Are First Impressions Set in Stone?

A research investigating the impression formation process of Airbnb hosts and the difference between lasting first impressions and warranting theory.

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ABSTRACT

Airbnb hosts form their impression of prospective guests in two stages. First, they form a first impression of a guest when the guest sends a request message. Next, the host can check the guest's profile where reviews written by others may adjust this first impression. Research on impression formation states that first impressions are lasting and difficult to change while warranting research argues that third-party information (i.e., reviews) is more important than self-generated information (i.e., the initial request message). Therefore, it is unclear as to whether first impressions may change as a result of other information that provides more warranting. This study examines which stage is more important to impression formation, level of trust and intention to accept a guest's request. The request message and reviews were manipulated in a 2 (message type) X 3 (review type) between-subjects experimental design (*N* = 179). Hosts indeed relied on other-generated information to form their final impression. Moreover, results showed that the impression of host would sway the most as opposed to their first impression if hosts read negative reviews about the guest. This study is one of the first that found empirical evidence supporting warranting theory on a sharing economy platform such as Airbnb.

Keywords: *Sharing Economy, First Impression, Airbnb, Online Reviews, Trust, Warranting Theory*

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INTRODUCTION

"You will never have a second chance to create a good first impression" – Will Rogers

Imagine renting out your own house, and after the guests leave, you return to your house, only to find that they trashed the apartment. This is exactly what happened to Stephan, a man renting his Amsterdam apartment through Airbnb. Three Spanish guests left the apartment extremely dirty and broke personal belongings (Zwetsloot, 2018). Millions of people use this platform and even though most of the time experiences are succesful, this is a realistic example of what can happen.

Airbnb is an example of an online marketplace, also called 'peer-to-peer (P2P) marketplace' or 'sharing economy platform', that offers short-term renting services and mediates between hosts and guests. Airbnb takes a different approach than the traditional tourism accommodation sector by letting people sublet their house with their personal belongings, and has therefore reshaped the hospitality industry (Oskam, & Boswijk, 2016). An Airbnb survey among hosts in Amsterdam revealed that 87 percent of hosts rent out their own home ("Airbnb Economic Impact", 2013), making this platform very personal. This personal aspect generates additional risk to the host. In general, guest's behaviour is uncontrollable risking potential liability for injuries to guests, neighbours and damages done to other properties. Besides injuries or damages, hosts put their property at risk of theft (Malazizi, Alipour, & Olya, 2018). Nevertheless, the wide popularity of the platform shows that hosts are willing to let people stay in their home, making Airbnb a perfect example where impressions, and subsequently trust are key factors in the success of the platform.

To avoid the risks related to sublet your house via Airbnb, hosts need to determine if the prospective tenant is reliable, trustworthy, and fits their demands, norms and values. To validate if the guest is trustworthy, the impression formation process on Airbnb occurs in two different stages. A first impression is formed when a guest wants to book an accommodation and sends a request message to the host. Here guests can explain the reason of their trip, with whom they are visiting or why they made a choice for your accommodation. In the second stage, the host accesses the guest's profile to view additional information. Amongst others this profile contains the reviews and amount of reviews, which are considered as the most important attribute to establish trust (Bridges & Vásquez, 2016). Thus, with regards to the impression formation process on Airbnb, renters form their first impression based on self-

generated information (i.e., the message sent by the requester). However, in the next stage, they are exposed to other-generated information about the profile owner (i.e., the reviews and review scores).

The main research question in this study is to examine which of these two stages is the most important in the impression formation process. Warranting theory states that self-generated information may be misleading as people can present themselves more vividly than they actually are. People search for evidence to verify the trustworthiness of the self-generated content. For this reason, individuals find other-generated content more valuable (Walther & Parks, 2002). Thus, in the case of Airbnb, the initial impression of the requester could change after additional, other-generated information is presented. However, Smith, Mackie and Claypool (2014) state that the first impression are lasting, and that these first impressions influence how a person treats the other in many different settings of life. This would mean that the first impression based on the request message is not prone to change in the face of additional information. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the impression formation process and the effect of self-and-other generated content on the first and subsequent impressions. Consequently, it leads to the following research question: *What is the effect of self-generated information (stage 1) on impression formation by hosts of Airbnb and does other-generated information (stage 2) change the initial impression and evaluation of hosts of Airbnb either positively or negatively?*

In order to answer this question, this research provides a theoretical framework presenting the key concepts, theories that support this research, as well as a literature review of previous research associated with the topic. The goal of this research is to investigate the difference between first impression and warranting theory. Are first impressions really set in stone, or do new environments that hold a different approach on the impression formation, have an affect on the initial impression?

