan over the reviews. If none of the reviews are particularly negative, the accommodation will be seen as a potential home to rent. Most often, someone will save the listing in their ‘wish list’, which is a function provided on the site that saves a specific home to a section in your profile. Potential guests mention that they will review several apartments like this and when they have created their own short list, they will look into the accommodation in more depth. That is, reading the description in detail, carefully reading on what is said to be ‘all reviews’.

“First I glance, so I get an overview, where is this place? Then I look at the pictures. And then I just scroll through the description and the reviews. If I think it’s interesting I save it to a wish list. And the second selection, then I read it more carefully and go into Google Maps, like street view.”

– Mikael, Airbnb guest, frequent traveler, both rooms and complete home

It is important to note that in all these actions, it is the potential guest who is in control and (willingly) makes the decisions. This also reflects on how potential guests see their own involvement in the choice. It is they who set all the criteria, select and choose. This in effect also creates a sense of ‘own responsibility’ for the guests. Where if something is not as expected, and they believe it could have been seen in the information provided on Airbnb, they should not complain.

It was surprising to hear how small of a role the host played within the selection process. Most respondents said that they may look at the host’s profile, but that the accommodation was more important. It is worth mentioning that the situation is different when guests share an accommodation with a host.

44 The notion of who produced the information about the homes did not stand out for guests. Hosts however saw these texts as a tool to attract the right type of guests.

45 It seems that reading all reviews is an idea that people have, but in reality during some of the interviews respondents realized they only read the first few. This makes sense as sometimes hosts can have up to 50 or 60 reviews.
“No, [it does not matter who the host is] my primary focus is the apartment and the location, and then the reviews. And yes, after that you do look at the hosts, maybe I sometimes have a different order, but I only check who it is.”

– Mieke, Airbnb Host & Guest, experienced user

Despite the host not being so important in selection, informants do speak of their hosts in high regards (if the experience was satisfactory). Prior to the visit there are always a variety of logistics that need to be arranged, such as check in, or perhaps questions about what is available in the accommodation. Through these conversations, hosts and guests get to know each other. Guests will also name how the communication and interaction was with a host in their reviews. Mikael shares a part of the review he wrote; ‘Rachel is an excellent flatmate, kind generous, funny. That’ all, I should probably have written a bit more about her.’ It is also through the reviews of a host that guests construct a sense of trust. As the hosts are frequently mentioned in reviews, this creates a sense of safety. Even when a host is never met, guests may comment on their trustworthiness. In the interview with Sara and Amanda this situation appeared. Their host had informed them that she never met guests, as she is out of town when she rents out her home. Nevertheless, most reviews had spoken highly of the host, despite the guests never having met this individual.

Respondents indicate that when possible, they often contact several hosts. The reason for this is twofold: Airbnb recommends to do this, and in addition, individuals are worried that accommodation may not be available on a specific date, and in this way they have several options. The choice of the accommodation is already made at that point: one could say the order of preference is set. Unless a host is very rude, or set unexpected (extreme) rules, the choice of one accommodation over another is not dependent on how the host is perceived. Three of the informants were hosts. What stood out in their interviews is that they basically accepted any guest if the accommodation was available. They might ask for the guest to obtain a verified ID, but in essence, all guests were welcome. This, however, does not mean that they do not review who their guest to be is.

“I look at the reviews, sometimes I find it difficult when the reviews are all about that person as a host. Then you don’t know how that person is as a guest. But you assume people behave if they are a host themselves as well.”

– Jessie, Airbnb Host, experienced user
Speaking to the hosts, what stands out is their commitment to being a host. For two of the respondents, the commitment was personal. They indicated how they liked to help their guests, find information for them and answer their questions.

“The more specific the questions, the more I enjoy it. For example if people ask about the blossoming seasons of the Keukenhof (Dutch flower show). And if I don’t find any information, I find that suspicious. I really want to know in that case, I mean, these people pay a lot of money to go there, what if there is nothing to see?”
– Jessie, Airbnb Host, experienced user

It is through this contact prior to the trip that hosts and guests build a relationship; they get to know each other. The host becomes familiar with their guest, and what the guest is planning to do during the stay. At the same time, the guest can utilize the expertise of the host from being a local. The hosting being a business venture, with certain expectations from the (paying) guests, is part of this ambition to deliver service and be available. Kenneth, who has accommodation in 3 locations, the UK, Scandinavia and the US, is focused on being able to respond in a timely manner.

“The cool thing with the Airbnb app is that you basically have everything you need in the app. Since I have a UK phone, they have this cool thing, whenever I travel, the UK phone works as in the UK. So I have all data and minutes for free. So the phone is always on and with me. I can always reply to the guests.”
– Kenneth, Airbnb host, previous guest, experienced host

The usage of “time” as a factor of trust has also been found by English-Leuck et all (2002, 96). In their study, time was often used to see if one could trust a co-worker (if they answered in good time). This practice is also used by the Airbnb site, which indicates the speed of answering for hosts as a measuring point for credibility. When one relies on people to deliver something in a specific amount of time, this creates what is referred to as ‘competence-based’ trust. A ‘kind of trust that is dependent on ‘effective’ delivery of service’ (Barber and Baba in English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 96). As the response time is shown on the hosts’ profile page and with the listing, transparency becomes an incentive for hosts to respond, as they want to keep their reputation intact.
Summary: Qualitative data – practices of trust assessment on Airbnb
The interviews provided some insights into questions that were raised in the quantitative study. Here too, reviews stood out as one of the most important areas of trust assessment. It was through the social information provided by fellow members that both hosts and guests were able to make a judgment on who they were entering into a transaction with. Guests mostly relied on the opinions of fellow guests, and hosts on how other hosts had reviewed these guests. Other practices were mostly about elimination, which means that guests have some criteria that must be met for them to consider an accommodation. The specific selection was often a combination of the size and type of accommodation needed, location and general look and feel.

5.3 Research question

Main question: How is trust negotiated on Airbnb?

Before discussing how trust is negotiated on Airbnb, it is important to mention how trust is negotiated outside of Airbnb when searching for accommodation, that is, what practices are applied outside of the platform, and why people would not want to use Airbnb. When individuals have decided to use Airbnb, they have already made their own evaluation of whether or not to trust Airbnb as an organization. When asked about confirmation of assessment of trustworthiness of information online (that is outside of the platform), it is still most common to rely on one’s direct social network; that is people close around us. Friends, family or colleagues will be consulted regarding their own experiences. A similar pattern appears when selecting a travel destination: in order to determine where to go, close contacts are used to either recommend or confirm a choice. This research was not designed to provide deep understanding on how this communication takes place, but the results do indicate a difference between consulting strong ties, where it is a direct conversation with a specific question, or weak ties, where it is through a social network that a general ‘shout out’ is made to obtain more information. The need for institutionalized or official sources, to confirm information was still apparent, even though the question can be asked where the line between social and institutionalized should be drawn.

This indicates that one of the findings is that practices of trust differ inside and outside of Airbnb. Outside of Airbnb (where this thesis specifically focused on the question if they trust Airbnb), individuals determine trust by means of ‘investigation’. That is, one actively searches the web to confirm information, be it through their social contacts or comparison of information on other sites, or through accredited news sources. It is a pro-active act to assure that information is true, and in this case, Airbnb can be trusted. Once users have entered ‘the world’ of Airbnb, they have in essence made their choice to use a Bed and Breakfast-like service, provided by
private individuals, which means they have trusted Airbnb as an intermediate. When inside Airbnb, it is rather a practice of ‘deduction’, that is, actively eliminating the amount of information available, which drives trust. Here, the role of one’s direct social network will contribute to what one focuses on (for example areas of a city), but it is in essence the information on the platform that drives trust. Where outside of Airbnb, several sources were used to come to a decision, on Airbnb, trust is determined by the information available on the platform.\textsuperscript{46}

What is interesting to mention is how Airbnb as an organization was perceived. Most respondents saw Airbnb as a (digital) platform that enabled individuals to connect. The word ‘platform’ was frequently used, be it though in a variety of forms; communication platform, that orchestrates connection; a discovery platform, which provides a search engine and overview of listings that is easy to use for guests; a marketing platform, which enables hosts to show their listings, and provides exposure to a large group of potential guests. This indicates that people are very aware that a single platform can have a specific meaning or purpose for different users, and that the technical solution does play a role in the shaping of an opinion of Airbnb. Despite it being one website, it’s agency, that is how it makes a ‘difference to a state of affairs’ (Latour 2005, 52), depends on who is interacting with the platform, and for what reason. When it comes to how hosts perceived Airbnb, the reference to a technological platform diminishes: hosts had a more ‘human’ connection to Airbnb. Rather than speak of a platform, hosts saw Airbnb as an actant, an organization or corporate body (ibid., 54) one could communicate with. Airbnb could be contacted by phone or reached online, and served as an anchor for safety and contact. Hosts would refer to specific guarantees from Airbnb, such as the insurance if a home is damaged. In general, the possibility to contact Airbnb was seen as a trust signifier. The reputation of the organization in that way reflected the expectations individuals had on listing their home on the Airbnb site, for example, the idea that there is someone who helps you when you have a problem. This notion of a reliable contact that will pick up the phone and listen to you when you have a problem, also evokes a sense of trust (English-Lueck, Darrah, and Saveri 2002, 99).