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory consists of four parts. First, Airbnb is introduced, along with the risks associated with sharing economy platforms, and the reason trust has to be established for it to be successful. Second, we introduce why first impressions are important for future behaviours, and the difference between real or online impressions. Third, we discuss how, with regards to Airbnb, the second impression is formed, together with the importance of online profiles and reviews. Finally, we compare and contrast first impressions with second impressions and introduce warranting theory.

1.1 AIRBNB

"Belong anywhere" is the main slogan of Airbnb. Through this message, Airbnb encourages people to use the platform, providing experiences for guests they wouldn't have without them. Ordinary people can rent out their accommodations to tourist which offers unique places that wouldn't be available through original booking sites. Hosts might be present during a guest's stay, renting out additional space or they might be absent, for example renting out their apartment while away on holiday. Renting exclusive villas or a small cottage in the middle of nowhere, it is all part of the 'Airbnb experience'.

Airbnb is a type of e-commerce site also known as a sharing economy platform. Sharing economy platforms are online businesses, using online technologies to share, swap, rent or offer services between consumers (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2015). With the help of the platform, suppliers and buyers are in direct contact with each other. More importantly, sharing economies allow individuals to take on two roles, being a consumer and a supplier. This setup allows for customized products, cheaper prices and flexible employment (Xie, & Mao, 2017). Hosts can set their own prices, and pay a 3% fee to Airbnb while guests are charged between 6-12% fee for a booking (Guttentag, 2015).

Founded in 2008, Airbnb is predominant in their sector. Over the years, the platform grew to have over 5 million listings worldwide, 81.000 listed cities, is spread among 191 countries and had over 300 million guest arrivals to date ("Fast Facts", 2018). A survey among Amsterdam hosts state that 36 percent of hosts use the extra income to make ends meet, and 30 percent states that the extra income is used to fund new businesses ("Airbnb Economic

Impact", 2013). Airbnb continues to be very popular, is used worldwide and for multiple purposes.

1.1.1 RISK OF SHARING ECONOMY PLATFORMS

Sharing economy platforms come with risks and uncertainties, and even though this uncertainty is an accepted part of peer-to-peer marketplaces and other online envrionments, it might be a decisive factor for people to use (or not use) a sharing economy platform (Ranchordás, 2015). The author state that innovaters continuously try to lower this uncertainty and consumers should be provided with a minimum amount of guarantees before using a sharing economy platform such as Uber (e.g., arriving safely) or meal sharing platforms (e.g., minimal chance of food poisoning). Regardless of its success, these risks and uncertainties also apply to Airbnb. Due to the service Airbnb provides, new risks came into existence with the rise of sharing economies. Traditional 'goods in exchange for money' is slowly disappearing, and in contrast to traditional marketplaces (e.g., eBay), hosts renting out their house to strangers do not only implicate monetary risks.

To cite Gibson, a renowned risk consultancy organisation, *"Hosting temporary guests can expose you to unexpected and expensive risks. Potential liabilities include theft, property damage, and the responsibility for guests injured while in your home. Generally, homeowner's insurance covers your property, but gaps in coverage open up once policyholders begin renting out their homes"* (Gibson, 2017). This is in line with research by Malazizi, Alipour and Olya (2018), and categorized e-commerce related risks in five different categories: financial, functional, physical, political and psychological. It was measured how hosts of Airbnb intention to use, intention to recommend and satisfaction are affected by risks. Results revealed that financial and safety risks negatively influence host satisfaction and intention to recommend.

These risks exist partially due to the policy of Airbnb itself. The platform outsources the risks related to renting such as damages to individuals because it softens the line between personal or public space, home or hotel, forcing hosts to screen guests before accepting their requests (Ravenelle, 2016). Consequently, hosts search additional information before accepting a guest's request message especially since it is hard to determine the quality of the service, as well as the trustworthiness of the supplier/consumer through the internet (Mavlanova, Benbunan-Fich, & Koufaris, 2012). Therefore, hosts are critical and careful about

who to trust within online environments that hold uncertainties and risks, and emphasize trust to be a key factor to determine whether a guest is accepted and overcome these risks (Miller, 2015).

1.1.2 TRUST AND IMPRESSION ON AIRBNB

As previously introduced, particularly within settings that hold risks, such as e-commerce sites or peer-to-peer marketplaces, trust can be the critical factor to overcome hesitation (Mittendorf, 2016). But what is trust exactly? Trust is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct and does not have an all-embracing definition (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003). According to Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang (2007) trust is the impression and stance that others will behave in a reliable and respectful way and that both parties will not benefit, or take advantage, from the situation. With reference to face-to-face encounters, Gill, Boies, Finegan and McNally (2005) found that perceived ability (i.e., competence), benevolence (i.e., kindness) and integrity (i.e., honesty) are cues people take into consideration to establish trust. These cues are harder to distinguish within computer-mediated environments because these traits and characteristics are relatively easy to manipulate on online environments. This hesitation and lack of available cues lead e-commerce sites to continuously develop trust mechanisms. For example, eBay implemented a feedback form about the salesperson for other consumers to read (Hamari et al., 2015). The Dutch e-commerce site Marktplaats also added a new trust feature called ‘cross at the same time’ or ‘even trade’. It implies that the seller does not receive his money until the package is delivered to the buyer, and thus not having the fear if your package will actually arrive.

Gefen, Karahanna and Straub (2003) refer in their research to cognition-based trust. It refers to trust as a concept that rest on impressions rather than on personal interactions. This concept can be especially relevant to the sharing economy as you form your impression through different cues and indirect information. Their concept has two factors: trust is established through *categorization* and through *illusion of control*. Categorization is explained as the similarity to an individual, where the higher the similarity, the higher the trust. Whereas, in the case of illusion of control, due to the small number of cues available in an online environment than real-life, individuals’ trust is based on available cues. It is found that individuals trust the other party more blindingly and are willing to take a leap of faith to resolve the unpredictable situation. At the same time, research by Mittendorf (2016) also

expresses the importance of trust within the sharing economy, and states that online platforms create a faster and easy connection, but also forms greater dependence. As discussed earlier, the online environment makes it harder to judge cues that usually shapes trust. Therefore, individuals are forced into trusting the other party, leaving them more vulnerable to wrongdoing. Thus, despite the amazing features the internet has to offer, trust remains the underlying mechanism to regularly use the service of a sharing economy platform (Möhlmann, 2015), and risks need to be as low as possible for it to thrive.

Moving on to impression, Airbnb's impression formation is very specific and the setup incorporates an interesting approach for hosts, framing the impression in two stages. First, an impression is formed when guests book an accommodation and are obligated to send a request message to the host. Guests are free to write any information and based on this information, hosts form their first impression of the prospective guest. Second, hosts form a second impression by viewing the guest's profile and are exposed to additional information. The Airbnb profiles of guests show only a minimal number of attributes: reviews, profile picture, verified information, date of membership and city of residence. In other words, in the first stage hosts form their impression through self-generated information, and in the second stage hosts form their impression through other-generated information.

1.2 FIRST IMPRESSIONS

1.2.1 IMPORTANCE OF A FIRST IMPRESSION

Impression formation is an elaborate process that can be categorized in two central dimensions: *communion* and *agency* (Utz, 2010). Researchers find these dimensions to be the most basic evaluative factors of impression formation (Ambady & Skowronski, 2008). Whereas, communion are social traits described as integrity, honesty and friendliness, competence are individual traits described as being decisive and having ambition (Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Impressions are formed instantly, spontaneously and with minimal cognitive effort (Schaller, 2008; Weisbuch, Ivcevic & Ambady, 2009), and people automatically process characteristics and traits of others to shape their impression (Jaeger, Sleegers, Evans, Stel, & van Beest, in press). Our brains are trained to observe any information, and as a result, the brain is able to form an impression on almost any cue. Information picked up by a person is actively processed and analysed.