To summarize, the question of how trust is negotiated on Airbnb is two-fold: the first moment of trust negotiation is the choice to use Airbnb or not – here the recommendation of a (known) social contact is primary, while secondary can be a media source that introduced Airbnb. In this case most individuals will also ‘check’ with a social contact to confirm their findings. The second moment of trust negotiation is when on the platform. In this case it is the information

\textsuperscript{46} If one looks at reasons why individuals choose not to try Airbnb, it does not seem to have to do with trust issues regarding personal safety, rather it is a matter of personal style and preference, or if one is skeptic, the need for more information that holds people back.
available on the platform that is used to negotiate trust. Through its technical framework, the platform drives the user to reduce the amount of information as they search. And as the shared economy is constructed out of consumers, or people like me and you, there is a lack of external information to confirm who a person is (even when you are a skilled internet user). This forces the user to rely on the information available on the platform, that is, pictures, descriptions and reviews. Trust is in this case negotiated in a constant interaction between the user and the system. The system dictates what is important, for example how a host or user needs to behave, and forces the users, in their own words, to publicly communicate their findings. By doing so, Airbnb creates ownership, as the users together have constructed Airbnb. It is their offline behavior that makes the service a success or failure, while at the same time it is through the platform that they are publicly portrayed as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ Airbnb members. In the following two sub questions, I will elaborate on how the online platform influences practices of trust, as well as how the users negotiate trust amongst each other.

Sub question 1: How does the online platform of Airbnb influence practices of trust?

As discussed in the main research question, the road to trusting and using Airbnb goes mostly through the social circle, through someone who may have used the service before and recommends it. It is this personal recommendation, as well as the introduction to how the system works, that creates trust in the system or platform. In this way, individuals even before entering the site ‘learn’ to trust the metrics, that is the technical framework of Airbnb. Within the learning process, there tends to be an explanation on where to find the site (online) as well as a short introduction to how it works (one can search for homes and contact hosts). When one has come to the site, many of the technicalities are similar to systems we generally use online. This recognition makes the threshold to interact with the system fairly low. One can just browse around, and look at what is on offer, find out if the site resonates with one’s personal style or preference for a holiday accommodation.

“So for me, my first experience with Airbnb, it was really easy to use, it was just as it was pictured online, which I know, it doesn’t always happen that way. But in my case it did. Ehm, and I just loved it, especially after how well this one went, I would definitely use them again.”

– Shannon, Airbnb Guest, one time user, traveled in a group
Even though the Airbnb platform has many existing media practices such as (a) Searching and search enabling, (b) Showing and being shown, (c) Presencing, and (d) Archiving (Couldry 2012, 45–52), it is the content produced by Airbnb, in combination with the way the site is programmed, that steers user behavior. One thing that stands out is the high amount of restrictions. One can in essence look, but not interact with, other users on the platform until a profile is created. In order to create this profile, a certain amount of information needs to be provided and confirmed. As Shannon tells me when I ask her if she created a profile: “I did! Because they say, you know, they kind of prompt you in it – they say the more information you put in it the better. As it enables the host to get to know you better”. In a certain way, one can say that Airbnb aims to teach us ‘how to live’ (ibid., 101), by informing the user of what is and is not appropriate on the platform. This constant prompting on how to produce information is also evident in how Airbnb instructs guests to communicate with their potential hosts. If one tries to contact a host, the pop-up instructs potential guests to share information. The concept of soft coercion, as presented by Trottier and Lyon (2012, 97), which refers to the pressure from a network pushing users to engage with the site, also comes to mind here.

In the interviews, it also became clear that some practices change due to updates in the Airbnb system. One example is how and why hosts and guests write reviews. Where previously, hosts and guests could see each other’s reviews and were able to make changes prior to publishing, the platform has now been amended so that the reviews are only shown when both parties have written one. This in effect has an impact on the motivations of writing a review: hosts lose the possibility to mediate with a guest, if a review is very critical. To avoid risks, some do not write a review at all. In this way, the hosts will be ‘punished’ as they are not able to obtain more reviews on their profile and build on their reputation.

“Today the system has been changed, a review only gets published when both parties have written a review. So sometimes I advice members of the group [Airbnb community Amsterdam], guys, just don’t write a review at all, this way you won’t be reviewed either. That is the wrong advice in a way, well for Airbnb, but it is a way to avoid a situation”
– Mieke, Airbnb Host & Guest, experienced user

These types of social norms that are specific for this economic endeavor, bring to mind some of the aspects of the Modern Social Imaginary as discussed by Taylor (2004; 2002). So what changes the social imaginary? When people take up, improvise, or are induced into new practices. It is the new context and outlook that drives them into new practices. A new way of being: ‘It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-
granted shape of things, too obvious to mention’ (Taylor 2004, 29). For example, the change imposed by Airbnb in the system of how reviews are created. My respondents did not see this as an improvement of the system, but had to comply with the rules in order to be part of it.

Searching and screening out (Couldry 2012, 45–52) are important practices on Airbnb. Potential guests can only navigate through the system if they provide some information. This information becomes a natural filter, which presents accommodation suitable for their specific needs. This, together with the evaluation of neighborhoods, seems to reduce most of the concerns of users (keep in mind, they have already embraced the concept of staying in a stranger’s home). This does not mean that at this stage in the process, simply any accommodation will do. Users will assess, based on the imagery, what fits their personal preferences. In general, images are seen as trustworthy, partly because reviews that are part of the listing often state if images are correct or not. Apart from this, verification of images was not seen as too important, as users trusted in the fact that if something was wrong, it would come up in the reviews.

To summarize, by facilitating and programming a digital platform, Airbnb influences and negotiates the social norm on the platform. In part through its communication, it tells the users what behavior is and is not appropriate. When one misbehaves, one can be excluded. This helps to build trustworthiness, as one needs to make ‘people and institutions accountable and raising the cost of breaching trust’ (Sztompka 1998, 24) Airbnb does so by indicating what is and is not ok within the network. For example, any damage to a hosts’ home will be reimbursed, and guests who are not happy with the home they have rented can be relocated the same night. In addition, the idea of restrictions is important: as the users navigate through the system, they are only able to continue if they comply with the rules. Here I see the comparison with a gate, where through a standardized ‘code’ individuals can obtain access, without any form of negotiation or ‘human’ contact. As soon as one has entered the building, or city, the system provides the user with a type of autonomy that indicates a form of user control. For example, on Airbnb there is the personal choice of what to write on a profile, and whether or not one uses a verified ID. This flexibility is again a way for all users to define their own norms, but at the same time, these norms cannot differ from those set by the system. As one cannot change the technical structure of the platform, one can only choose to comply with the minimum of information as set by the organization. It is through negotiations with oneself and the platform that the users come to trust one another and make choices.
Sub question 2: How do the users of Airbnb negotiate practices of trust?

In the previous sub-question, the role of the platform was discussed. It is difficult to determine where the role of the platform begins and the role of communication, that is text, starts. From the interviews it has become apparent that the main and most frequent practice of trust assessment is using social information in the form of ratings and reviews. The concept of reputation plays an important role on the Airbnb platform. Reputation in this case has to do with transparency of who one is on Airbnb, and how one is rated and reviewed by other users. The profile page for guests, and the listing page for hosts are in essence a reflection of ones level of trustworthiness on Airbnb. It is a summary of whom one is dealing with (which is produced by the user) but even more importantly it is an overview of what others think of this person. On the one hand, one can write about oneself, but most often, it is the comments of others that turn a user into a ‘trusted Airbnber’. Reviews on Airbnb are seen as a reliable source, primarily as they can only be created after a visit has taken place (and a financial transaction was made through the system). As opposed to for example Tripadvisor, reviews on Airbnb are perceived as truthful, as the system will only allow people who traveled to write a review. This restriction reduces the risk of ‘fraud’ or ‘fake’ information, as it is simply not possible to publish it. As mentioned before, as soon as people have become users, they trust the system of Airbnb, and there is an expectation that the ‘rotten apples’ quickly fall out as the reviews are honest, and if people misbehave they will be excluded from Airbnb.

The ratings, that is the star system where users can ‘grade’ a host based on a pre-set amount of criteria, are used as a quick check: an indication if one should consider spending more time reading the reviews. Commentary, in the form of a review, is ‘automatically archived and made visible online’ (Couldry 2012, 55). It helps the user to filter the information and works almost as a guide to assist in selecting what information is or is not relevant when one deals with the “information bomb” (virilio in Deuze 2012, 51) that users are confronted with. What stands out here, is that many individuals indicated that they did not always trust reviews available outside of Airbnb, as anyone could write anything there. However, there was an almost blind trust in the reviews on the Airbnb platform\(^47\), due to the restrictions that exist through the technicality of the platform. Not everyone is able to contribute to the site. It is only those who have complied with the rules, and are members (and actually spend the night in a home) who can contribute to the reviews.

Even though all respondents indicated that they trusted the reviews, it also became clear that one needs to learn how to read and write reviews. Due to the personal interaction between a

\(^{47}\) None of the respondents indicated that they had read review sites about Airbnb.
host and a guest, both parties often tried not to be ‘rude’ or ‘unpleasant’ to the other person. After all, the guest has paid to stay in your home, and the host has been so generous as to open their home to a complete stranger. Often there has been a fair amount of contact prior to the visit, which creates a bond between the host and guest\(^{48}\). The importance of communication is also stressed by Airbnb: tell about yourself, ask questions, get to know one another, create a realm of trust. What this interaction seems to do is focus on the social side, more than the financial transaction. Where respondents would be ‘ruthless’ in their reviews of hotels, the empathy that was created in the interaction with the host/guest, makes them reluctant to be too frank.

What this leads to is that, for many, reviews need to be read carefully. As an example, ‘in-between the lines’, Mikael shares his New York experience; “There was a family downstairs, and they were quite noisy […] the window was just one layer of glass, you would hear everything going on outside it was a little noisy, not that bad, when you are staying in New York that is just one of the things”. In his review he didn’t want to be rude to his host, who he had had contact with over the weeks, also, he didn’t want her to lose business over something small like this. At the same time, he felt the responsibility to share his experience with other potential guests. He ended up formulating the following sentence: “family downstairs can be a bit lively at times, but that is part of the charm of this house in my opinion. Also the window faces the street so consider bringing earplugs if you are a light sleeper, the street is pretty quiet though. Despite its’ proximity to Franklin Avenue”. He saw this as the right balance to warn future guests, but not bring any harm to his hosts’ future business.

This method to reading and writing reviews was more apparent among the more experienced Airbnb users. Also, the first-time users I spoke to had had a positive experience. The amount of trust that is placed in reviews is somewhat fascinating. The fact that someone wrote something proves the existence of a location, as well as the idea of it being safe (after all, the previous guest survived their stay). This behavior is in line with how Fukuyama sees trust as ‘the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and co-operative behavior, based on commonly shared norms’ (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007, 677–678). The writing of reviews therefore seems to create a sense of ownership and accountability to the website and fellow members, or one could even say to the Airbnb community\(^ {49}\). Hosts wrote their reviews about

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\(^{48}\) Note that even though some hosts indicate that they really get to know their guests, and speak about them dearly (and vice versa), none of the respondents had ‘kept in touch’ with their hosts or guests.

\(^{49}\) Within Digital Media, the word community has been somewhat of a problem child. Much debated, frequently looked at, but still by no means an area of absolute consent. Miller discusses how today the term does not have one definition, rather he sees it as something that refers to “some sort of ideal state of belonging that we have lost and need to recapture” (2011: 184). Rather than defining what type of community this is, and how it constructs itself, I therefore have taken the position of Social Imagined Communities, which within Media and Communications is defined as “[a] group sharing an abstract, symbolic, but distinctive identity, whose members cannot collectively meet or know each other, but to which its members nevertheless feel they belong.” (Chandler 2011).
guests to inform other potential hosts. Guests wrote their reviews to inform other potential guests. And despite the financial exchange (which was almost seen as a friendly gesture to the person who lets you into their home), the social norms of being polite seemed to have the upper hand. No one wants to ruin their reputation on the platform, as it means exclusion from the system and not being able to be a part of Airbnb anymore.

Issues of trust tend to arise when things are not as they should be, that is if someone does not comply with the rules set by Airbnb. This can either be a lack of reviews, an unclear profile picture or other cues that are different from the norm as set by the system. Such as poor English, or reviews that are not written in a way that fits the standard, either due to language or a lack of expected content. Due to the large amount of listings, guests will simply move on to the next accommodation, rather than engage with a listing that doesn’t fit the bill of what is ‘normal’. For hosts, Airbnb is primarily a source of income that comes with a risk, as does any self-owned business. Many of the risks are covered by Airbnb (insurance), but some just need to be taken in order to secure income. That is why, apart from asking for verified ID’s, many hosts accept almost any guest. The system places a great deal of responsibility on the users – they are told to read, communicate and ask questions. It is the user who has to provide all content, and manage their presence and communication on the platform. If your gut feeling says this is not right for me, you should not proceed. What this seems to do, is create a high level of accountability. If something goes wrong, the individual has him or herself to blame, as perhaps they did not comply with the system, did not ask the right questions or simply did not read enough. What stands out is the importance of social information, especially in the form of reviews. Reviews are seen as a confirmation that things are ok, that other guests/hosts will inform and warn peers if things are not as they should be.

To summarize, users of Airbnb negotiate practices of trust by a group defining the social norm. Much of this norm seems to be directed and steered through communication provided by Airbnb. The concept of reputation management is crucial on the platform: over time, a user can build his or her reputation (and earn trust) by means of reviews, and if one is a host, also ratings. Apart from that, it is important to comply with the system. For hosts this is about responsiveness and communication, both of which are publicly shown. There seems to be ‘no place to hide’, as much of the interaction and communication is accessible to all users. Last, there is the reading
and writing of reviews, which enable the users of the platform to make a judgement whether they trust a specific listing\textsuperscript{50} or guest.

\textsuperscript{50} Note, that the interviews indicated that trust assessment was a two step process, first one had interest/trust in a specific listing, the ‘trust’ in a host was constructed through the quality of the listing and the reviews. None of the interviewees indicated that they would first look at who the host was, and then assess the listing.
6. Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion
This thesis set out to explore practices of trust assessment, in specific on Airbnb. In order to understand how trust was negotiated on Airbnb, it was also necessary to look at how practices of trust assessment were applied outside of Airbnb. The research showed that outside of Airbnb, when searching for accommodation, individuals mostly used the practice of ‘investigation’ that is, they actively searched to confirm or reject the credibility of a source. The primary source was still the direct social network, where individuals were seen as almost ‘knowledge experts’ who could either endorse the quality of the site the information was found on, or had sufficient knowledge on the subject to confirm or reject information. In addition to social information, institutional information was used. Here it was specifically accredited news sources, or perhaps more ‘traditional’ media that was used⁵¹.

Once an individual had gone on to Airbnb, the practice switched from ‘investigation’ to ‘elimination’, that is, the user reduced the amount of information available through existing media practices such as searching. With the help of external sources, both social and institutional, a pre-set amount of criteria were established, such as what location/area of the city to trust. In addition, hard criteria as budget and size of the travel party, would reduce the amount of search options. The remaining options were assessed based on style and personal preferences. As one of the respondents said: “lika barn leka bäst” (translation: birds of a feather stick together) – what seems to happen is a process of similar people who find each other, and have a common vision/goal of the experience. On the one hand, a host who wants to attract a specific type of guest, and on the other, how a guest sees himself and in what type of text one recognizes themselves. This search for similarity, even if it is in an unknown place in the world, seems to work out, as after the choice, host and guest communicate and get to know each other. The host learns about the guests’ plans, and the guest (most often) gets what he wants, tips for his or her upcoming trip. In the cases where it did not work out, the user blames it on themselves, as they have a sense of ‘control’ in their selection, which comes with an idea of personal accountability.

This thesis set out from a theoretical standpoint that media is a practice, that is, it is something that can be learned. Where learning is often seen as a human practice, a teacher and student, in the case of Airbnb it is also the system that teaches the user. Even though it is the organization (Airbnb) that creates and provides the technical platform, the respondents from the online survey saw the platform as an intermediate that could take on a variety of roles, depending

⁵¹ Please note that ‘traditional’ in this case says nothing about the platform that the media is seen on, but rather that it is an established news source.
on the user. At the same time, when listening to the interviews, the respondents spoke about the platform as if it was an actant, as if the platform took them by the hand, and educated them on how to be a good Airbnb user. I believe future research could focus more on how non-human systems can teach and change behavior amongst users.