Subconsciously, our brain processes non observational traits, goals or motives to form an impression (Ambady & Skowronski, 2008). These Impressions are formed to avoid being hurt, harmed or killed, and before people reach a rational and thorough decision, we subconsciously make a decision that impacts our thoughts and attitudes. Moreover, people let expectations guide their decision making and label others as good or bad, empathic or cruel and cling on to these opinions (Ambady & Skowronski, 2008). Research confirmed that first impressions are formed after a few seconds and are very accurate to the truth (Ambady, Bernieri & Richeson, 2000). For example, face-to-face impressions are formed within milliseconds, and a 100 milliseconds exposure time to face is enough to form an impression. Longer exposure time did not significantly change the impression (Willis & Todorov, 2006).

Over time, people are exposed to additional information of others. Whereas it is of human nature to seek information believed to be true and dismiss information that is conflicting to the initial attitude, also known as confirmation bias (Goman, 2015). According to Smith, Mackie and Claypool (2014), all further information is positively related to the first impression. So, future decisions and judgements are based on the attitude originated from the first impression. Furthermore, a study by Human, Sandstrom, Biesanz and Dunn (2012) proved that an accurate first impression has a positive influence on relationship development, liking, social tie and social interaction over time. The authors found that first impressions leave a lasting impression, and consequently predicts if and how people engage with others over a time span of several months. Moreover, future interactions and relationships all benefit from a positive first impression. It permits people, that made a positive impression with others, to make mistakes as others will most likely assume the best of this person and give them the benefit of the doubt (Knight, 2016). To conclude, the first impression formed of others are very dominant, affecting behaviour, thoughts and actions towards others in the future and downplaying further information that are not consistent with the original attitude, making first impressions lasting impressions.

1.2.2 ONLINE IMPRESSION

Impressions can also be formed within online environments. However, these impressions can deviate from the truth because people have control over the cues they decide to provide in order to be perceived positively and thus give a good impression. Especially with social networking sites, impression management and a positive self-presentation are important

factors to join and contribute (Krämer, & Winter, 2008). As with all platforms that require setting up a profile, impressions can be managed. Toma, Hancock and Ellison (2008), and Toma & Hancock (2010) found that online daters deliberately alter information on their online dating profile. Participants lie most about cues that enhances their physical online self-presentation such as photographs, weight, age or height. Moreover, Caspi and Gorsky (2006) found that people's motivation to deceive comes from privacy concerns or from enjoyment. Therefore, it can be difficult to establish trust and form an accurate impression as people are able to manipulate information to make themselves seem more attractive.

Nevertheless, online environments require the impression to be formed by the available cues represented online, and interpersonal development of relationships (i.e., trust) is established and maintained through computer-mediated communicating technologies without non-verbal cues, also called *social information processing theory (SIP)* (Olaniran, Rodriguez & Williams, 2012). Computer-mediated communication is an essential element of any e-commerce environment and in regards to Airbnb's two-stage approach (self-generated and other-generated information), it represents a crucial step for the impression formation of hosts. Particularly in the absence of cues normally available in face-to-face impression (i.e., perceived ability, benevolence, integrity), people focus on cues that remain available and derive their impression from those cues, such as textual computer-mediated communication messages or information presented on profiles. Moreover, because of online environments, people process information differently. Sparks and Browning (2011) state that people develop mental models while processing information, meaning that they "apply shortcuts, selectively processing simple to access information", where some profiles' attributes hold a higher value than others, and therefore carries additional weight to the impression. The information is also categorized and ranked depending on the importance of the information to form an impression (Schiller, Freeman, Mitchell, Uleman & Phelps, 2009).

Even though people have some influence on the cues they want to display, they leave cues that nonetheless reflects their personality. The behaviour and the cues people project is explained by the Brunswikian lens model (Utz, 2010). The traits exhibited by individuals are used as observational references, and people draw conclusions about an individual's personality to form an impression. To conclude, people form impressions online through different cues than offline impressions which may be deceiving. Thus, it is more difficult to form an accurate impression online than an impression offline.

1.2.3 IMPORTANCE OF A FIRST IMPRESSION ON AIRBNB

The first impression of Airbnb guests' is through textual self-generated content. In the same vein as the request message, cover letters, job applications or a curriculum vitae are all examples where first impression is based upon textual information. In order to form a positive impression through text, grammatical errors and spelling mistakes are important factors. The written text should be clean and follow a specific structure (Schramm and Neil Dortch, 1991). Also, users of correct language (e.g., no spelling mistakes or so called 'text speak') on Facebook were evaluated as more intelligent and competent (Scott, Sinclair, Short, & Bruce, 2014). Furthermore, Whitmore (2017) provides three reasons why correct use of language matters: your message will be unambiguous, you are viewed as more credible and intelligent and it indicates an attentive and careful behaviour towards business operations. But what causes a positive impression on Airbnb?

Because the request message is of such big importance to impression and trust, people debate what elements are successful in the request message. Forming a positive first impression is a reciprocal process for both hosts and guests. According to Airbnb, guest should send a request message where they, amongst others, ask the host for check-in and check-out times, making arrangements about the key transfer and exchange contact details in case the planning changes. They state that communication is especially important for the host and Airbnb. If any problems occur during the guest's stay, there is proof that arrangements were made ("How do I coordinate check-in details with my host", 2018). However, host should comfort guests and verify that they made the right decision to book your accomodation. Communication is important for the entire experience of guests and hosts need to manage expectations to avoid surprises. Their message should contain a warm greeting, practical details, house rules, contact info and do so in a structured lay-out (Guesty, 2014; "Airbnb Tips for 5 Star Guest Communication", 2018). Thus, a message that is carefully written, has no spelling mistakes and is communicated in a clean structure is evaluated as more positive. Therefore, host form a more positive impression, evaluate the guest as more trustworthy and have a higher intention to accept the guest than messages that do not contain these elements.

H1: *Hosts that read a professional message of a prospective guest form a more positive impression, evaluate the guest as more trustworthy and have a higher intention to accept the guest compared to hosts that read an unprofessional message.*

1.3 SECOND IMPRESSIONS

1.3.1 THE EFFECT OF REVIEWS

After hosts form a first impression of an Airbnb guest based on the initial message, they will view the guest's profile page. The profile contains information about the prospective guest, that, unlike the request message (i.e., self-generated information) contains three types of information: self, system, and other-generated information. One the one hand, the biography (bio) is an example of self-generated information displayed on a user's profile. Amongst other information, the user can describe their personalities, interests and/or previous experiences. On the other hand, verified information, rules or policies are all examples of system-generated information. This type of information is compulsory when opening a profile as Airbnb automatically processes this information and represent it as part of their profile lay-out. Lastly, other-generated information is information provided by third-parties and visible on a person's profile page, and in the case of Airbnb, these are known as reviews. Reviews are designed to reduce risks, are more immune to manipulation than self-generated information and are the pillars of trust within the sharing economy (Bridges & Vásquez, 2016; Ert, Fleischer & Magen, 2016).

This research focusses on positive, negative or no reviews displayed on the Airbnb profile. In opposition to reviews about Airbnb hosts, reviews of guests are only represented through text and not by visual cues such as stars or likes. Therefore, host are forced read reviews on a guest's profile to sufficiently assess the quality of a prospective guest, and are not able to form their impression on simple visual cues (Zervas, Proserpio & Byers, 2015). According to Zhang, Ye, Law, and Li (2010) and, Vermeulen and Seegers (2009), positive reviews was proven to be positively related to online popularity, attitude and purchase intention, making them a valuable electronic word of mouth and an important attribute on a profile. Moreover, reviews have been researched within the hotel sector and results showed that positive reviews increased expectations of guest before their arrival (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008), and created a higher level of trust (Sparks & Browning, 2011). On the other hand, research by Lee, Park and Han (2008) revealed that negative reviews in correlation with high product involvement, lead people to conform the perspective of the reviewers affecting product attitude. Therefore, it is expected that a profile with positive reviews increases trust,

forms a more profound impression and a higher intention to be accepted as a guest than a profile with negative reviews.