This thesis also looked at how the social is defined amongst the users of Airbnb. It did so through the lens of the Social Modern Imaginary. Where above, I have written about the role of the technical platform, as well as the type of practices, the need for a social norm or common moral seems to be a crucial part of the shared economy, for the organization to earn trust. This norm is created through the standard of the organization, and brought to life from a consensus between those who offer a product (hosts) and those who buy it (guests). Through social information, in the form of listings, profiles and reviews, they publicly communicate what is right and wrong. One can earn trust by complying with the rules of Airbnb, which in effect are ‘forced’ upon the users (as one cannot publish any content that is not in line with the programming of the platform). Nevertheless, the users are able to create a sense of their own way of taking control: one can refuse to provide some information, but more specifically, one learns how to read and write reviews.

What stands out within the shared economy, and especially for Airbnb, is the use of reviews. The platform indicates what is accepted or not within this community, and through reviews the users echo this. Together this creates a sense of moral order that is about mutual respect and mutual service to those who are the users or community members (Taylor 2002, 95). For example, you respect your hosts’ property, and as a host you need to help and welcome your guests. The sense of moral order does require for individuals to feel that what they do it realistic. That means, that the practices need to be realistic for the members to follow, but also need to be made their own. People need to have a sense that the norms set by the group are realizable, and therefore can become part of their actions (Taylor 2004, 28). Here, the lack of cultural knowledge and awareness seems to be a benefit. Some behavior that is seen as ‘odd’ is often blamed on a lack of mastering the English language, or a cultural norm. It is seen as something that is exotic and different. Where people find each other in the shared interest to travel, they also accept that there are great differences in how we do this.

As more and more private goods are ‘shared’ and commoditized through organizations, who provide a platform, and connect ‘sellers’ and ‘buyers, the question of how these loose networks can negotiate a social norm, will be increasingly interesting. In the case of Airbnb, it is a home, but companies like Uber or Lyft ‘share’ transport, Relayride is in essence a private rental company and Zilok allows you to ‘borrow’ small home equipment, from a drill to sewing machine. None of these business ideas are truly new: before we also carpooled with colleagues,
stayed a friend’s house abroad, borrowed a family member’s car, or went to a neighbor to use their ladder. What is different, however, and is bound to have a profound effect on society, is that we now pay for what was previously a ‘favor’\textsuperscript{52}. This ‘service model does not produce content, but opportunities to communicate through it’s infrastructure’ (Bolin 2014, 168). In effect, the organization monetizes from the users, who are also the consumers. We, ‘out of our free will’, produce the content and pay a price to connect to virtual strangers, whom we have nothing in common with, because the system enables us. I believe there is a need for future research on these economic endeavors, and how they influence our perception on sociality, as well as how they can influence our norm of sociality, both on and offline.

\textit{Discussion}

The level of responsibility of the user seems to be increasing. As a consumer, one needs to develop practices of how to determine if information is trustworthy or not, as well as how to act in a manner that allows you to be trusted within the system. Despite respondents not seeing their participation as within a community: none of the guests, and only 8\% of the hosts, indicated that they used Airbnb to be part of a community (secondary reason), there are signs that indicate aspects of a community. One is dependent on knowing and understanding certain social codes that apply to this specific online platform, for example how to communicate with a host or guest, in order to be accepted and included. Breaking the codes, and not complying with the rules of the platform, may result in social exclusion – either one will have difficulties to find accommodations or guests in the future, or if one breaks the rules in the offline setting, one can be removed from the platform, and is no longer a member of the community. It is important to keep in mind though, that these social norms are specific for Airbnb, and while the interaction framework may be similar on other platforms, the social norm will most likely will be different. Outside of the platform many people still rely on their social circle for confirming information, but those who might be more isolated or limited still have the possibility to use the Internet to obtain a more balanced view. A risk here though, is that those who are less Internet-savvy may be excluded\textsuperscript{53}. As much as it comes natural to many that social behavior depends on the offline setting one is in. The question can be asked if this also applies for the online realm. Further research in the adaptability of users to the social norm of online platforms may be useful, to understand more about not only digital skills, but also social skills online.

\textsuperscript{52} One could even wonder if we are not buying ‘the good old days’, where we actually \textit{could} ask a neighbor for help, and we had our own social network to get things done (for free, or in exchange for a favor).

\textsuperscript{53} Van Dijk discusses Digital skills and the risk of a digital divide in his book the Network Society (Van Dijk 2012, 195–204). He has identified ‘media related’ and ‘content related’ digital skills.
I do believe there needs to be more research on how and why reviews are created, and what the role of the organization and technical platform is in establishing the social norm for writing reviews. On a platform as Airbnb, users indicated that they created reviews for fellow travelers, and that they kept these people’s needs in mind when writing. At the same time, none of the respondents indicated to do the same on travel platforms outside of Airbnb. Even though the reviews were seen as a personal act to help fellow users, the reviews mirrored and reflected what is seen as important by Airbnb. The fact that a website is negotiating how to act or behave isn’t that strange. If one regards a site as an online destination, that is a place (field), this also means that this specific place can hold a symbolic value, which the visitors comply with. Where before we might have a specific connection to or interpretation of a physical location that was perceived as holy (Taylor 2004, 56), why not assume that a digital system is able to mediate in a similar way? And transfer a certain symbolism and value. I believe more research is needed in this field, to see how interaction with technical platforms can shape and condition peoples’ behavior. As for example in the case of the shared economy: how does the moral standard –that is negotiated on the platform– contribute to how the users interact with each other in personal meetings?

This thesis did not explicitly focus on the economic perspective of the shared economy, that is, the fee that Airbnb takes from the users, and how this influences their involvement in creating sociability on the platform. It is however interesting to discuss the impact of the underlying economic transaction on the behavior of users of Airbnb, as well as the construction of the platform. Taylor brings forward the idea of how sociability as conversation could be a model of society as mutual exchange, rather than hierarchical order (Taylor 2004, 46). As plausible as this sounds, one can question if there really is a mutual exchange within Airbnb, as it is cash for accommodation, and only those who either own a good, or have the financial means to be able to reciprocate, can take part in an exchange. Which if one looks at shared economies, means that Airbnb is nothing more than a ‘normal’ business agreement (where you probably would expect very different norms and practices, if you for example would be in a hotel). Which through norms and values, forced upon users has created an idealistic concept of mutual exchange, when in all essence it is nothing more than a ‘hierarchical’ business exchange. This thesis has not been able to answer the question concerning the role of financial exchange and the influence on Airbnb, but it would be interesting for future research to obtain more understanding

54 For example, respondents indicated that in commercial accommodation, they would be far more critical, even though they acknowledged that the price for Airbnb was often the same as for a commercial hotel, they did not have the same expectations on the hosts as one would have on hotel staff.
of why the social aspect of politeness and friendliness seems to be so important amongst users of the shared economy.

Where reviews and UGC are often doubted and questioned on open websites, a closed platform such as Airbnb creates a higher level of trust. A level that is so high that individuals will only verify information if the amount of reviews is too low. Otherwise, the opinions of unknown others is seen as enough to decide to invest money and physically travel somewhere. As the system changes, so do the reviews that are being written, both in content and availability. Further research on reviews and motivations for writing would be an interesting field to look at. Especially since this social information plays such a crucial role for users of a shared economy network.