Besides the effect of positive vs. negative reviews displayed on the profile, this study was also interested in a profile with no reviews. To our recollection, scholars have not yet investigated the effect of a profile containing no reviews on a new platform such as Airbnb. Hence, the current study is interested in what effect no reviews of prospective guests have on impression, trust and acceptance intention of hosts, thus filling a knowledge gap in current literature. As previously introduced, uncertainty is a big factor related to trust. Hwang and Lee (2012) found that uncertainty avoidance moderates the effect between trust and purchase intention. People use uncertainty reduction strategies to gain information about others to create a more predictable situation (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010). The authors describe three strategies to reduce uncertain situations: active strategies (i.e., seeking information without involving the target), passive strategies (i.e., observation) and interactive strategies (i.e., direct communication with the target). However, not every strategy is qualified for the different sharing economy platforms. Nevertheless, people try to discover additional information about the other person, leaving people with unresolved feelings if the information seems unattainable. Thus, especially with online environments people are hesitant to trust one another. At the same time, we previously stated that in order to restore unpredictable situations, people are willing to take a leap of faith. Therefore, we expect a profile with no reviews to be evaluated more negatively on impression and trust than a profile with positive reviews, but more positively than a profile with negative reviews.

H2a: *Hosts reading positive reviews on the guest's profile form a more positive impression, evaluate the guest as more trustworthy and have a higher intention to accept the guest compared to hosts that read negative reviews.*

H2b*: Hosts reading positive reviews on the guest's profile form a more positive impression, evaluate the guest as more trustworthy and have a higher intention to accept the guest compared to hosts that read no reviews.*

H2c: *Hosts reading no reviews on a guest's profile form a more positive impression, evaluate the guest as more trustworthy and have a higher intention to accept the guest compared to hosts that read negative reviews.*

1.4 FIRST IMPRESSIONS VS WARRANTING PRINCIPLE

Although our theory suggests first impressions to be lasting, first impressions on Airbnb may change upon viewing the online profile of a prospective guest. This is because other-generated information on the profile might be more valuable to the impression formation process than self-generated information guests provide in their message. This process is known as warranting, and is explained by *warranting theory*. *Warranting theory* specifies that perceivers' judgements about others rely more profoundly on other-generated information than on self-generated information. Online profiles allow the person to manipulate self-generated information to present themselves in a more likable manner, whereas other-generated information is less likely to be manipulated and more trustworthy, as it is not directed and managed by the subject of the information. Therefore, other-generated information has a higher warranting value, and thus hold a more extensive impact on impression formation (Walther & Parks, 2002; Utz 2010; Hall, Pennington & Lueders, 2014).

Airbnb's two-stage impression process let hosts form their first impression on self-generated information and then allow a person to access self, other and system-generated information to form their second impression. The two-stage approach of Airbnb conflicts two existing theories. Do first impressions last or does the second impression changes the initial attitude, thoughts and behaviours because of warranting value of the information presented on the profile? Until now, it is unclear what effect the two-stage approach of Airbnb will have on the impression formation of hosts.

The warranting principle has been examined in new media technologies such as Facebook. For example, Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel and Shulman, (2009) measured extraversion and attractiveness through self-generated statements and other-generated statements and found that people relied more on other-generated statements, thus supporting warranting theory. Likewise, warranting theory was also verified within Facebook selling groups, concluding that successful and maintained membership in a group is hard to manipulate, and therefore facilitating trust among sellers and buyers (Moser, Resnick, & Schoenebeck, 2017).

We investigate warranting theory among four different conditions (i.e. scenarios), being: (1) professional message - positive reviews, (2) professional message - negative reviews, (3) unprofessional message - positive reviews and (4) unprofessional message - negative reviews. Research found that people have a tendency to ask for more information

when their first impression is positive to affirm their impression, (Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1991; Dreben, Fiske & Hastie, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), and reviews consistent with the current beliefs have been found to be more helpful (Yin, Mitra & Zhang, 2016). This effect is moderated by the confidence in the initial beliefs, supporting confirmation bias. Taking all information into consideration, it is expected that participants rely more heavily on other-generated content to form their impression on Airbnb. Therefore, it is believed that first impressions are not lasting on Airbnb. We thus expect that the warranting value of reviews on Airbnb profiles carries more weight than the self-generated information given in the first message and accordingly we expect that the initial impression will change in light of other, more warranting, information. To be precise, in the first scenario we expect that hosts confronted with a professional request message sent by the guest form a positive first impression. Then, when the reviews are also positive, we expect the second impression to be more positive after reading the reviews than the first impression. In the second scenario, when hosts are presented with a professional request message sent by the guest, we again expect the first impression to be positive. Then, when the host is exposed to negative reviews, we expect the second impression to be more negative than the first impression. In the third scenario, when hosts read an unprofessional request message, we expect the first impression to be negative. Then, when hosts read positive reviews of the guest, we expect the second impression to be more positive than the first impression. In the final scenario, when hosts are exposed to an unprofessional request message, we also expect the first impression to be negative. Then, when the reviews of the guest are also negative, we expect the second impression to be more negative than the first impression.

H3a: *Hosts being exposed to a professional request message and then positive reviews form a more positive second impression, evaluate the guest as more trustworthy and have a higher intention to accept the guest compared to their first impression.*

H3b: *Hosts being exposed to a professional request message and then negative reviews form a more negative second impression, evaluate the guest as less trustworthy and have a lower intention to accept the guest compared to their first impression.*

H3c: *Hosts being exposed to an unprofessional request message and then positive reviews form a more positive second impression, evaluate the guest as more trustworthy and have a higher intention to accept the guest compared to their first impression.*

H3d: *Hosts being exposed to an unprofessional request message and then negative reviews form a more negative second impression, evaluate the guest as less trustworthy and have a lower intention to accept the guest compared to their first impression.*

Besides our expectation that the warranting value of other-generated information carries more weight on impressions and evaluations of trustworthiness than self-generated information, we were also interested in which type of other-generated information (e.g., positive, negative) has the strongest effect on the impression and evaluation of trustworthiness of Airbnb hosts. Thus, we investigate whether orders of presentation (e.g., professional-positive, professional-negative, unprofessional-positive, unprofessional-negative) affect the strength of the second impression changes. Studies showed that, in general, negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990), and with regards to impressions, people give more weight to negative characteristics than to positive characteristics (Smith et al., 2006; Anderson, 1965). Negative information is also found more valuable in regard to reviews. Results from research by Cui, Lui, and Guo (2012) showed that negative reviews have a greater effect on a person's purchase decision than positive reviews. Hence, we expect hosts exposed to negative reviews (irrelevant of conditions) will deviate or strengthen their second impression significantly more than hosts exposed to positive reviews.

H4a: *The second impression of hosts exposed to a professional message but negative reviews will deviate more as opposed to the first impression than hosts exposed an unprofessional message and positive reviews.*

H4b: *The second impression of hosts exposed to an unprofessional message and negative reviews will be strengthened more as opposed to the first impression than hosts exposed to a professional message and positive reviews.*

2. METHOD

2.1 DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

In order to test the hypotheses and answer the research question, we created a 2 (request message: positive vs. negative type) X 3 (reviews: positive vs. negative vs. non) experimental design (N = 179). The experiment consisted of six experimental conditions presented in Table 1. Participants were approached using a non-probability sampling method due to constraints in time and resources. More specifically, this research used a snowball sampling method and relied on people sharing the experiment through online media. The experiment was created in Qualtrics, distributed among a large number of respondents in a short period of time and took participants around 10 minutes to complete.

Table 1. Treatment matrix

MESSAGE	**REVIEW**		
	Positive	**Negative**	**Non**
Professional	*Condition 1 (N = 31)*	*Condition 2 (N = 26)*	*Condition 3 (N = 32)*
Unprofessional	*Condition 4 (N = 31)*	*Condition 5 (N = 30)*	*Condition 6 (N = 29)*

In total there were 243 respondents that took part in this experiment. 64 participants were removed because they did not complete the survey, so 179 (M = 27.58 SD = 8.88) respondents formed the final sample. The age varied between 18 and 63 years. 103 participants were male (57.5%) and 76 participants were female (42.5%). Most participants were Dutch (86%) with others coming from, amongst others, France, Italy and Germany. All demographics are summarized in Table 2.

Thereafter, we checked if the participants were evenly distributed among the different conditions. A Crosstabs Chi-square was used to analyse the variance of demographic variables across the six experimental conditions. The Chi-square analysis revealed that none of the demographic variables were significant across the six conditions ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, we can conclude that our sample was successfully randomly distributed.