This thesis set out to explore practices of trust assessment within a shared economy. It looked especially at how we use and assess information in the decision process. What we learned is that outside of a closed platform, users use both their social network, as well as investigate the web, to confirm information and its source. As soon as individuals have decided that they trust a specific organization or service, in this case Airbnb, their trust assessment changes. On a closed platform, as Airbnb, it is the information available on the platform that is seen as the truth, and it are the users, steered by the system, who negotiate the community’s own morals. At the end, it is still up to each and every individual to navigate their way through the information, and suffer the consequences when they have not done so in an accurate way. We might be careful with trusting information on the web, but when it comes to a physical choice, we still put our trust in the hands of others, even if we have no clue who these people are.
7. Bibliography


8. Appendix

Appendix I – Online survey (incl. programming notes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>SWEDISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for participating in this survey!</td>
<td>Tack för att du deltar i denna undersökning!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is Limor, and I am a Master Student at Uppsala University in the field of Digital Media and Society. For my thesis, which focuses on practices of trust assessment when looking at holiday accommodations, I would like to ask for your help by filling in this survey.</td>
<td>Jag heter Limor, och jag är en Masterstudent i ämnet ”Digital Media and Society” vid Uppsala universitet. Min magisteravhandling (thesis) handlar om hur förtroende spelar in vid val av semesterboende. Som underlag för avhandlingen ber jag om din hjälp med att fylla i den här undersöknningen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The outcomes of the survey are to be used for the writing of my thesis. The survey is an anonymous and independent study for which I have not received any funding.</td>
<td>Resultatet av undersökningen är avsett för min uppsats, och den är anonym och oberoende. Jag har inte tagit emot någon extern finansiering för att genomföra den.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The survey will take approximately 10/15 minutes to answer. At the end of this survey I will also provide some additional information about my study.</td>
<td>Undersöknningen tar ca 10-15 minuter att besvara. I slutet av undersöknningen får du även ytterligare information om min uppsats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you in advance for your help!</td>
<td>Tack på förhand för din hjälp!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With kind regards,</td>
<td>Med vänlig hälsning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limor</td>
<td>Limor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any questions? Email me on <a href="mailto:mail@limor.se">mail@limor.se</a></td>
<td>Frågor kring undersöknningen? Skicka e-post till <a href="mailto:mail@limor.se">mail@limor.se</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do at this point want to thank Eric Groenewoud, and Survey Sampling International who have been so kind to support me with the programming and hosting of this survey.</td>
<td>Jag vill tacka Eric Groenewoud och Survey Sampling International som har hjälpit mig med programmering och hosting av denna undersökning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS:** PUT IN A “start survey” BUTTON

------------ Next page --------------

**1. TYPE:** SINGLE CODE

**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ALL

**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS:** SCREENER QUESTION – if answer is C. “No, I never take part in choosing accommodation” please terminate survey (show message):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“This survey is aimed at people who frequently look for accommodation, unfortunately you don’t fit this criteria – I do want to thank you for your time.”</td>
<td>“Denna undersökning riktar sig till människor som ofta letar efter semesterboende. Tyvärr uppfyller du inte detta kriterium. Jag tackar för din tid.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for participating in this survey. This survey is aimed at practices of trust assessment when booking accommodation for private trips. This can be a weekend trip, long travel or an overnight stay in your own country as long as it is not a trip meant for business purposes. When you answer these questions, please think about what you believe is most accurate for your personal situation. When traveling (privately) are you involved in the process of deciding to book accommodation?</td>
<td>Tack för att du deltar i denna undersökning. Den handlar om den roll förtroende spelar vid bokning av boende för privata resor. Det kan till exempel handla om helgresor, längre resor eller inrikes övernattningar, men undersökningen berör inte affärsresor. När du besvarar frågorna, försök att ange det svar som stämmer bäst överens med din personliga situation och upplevelse. Deltar du i valet av boende när du reser privat?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Yes, I am the main responsible</td>
<td>a. Ja, jag är huvudansvarig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b. Yes, I am part of the process  
   b. Ja, jag deltar i valet  
   c. No, I never take any part in choosing accommodation  
   c. Nej, jag deltar aldrig i valet av boende

2. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**  
   **SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ALL**

   **TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your gender?</td>
<td>Ditt kön</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   **RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Male</td>
<td>a. Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Female</td>
<td>b. Kvinna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**  
   **SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ALL**

   **TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your age?</td>
<td>Din ålder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   **RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Up to 24 years</td>
<td>a. Under 24 år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 25 – 34 years</td>
<td>b. 25 – 35 år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 35 – 44 years</td>
<td>c. 35 – 44 år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 45 – 54 years</td>
<td>d. 45 -54 år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. 55 years and up</td>
<td>e. 55 år eller äldre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. **TYPE: NUMERICAL**  
**SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ALL**  
**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: ADD A NUMERICAL FIELD**

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On average, how many hours a day do you spend online?</td>
<td>Hur många timmar spenderar du i genomsnitt på nätet per dag?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. On a week day</td>
<td>a. Under veckodagar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. In the weekend</td>
<td>b. På helger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**  
**SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ALL**

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which of the below best describes your online capabilities?</td>
<td>Vilket av nedanstående påståenden stämmer bäst överens med dina kunskaper om Internet?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I am a digital genius</td>
<td>a. Jag är ett digitalt geni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I find my way online</td>
<td>b. Jag klarar mig på Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I need some help online</td>
<td>c. Jag behöver viss hjälp på Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I try to avoid the Internet as much as I can</td>
<td>d. Jag undviker Internet så mycket jag kan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the following section I would like to get a better understanding on how you see trust.

If you think about trusting people you have come in contact with online (and have not yet met in person), how likely is it for you to trust them?

RESPONSE FORMAT: SCALE OPTIONS ACROSS SCREEN

not at all likely, somewhat likely, neither likely nor unlikely, somewhat unlikely, highly unlikely

not at all sannolikt, ganska sannolikt, varken sannolikt eller osannolikt, ganska osannolikt, högst osannolikt
Imagine that there would be a website that enables you to find people who offer personal goods or services (items that they own or make themselves, not professionally). Which of the examples stated below could you imagine using? You can mark as many as you want.

### RESPONSE FORMAT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Eat a home cooked meal at someone’s private home</td>
<td>a. Äta ett hemlagat mål mat i någons privata hem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Pick up left-over food (which is enough for a meal)</td>
<td>b. Hämta hemlagat mat till t ex en matlåda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Spend the night in someone’s home (while the owner isn’t there)</td>
<td>c. Spendera natten i någons hem (när ägaren inte är hemma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Spend the night in a room of someone’s home (when the owner is there)</td>
<td>d. Spendera natten i ett rum i någons hem (när ägaren är hemma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Fetch a ride with a private individual in their car</td>
<td>e. Få skjuts av en privatperson i dennes bil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Borrow a car from an individual</td>
<td>f. Låna en bil av en privatperson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| g. None of the above                                                 | g. Ingen av ovanstående                                              

7.1 TYPE: MULTI CODE  
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ALL – exclude those who answered Q7 G “none of the above”  
ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: Show as response only the answers selected in Q7 + G “none of the above”

### TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the previous question you indicated that you could imagine using a website that enables you to find people who offer personal goods or services for a fee (items that they own or make)</td>
<td>På förra frågan svarade du att du kunde tänka dig att använda en webbsida som hjälper dig att hitta privata varor eller tjänster (dvs varor eller tjänster som privatpersoner själva producerat och</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which of these services would you be willing to pay for? You can mark as many as you want.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Eat a home cooked meal at someone’s private home</td>
<td>a. Åta ett hemlagat mål i någons privata hem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Pick up left-over food (which is enough for a meal)</td>
<td>b. Hämta hemlagat mat till t ex en matlåda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Spend the night in someone’s home (while the owner isn’t there)</td>
<td>c. Spendera natten i någons hem (när ägaren inte är hemma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Spend the night in a room of someone’s home (when the owner is there)</td>
<td>d. Spendera natten i ett rum i någons hem (när ägaren är hemma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Fetch a ride with a private individual in their car</td>
<td>e. Få skjuts av en privatperson i dennes bil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Borrow a car from an individual</td>
<td>f. Låna en bil av en privatperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. None of the above</td>
<td>g. Ingen av ovanstående</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. **TYPE:** SINGLE CODE

**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ALL

**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS:**

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything you do to check if information you find online is true/correct?</td>
<td>Vidtar du några åtgärder för att säkerställa att information på nätet är sann/korrekt/stämmer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples can be checking other sources, asking someone around you or maybe something else</td>
<td>Till exempel använda andra källor, fråga någon i din närhet eller någonting annat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Yes</td>
<td>a. Ja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. No</td>
<td>b. Nej</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.1 TYPE: OPEN FIELD  
SAMPLE ROUTING: ONLY SHOW IF Q8 IS A. “YES”  
ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS Q 8

TEXT:

ENG | SWE  
--- | ---  
Could you please explain what these actions are? Please give examples of what you most often do. | Var vänligen förklara vilka dessa åtgärder är. Ge exempel på vad du vanligtvis gör.

RESPONSE FORMAT: TEXT BOX MULTIPLE LINE/ROW

----------------- Next page -----------------

ENG | SWE  
--- | ---  
In the following section I would like to know a bit more about how you select your accommodation (a place to spend the night when on a trip). Please provide answers based on your personal travels, so not for when you travel for work. | I den här delen skulle jag vilja veta mer om hur du väljer semesterboende (en plats att spendera natten på under en resa). Ge exempel baserade på privata resor, inte affärsresor.

----------------- Next page -----------------

9. TYPE: MULTIPLE CODE  
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ALL  
ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: ADD OPEN FIELD SINGLE LINE/ROW BEHIND: F. “Other”

TEXT:

ENG | SWE  
--- | ---  
If you think about booking accommodation, which of the places below have you used? You can select multiple options. | Vilken/vilka av följande har du använt för att boka semesterboende? Du kan välja flera alternativ.

RESPONSE FORMAT:

ENG | SWE  
--- | ---  
a. A travel agency | a. En resebyrå  
b. Through an online travel agency | b. En resebyrå på Internet  
c. Directly at the suppliers (for example, Radisson, Ibis or a camping site) | c. Direkt från leverantören (tex Radisson, Ibis eller en campingplats)  
d. Commercial travel sites (for camping sites) | d. Komersiella resesidor (tex
If you think about where you most often book accommodation, which of the places below is most common? You can only select one answer. If you are not sure which is most common, please select the place you feel most secure in using for booking.

RESPONSE FORMAT:

ENG | SWE
---|---
a. At a travel agency | a. En resebyrå
b. Through an online travel agency | b. En resebyrå på Internet
c. Directly at the suppliers (for example, Radisson, Ibis or a camping site) | c. Direkt från leverantören (tex Radisson, Ibis eller en campingplats)
d. Commercial travel sites (for example Hotels.com, Booking.com or Trivago) | d. Kommersiella resesidor (tex Hotels.com, Booking.com eller Trivago)
e. Through a review site (such as Tripadvisor or Yelp) | e. Sidor med omdömen om boende (tex Tripadvisor eller Yelp)
f. Other | f. Annan
information about accommodations? You can choose up to three answers.

RESPONSE FORMAT:

ENG | SWE
---|---
a. Family | a. Familj
b. Friends | b. Vänner
c. Neighbors | c. Grannar
d. A local travel agency | d. En lokal resebyrå
e. An online travel agency | e. En Internetbaserad resebyrå
f. Review sites (for example TripAdvisor or Yelp) | f. Sidor med omdömen om boende (tex TripAdvisor eller Yelp)
g. Commercial travel sites (for example Hotels.com, Booking.com or Trivago) | g. Kommersiella resesidor (tex Hotels.com, Booking.com eller Trivago)
h. Social Network Sites (for example Facebook) | h. Sociala nätverk (tex Facebook)
i. A search engine (for example Google) | i. Sökmotorer (tex Google)
j. Blogs | j. Bloggar
k. Microblogs (for example Twitter) | k. Microbloggar (tex Twitter)
l. I do not consult any sources | l. Jag använder inga källor
m. Other | m. Annan

11. TYPE: SINGLE CODE
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ALL
ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: ADD OPEN FIELD SINGLE LINE/ROW BEHIND: G. “Other”

TEXT:

ENG | SWE
---|---
If you think about where you physically are when searching for accommodation, which of the places below is most common? | Var befinner du dig oftast när du söker efter semesterboende?

RESPONSE FORMAT:

ENG | SWE
---|---
a. At home | a. Hemma
b. At a friends house | b. Hos en vän
c. At work | c. På arbetet
d. In transport (for example metro or train) | d. På resa (t ex tunnelbana eller tåget)
e. In a public place (such as library or internet café) | e. På en publik plats (tex ett bibliotek eller ett Internetcafé)
f. In a travel agency | f. På resebyrå
g. Other | g. Annan
In the following section I would like to get a better understanding on the possibility to find accommodation through an online network/service. Here I am specifically interested in examples outside of established forms of accommodation, such as hotels, hostels or camping sites.

---

12. **TYPE:** OPEN  
**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ALL

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you name some examples of online network/services where you can find accommodation that is offered by private individuals?</td>
<td>Kan du nämna några exempel på Internetbaserade tjänster där du kan hitta semesterboende som tillhandahålls av privatpersoner?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:** 5 SINGLE LINE/ROW TEXT BOXES AND A CHECK BOX AT THE BOTTOM:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not know any</td>
<td>Jag känner inte till några</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. **TYPE:** SINGLE CODE  
**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ALL

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would now like to ask you a few questions about Airbnb. Have you ever heard of this service?</td>
<td>Jag vill nu ställa några frågor om Airbnb. Har du hört talas om denna tjänst?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Yes, and I have used it (either as a host or guest)</td>
<td>a. Ja, jag har använt den (som värd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b. Yes, I never used it but I know it well enough to answer questions about it
c. Yes, but I do not really know how it works
d. No, I don’t know Airbnb

eller gäst)
b. Ja. jag har aldrig använt den men känner till den tillräckligt väl för att kunna svara på frågor om den
c. Ja, men jag känner inte till hur den fungerar
d. Nej, jag känner inte till Airbnb

14. TYPE: SINGLE CODE
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED C. “YES, BUT I DO NOT REALLY…” AND D. “NO” AT Q13

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Airbnb is a digital marketplace that enables private individuals to rent out (for payment) their home to people from all over the world. Airbnb provides the website which connects so called ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’. A host is basically anyone who has a room, apartment or house available to be rented out. Guests can be people from around the world, who choose to pay to stay in an other person’s home. Would you consider using Airbnb to find accommodation on a trip?</td>
<td>Airbnb är en digital handelsplats som ger privatpersoner möjlighet att hyra ut sin bostad till människor runt hela världen (mot betalning). Airbnb tillhandahåller mötesplatsen för ”värdar” och ”gäster”. En värd är en person som har ett rum, en lägenhet eller ett hus att hyra ut. Gäster är människor från hela världen som väljer att bo i en annan persons hem. Skulle du kunna tänka dig att använda Airbnb för att hitta boende för en resa?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESPONSE FORMAT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Yes</td>
<td>a. Ja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. No</td>
<td>b. Nej</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 14.1 TYPE: OPEN ANSWER (non-compulsory)
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED a. “yes” AT Q14
ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: Show box on same page - Question is not compulsory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG</strong></td>
<td><strong>SWE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you explain why? <em>If you have any specific concerns, specifically in relation to trust, please share these.</em></td>
<td>Kan du förklara varför? <em>Om du har några särskilda funderingar kring förtroende, dela med dig av dessa.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:** TEXT BOX MULTIPLE LINE/ROW Om

### 14.2 TYPE: OPEN ANSWER (non-compulsory)
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED b. “No” in Q14
ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: Show box on same page - Question is not compulsory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG</strong></td>
<td><strong>SWE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you explain why? <em>If your reasons have to do with trust, could you specify these in your answer?</em></td>
<td>Kan du förklara varför? <em>Om dina skäl har att göra med förtroende, förklara det i ditt svar.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:** TEXT BOX MULTIPLE LINE/ROW

### 15. TYPE: SINGLE CODE
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED C. “YES, BUT I DO NOT REALLY...” AND D. “NO” AT Q13 ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: AFTER QUESTION IS ANSWERED, SKIP TO Q31 and then TO Q32 (SKIP Q31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG</strong></td>
<td><strong>SWE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be the main reason for you not to trust a service like Airbnb.</td>
<td>Vilket skulle vara ditt främsta skäl att inte lita på en tjänst som Airbnb?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ENG</strong></th>
<th><strong>SWE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I do not know who the people are who I am renting the accommodation from</td>
<td>a. Jag känner inte de personer som jag hyr boende av</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I am worried about how the payment is handled</td>
<td>b. Jag är orolig för hanteringen av betalningen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c. I would be worried what happens if I break something
d. I would be worried who to contact when I have a problem
e. None of the above
f. I do not see any reason not to trust this service

---

16. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**

**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED A. “YES, AND I HAVE USED IT” AND B. “YES, I KNOW HOW IT WORKS” AT Q13

**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS:** RANDOMIZE ANSWERS (“OTHER ALWAYS LAST) ADD OPEN FIELD SINGLE LINE/ROW BEHIND: f. “Other”

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did you first hear about Airbnb?</td>
<td>Hur hörde du först talas om Airbnb?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Through a friend</td>
<td>a. Genom en vän</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Through an online news channel</td>
<td>b. Via en Internetbaserad nyhetskälla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Through a review site (for example Tripadvisor or Yelp)</td>
<td>c. Via en sida med omdömen om boende (tex Tripadvisor eller Yelp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Through a search engine (for example Google)</td>
<td>d. Via en sökmotor (tex Google)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Through a Social Network Site (for example Facebook)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. TYPE: MULTIPLE CODE
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “YES, AND I HAVE USED IT” AND B. “YES, I KNOW HOW IT WORKS” AT Q13

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Airbnb, are you a: Please select all that apply</td>
<td>Hos Airbnb, är du en: Välj det/de alternativen som stämmer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESPONSE FORMAT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Guest</td>
<td>a. Gäst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Host</td>
<td>b. Värd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. TYPE: SINGLE CODE
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “Guest” AT Q17

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long have you been using Airbnb, as a guest. Please make your best estimate if you are not sure.</td>
<td>Hur länge har du använt Airbnb som gast? Uppskatta tiden så gott du kan om du är osäker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESPONSE FORMAT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Less than a year</td>
<td>a. Mindre än ett år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1-3 years</td>
<td>b. 1-3 år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. More than 4 years</td>
<td>c. Mer än fyra år</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18.1 TYPE: Single code
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “Guest” AT Q17

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much time do you estimate was between coming into contact with</td>
<td>Hur lång tid gick det mellan din första kontakt med Airbnb och första gången du</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| f. Other | e. Via ett socialt nätverk (tex Facebook) |
| f. Annan |
Airbnb and your first time using the service as a guest? Please make your best estimate if you are not sure.

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. There was no time in-between</td>
<td>a. Det gick ingen tid emellan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Less than half a year</td>
<td>b. Mindre än ett halvår</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Half a year to a year</td>
<td>c. Ett halvår till ett år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. More than 1 year</td>
<td>d. Mer än ett år</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. TYPE: SINGLE CODE  
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: B. “Host” AT Q17

**TEXT:**

How long have you been listed on Airbnb, as a host. Please make your best estimate if you are not sure.

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Less than a year</td>
<td>a. Mindre än ett år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1 -3 years</td>
<td>b. 1-3 år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. More than 4 years</td>
<td>c. Mer än fyra år</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. TYPE: SINGLE CODE  
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “Guest” AT Q17

**TEXT:**

How often do you use Airbnb for accommodation? Please select what is most applicable for you.

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**
### ENG

| a. | I try to use it for every trip |
| b. | I have a profile but don’t use it too often |
| c. | I tried it only a few times |
| d. | I have a profile, but never used it |
| e. | I only use it as a source of inspiration for trips |
| f. | I used it before, but stopped using it |
| g. | I don’t have a profile, but have booked through someone else’s profile |
| h. | I don’t have a profile, but traveled with someone who has a profile |

### SWE

| a. | Jag använder den för varje resa (om möjligt) |
| b. | Jag har en profil, men använder den inte så ofta |
| c. | Jag har använt den ett fåtal gånger |
| d. | Jag har en profil, men använder den aldrig |
| e. | Jag använder den bara som inspirationskälla för resor |
| f. | Jag använde den tidigare, men har slutat |
| g. | Jag har ingen profil, men har bokat via någon annans profil |
| h. | Jag har ingen profil, men har rest med någon som har en |

---

21. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**

**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “Guest” AT Q17

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you most frequently travel when you use Airbnb?</td>
<td>Hur reser du ofta när du använder Airbnb?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Alone</td>
<td>a. Ensam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. With friends</td>
<td>b. Med vänner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. With my partner</td>
<td>c. Med min partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. With family (including children)</td>
<td>d. Med familj (inkusive barn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Other</td>
<td>e. Annat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

22. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**

**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “Guest” AT Q17

**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS:** RANDOMIZE ANSWERS (“OTHER ALWAYS LAST) ADD OPEN FIELD SINGLE LINE/ROW BEHIND: g. “Other”

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the main reason you use Airbnb as a guest?</td>
<td>Vilket är det främsta skälet till att du använder Airbnb som gäst?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a guest, how do you select accommodation?

Please think about what makes you trust or distrust a specific listing. If there are specific things you might ask or do before considering to book, please share these. Feel free to give specific examples.

RESPONSE FORMAT: TEXT BOX MULTIPLE LINE/ROW
When choosing accommodation, what are the most important things you do to confirm your choice? You can choose up to 3 answers.

ENG

1. I ask some personal information about the hosts
2. I check the hosts email address
3. I check Google maps street view to see the house/building
4. I print a map on how to go there
5. I read all descriptions of the accommodation
6. I read all house rules
7. I only communicate via the Airbnb Platform
8. I read all reviews available
9. I only book when there are verified pictures
10. I check if the users have a verified ID
11. I ask extensive questions about the home
12. I try to get to know the host and get a feeling for who they are
13. Other

SWE

1. Jag frågar efter personlig information om värden
2. Jag kollar värdens e-postadress
3. Jag tittar på Google Maps Streetview för att se huset/byggnaden
4. jag skriver ut en karta för att se var det ligger
5. Jag läser alla beskrivningar av boendet
6. Jag läser alla regler för boendet
7. Jag kommunicerar bara via Airbnb:s plattform
8. Jag läser alla recensioner som finns
9. Jag bokar bara när det finns verifierade bilder
10. Jag kollar om användaren har ett verifierat ID
11. Jag ställer många frågor om boendet
12. Jag försöker lära känna värden och få en känsla av vem det är
13. Annat
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you consult any additional digital sources other than Airbnb when choosing a specific accommodation to stay in? Please write down which (URL or name of site/service.</td>
<td>Använder du andra digitala källor än Airbnb för att välja semesterboende? Ange URL eller namnet på sidan/tjänsten.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

3 SINGLE LINE/ROW TEXT BOXES AND A CHECK BOX AT THE BOTTOM:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t use any other sources</td>
<td>Jag använder inga andra källor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**

SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “Guest” AT Q17

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a guest, would you use Airbnb anywhere in the world?</td>
<td>Som gast, skulle du använda Airbnb varsomhelst i världen?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Yes</td>
<td>a. Ja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. No</td>
<td>b. Nej</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26.1 **TYPE: OPEN ANSWER (non-compulsory)**

SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED b. “no” AT Q26

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: Please show text box on same page - Question is not compulsory

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why not?</td>
<td>Varför inte?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT: TEXT BOX MULTIPLE LINE/ROW**

27. **TYPE: OPEN ANSWER**

SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “Guest” and/or B. “Host” AT Q17

**TEXT:**
**ENG**

What do you think the role of Airbnb is in the mediation of guests and hosts?

**SWE**

Vilken roll spelar Airbnb i förmedlingen mellan gäst och värd?

**RESPONSE FORMAT: TEXT BOX MULTIPLE LINE/ROW AND A CHECK BOX AT THE BOTTOM:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They do not play a role</td>
<td>De har ingen betydelse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE (row 1) MULTIPLE CODE (row 2)**

**SAMPLE ROUTING:** ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: B. “Host” AT Q17

**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS:** RANDOMIZE ANSWERS (“OTHER” ALWAYS LAST) ADD OPEN FIELD SINGLE LINE/ROW BEHIND: g. “Other”

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your main reason and supporting reasons for being a host? Please select one main reason, and if applicable you can choose up to two supporting reasons.</td>
<td>Vilket är ditt främsta skäl, och övriga skäl, för att vara värd? Välj ditt främsta skäl och om det är relevant upp till två övriga skäl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. It makes me feel like I belong to a community</td>
<td>a. Det får mig att känna att jag är en del av en gemenskap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. It is a good way to make some extra money</td>
<td>b. Det är ett bra sätt att få lite extra pengar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I like to enable people to stay somewhere that is non commercial</td>
<td>c. Jag tycker om att ge andra möjlighet till ett boende som inte är kommersiellt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I want people to have the opportunity to feel like a local when traveling</td>
<td>d. Jag vill ge människor en möjlighet att känna att de är en del av den lokala kulturen när de reser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. I am able to provide people with a unique place</td>
<td>e. Jag har möjlighet att erbjuda människor ett unikt boende</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. I like the idea to provide people with a home away from home</td>
<td>f. Jag tycker om tanken på att erbjuda känslen av ett hem när någon är på resa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Other:</td>
<td>g. Annat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:** Two rows of square boxes, 1st row header “Main reason” 2nd row header “supporting reasons”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st row header “Main reason”</td>
<td>”Mitt främsta skäl”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
29. **TYPE: OPEN ANSWER**

SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: B. “Host” AT Q17

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you do to asses if you trust a guest in your home. Please think about what you specifically focus on when reviewing a guest, think about things you do online or questions you might ask.</td>
<td>Vad gör du för att utvärdera om du litar på en gäst i ditt hem? Tänk på vad som är särskilt viktigt när du utvärderar en gäst. Tänk på vad du gör/söker efter på internet eller vilka frågor du ställer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT: LARGE TEXT BOXES AND A CHECK BOX AT THE BOTTOM:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t check anything else, if the accommodation is available I accept anyone.</td>
<td>Jag kollar ingenting särskilt. Om mitt boende är tillgängligt så accepterar jag vem som helst.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. **TYPE: SINGLE CODE**

SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: B. “Host” AT Q17

**TEXT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a host, do you ever try to ‘check up’ on your guests before they visit?</td>
<td>Som värd, försöker du någonsin att kolla upp dina gäster innan de kommer?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE FORMAT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| a. Yes, always  
  b. Yes, sometimes  
  c. No, never | a. Ja, alltid  
  b. Ja, ibland  
  c. Nej, aldrig |
30.1 TYPE: OPEN FIELD (non compulsory)
SAMPLE ROUTING: ONLY SHOW IF Q30 IS A. “YES, always”, B. “Yes, sometimes”
ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS Q 30 (non compulsory)

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where do you check? Could you give some examples (names of services, websites)</td>
<td>Var kollar du? Ge gärna exempel (namn på tjänster, webbsidor)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESPONSE FORMAT: 3 SINGLE LINE/ROW TEXT BOXES

31 TYPE: OPEN FIELD

SAMPLE ROUTING: ALL

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What country are you from? (if you live abroad, please indicate the country you feel most culturally affiliated with)</td>
<td>Vilket land kommer du ifrån? (om du bor utomlands ange vilket land du känner dig kulturellt mest tillhörande)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESPONSE FORMAT: 1 SINGLE LINE/ROW TEXT BOX

31.1 TYPE: OPEN FIELD (non compulsory)
SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED: A. “YES, AND I HAVE USED IT” AND B. “YES, I KNOW HOW IT WORKS” AT Q13

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last... In addition to this survey, as part of my thesis I am looking for people to interview about their experiences with Airbnb (positive or negative!). If you would be interested in helping me with this, please leave your name and email address below. If you are not interested... Please click the button below to finalize the survey!</td>
<td>Till sist... Utöver den här undersökningen letar jag efter personer att intervjua om deras upplevelser av Airbnb (positiva eller negativa!). Om du är intresserad av att hjälpa mig med detta, lämna ditt namn och din e-postadress nedan. Om du inte är intresserad, klicka på knappen nedan för att avsluta undersökningen!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESPONSE FORMAT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Name (+ OPEN FIELD, SINGLE ROW)</td>
<td>Namn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Email Address (+ OPEN FIELD, SINGLE ROW)</td>
<td>E-post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please enter a valid email address

Angie en gällande mailadress

31. **TYPE: OPEN FIELD (non compulsory)**
**SAMPLE ROUTING: ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SELECTED C. “YES, BUT I DO NOT REALLY…” AND D. “NO” AT Q14**

TEXT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last... In addition to this survey, as part of my thesis I am looking for people to interview about their opinion on Airbnb. If you would be interested in helping me with this, please leave your name and email address below.</td>
<td>Till sist... Utöver den här undersökningen letar jag efter personer att intervjua om deras uppfattning om Airbnb. Om du är intresserad av att hjälpa mig med detta, lämna ditt namn och din e-postadress nedan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you are not interested... Please click the button below to finalize the survey!</td>
<td>Om du inte är intresserad, klicka på knappen nedan för att avsluta undersökningen!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESPONSE FORMAT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Name (+ OPEN FIELD, SINGLE ROW)</td>
<td>Namn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Email Address (+ OPEN FIELD, SINGLE ROW)</td>
<td>E-post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please enter a valid email address

Angie en gällande mailadress

Completion page
You just answered the last question, and I would like to thank you for your time and answers. As promised on the first page, some more information on my thesis.

Your answers will be the ‘empirical data’ for a case study on practices of trust, when using Airbnb. This means as much as, what do we do to tell ourselves that it is ‘ok’ to make a choice, and take a physical action after we have searched for information online. In my thesis I am specifically interested in how information, that is created by Airbnb (or other corporations), is used and assessed in relation to personal information, which is generated by other users.

I am currently in the process of writing the paper, and expect to finalize it before the start of summer 2015. Are you interested in the results? Connect with me on Linkedin - this is a good way to contact me if you would like to follow up.

Do you know someone else who could participate in the survey? Please share the link! If you cope the original URL, you can send it to someone else, and they can participate as well.

With kind regards,
Limor Janssen

This survey was made possible with the help of Survey Sampling International, more information? Please visit their website; http://www.surveysampling.com/en
Appendix II – Interview guide (guests)

About You

Get an understanding of what platforms they use (on/offline)
- Tell me a bit about your ‘digital’ behavior
  - What networks do you belong to/sites do you use/visit frequently
  - What is your average day, what do you use digital services for?
  - How active are you? Do you write comments?
  - What are your main concerns online?
  - What are your main concerns? Do you ‘trust’ the system.

Get an understanding of what is important and motivates them
- Tell me a bit more about your traveling behavior
  - What is it about for you?
  - How do you get inspired
  - How do you get informed
  - What sources do you use?

About Airbnb

Get an understanding of what Airbnb is all about for them
- Can you tell me a bit about how you started using Airbnb
  - How did you hear about it?
  - What were your thoughts first looking at it
  - What made you try it for the first time?
- Can you show me an example of how you search for an apartment
  - Where did you travel last? Can you show me where you stayed?
    - Probe on what type of questions they asked, if they contacted more people. See if they show you the conversations
    - Probe on what the role of pictures, text or other visual signifiers it
    - Probe on how you asses if a host is credible or not – what is it that evokes trust and what evokes ‘distrust’. What do you do when you doubt a specific host.
    - Do you have doubts, what are these and what do you do if you have doubts about a place?
    - Have you ever been in a ‘negative situation’ can you tell me about that?
- Can we do a ‘fake’ search – I will name a place and could you talk me through what you do, and what steps to take to find accommodation. (we sit together and re-enact the usual process)
  - Do a fake search on a European city (that they haven’t been to)
  - Do a fake search on a more ‘risky’ city that they haven’t been to (perhaps india, some southern American countries, Africa)
    - Probe on how they check things – who they ask/what sources they use.
Appendix III – Interview guide (hosts)

About You

Get an understanding of what platforms they use (on/offline)

- Tell me a bit about your ‘digital’ behavior
  - What networks do you belong to/sites do you use/visit frequently
  - What is your average day, what do you use digital services for?
  - How active are you? Do you write comments?
  - What are your main concerns online?
  - What are your main concerns? Do you ‘trust’ the system.

Get an understanding of what is important and motivates them

- Tell me a bit more about your traveling behavior
  - What is it about for you?
  - How do you get inspired
  - How do you get informed
  - What sources do you use?

About Airbnb

Get an understanding of what Airbnb is all about for them

- Can you tell me a bit about how you started using Airbnb
  - How did you hear about it?
  - What were your thoughts first looking at it
  - What made you try it for the first time?

- Can you show me your listing
  - Why did you choose to describe it like this
    - Probe on pictures, house rules etc.
    - Are there any worries about people knowing where you live?
    - Any worries about it being ‘illegal’ to sublet without permission etc.

- What type of people are your guests?
  - Can you show me some of the applicants
    - Probe on why they said yes or no
    - Probe on if they do any check ups on people
    - Probe on what it is that they ‘distrust’ an individual and what they do
    - Have you had any strange experiences that changed the way you saw trust (in relation to your guests)
    - Have you ever reported people to Airbnb, what happened after this
Appendix IV – Questions to Airbnb

Interview guide Airbnb

First of all, thank you so much for helping with these questions for my thesis. My education is in the field of the Social Sciences, in-between Sociology and Anthropology, this means that I am specifically interested in the ‘human’ factors. Therefore most of these questions are framed in relation to how users (host/guest) experience things. If a question would need more elaboration, please let me know, very happy to clarify!

• What have been the main challenges when it comes to building trust within the system/platform?

• Have their been any specific ‘breakthrough’ moments when it comes to building trust between the platform and the user?

• What are the main concerns that users have on a personal level. In specific when it comes to letting people into their home/going into someone else’s home. Do these concerns differ between guests and hosts?

• Have you experienced any big cultural differences when it comes to the concept of trust? Could you give some examples.

• What are some of the practices –that is what do people do– outside of the website to feel safe/build trust? Please think of actions they take both on-or offline.

• How do you believe that users asses the difference in content created by other users vs. Airbnb? (User Generated Content vs Corporate Content)

• Airbnb has enabled hosts to provide house rules and other information, what do you believe people do next to this to feel confident in their choice of visiting a strangers home.

• In most cultures it is not the ‘social norm’ to stay in an unknown person’s home, what do you think are specific reasons that so many people are open to ‘break with social convention’ and enter an unknown person’s private home.

• Is there a specific group that is under or over-represented as guests? Could this have to do with age, gender, or digital capabilities?

• How do you believe people decide if a home or area is ‘safe’ for them, that is, how do you know what is the right neighborhood etc.

• When I have spoken to people about my thesis, a common response has been: “Well, it is people like me who use Airbnb” but when asking a second question, “what is someone like you” they tend to look at me with big eyes. Does Airbnb have an idea what “people like me” means, outside of the joy to travel. Where does this sense of belonging come from?