Table 2. Demographics participants

CHARACTERISTICS	CATEGORIES	N	PERCENT(%)
Gender	Male	103	57.5%
	Female	76	42.5%
	TOTAL	**179**	**100%**
Age	18-25	95	53.1%
	26-50	72	40.2%
	51-65	12	6.7%
	TOTAL	**179**	**100%**
Nationality	Dutch	154	86%
	French	5	2.8%
	Italian	4	2.2%
	German	3	1.7%
	Spanish	2	1.1%
	Other	11	6.2%
	TOTAL	**179**	**100%**
Renting through Airbnb (guest)	Yes	118	65.9%
	No	61	34.1%
	TOTAL	**179**	**100%**
Renting out through Airbnb (host)	Yes	12	6.7%
	No	167	93.3%
	TOTAL	**179**	**100%**
Overall experience as an Airbnb Host	Neutral	1	8.3%
	Good	8	66.7%
	Very Good	3	25%
	TOTAL	**12**	**100%**

2.2 PROCEDURE

Participants received an invitation link to participate through online media such as Facebook or LinkedIn. Participants were exposed to the two-stage impression formation process of Airbnb hosts, and were exposed to two sets of stimuli, being: request message and the guest's profile. Both stimuli used the original lay-out as presented on Airbnb (Appendix 1). This setup allowed participants to form their first impression through the request message and the second impression through other-generated information. The request message as well as reviews were the independent variables that were manipulated throughout this research.

The experiment began with an informed consent form that participants could

agree with. The information stated, amongst others that their answers were anonymous and given the choice to continue or stop with the current study. Next, participants were asked to imagine themselves as hosts of Airbnb and were exposed to the request message from a prospective guest named David. They were instructed to read the message carefully in order to answer questions followed after this message. After reading, they rated their impression, trust and acceptance toward David (appendix 4). Following the questions, people were provided with the profile from David and asked to view/read the profile carefully. After they rated their impression, trust and acceptance once more (appendix 4). Lastly, participants were asked questions regarding manipulation checks, control variables and demographics (appendix 4).

2.3 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND MANIPULATION

Request message. The first independent variable is the request message, composed of two levels, professional or unprofessional. The request message was sent by David. The professional message explained to participants why the prospective David visits the city, how many people are coming, gives a compliment about the accommodation and asks if the host need additional information. Participants that read a professional message read the following: "Hey. *Me and my girlfriend are planning a city trip to visit this beautiful city. I just booked your apartment and it looks amazing. We are coming from the 12th till the 14th. Let me know if you need any additional information. We look forward to our stay! Kind regards*". An unprofessional message portrays David as disrespectful, uninformed and uses spelling and grammatical errors. Participants that read an unprofessional message read the following request message: "*Yo! Im coming with some friends to the city. You have wifi in the apartment right? Can you give us a recommendation of things to do in the city..? Oke see you. Bye".*

Reviews. Reviews is the second independent variable and has three levels, positive, negative and no reviews. After participants were exposed to the request message, the participants were presented with the profile of the prospective guest, and thus were exposed to other-generated information concerning the guest. In the exclusion condition, participants saw a profile without reviews. In the other conditions, participants read three reviews on the profile. Participants that were exposed to positive reviews read amongst others: *"David has been a good guest, we had pleasant communication and he left the place very clean just like we agreed. I would recommend David as a guest".* Participants exposed to negative reviews

read: *"David has not been a good guest, there was hardly any communication and he left the place very dirty. I would not recommend David as a guest".* Beside the manipulation, the profile was kept as neutral as possible so participants' impression and judgement would develop based on reviews.

In order to verify the manipulations, we conducted a pre-test to reveal what elements hosts find important in their impression formation process about profile owners. Moreover, the pre-test was used to identify any problems with questions, stimuli or presentation and additionally, we were interested whether the results complied with the expectations that originated from the theory. Results of the qualitative pre-test are discussed below.

2.4 PRE-TEST

Sixteen individuals participated in the pre-test. The participants were on average 27.13 years of age with 56.25% being female and 43.75% male. 56.25% were students and 43.75% of participants were employed. The participants were approached through convenience sampling and randomly assigned to one of four conditions, being: (1) Professional message – trustworthy profile; (2) Professional message – less trustworthy profile; (3) Unprofessional message - trustworthy profile; (4) Unprofessional message – less trustworthy profile.

The first message was manipulated as follows: the structure of the message was either professional or an unprofessional. That is, a professional message started the conversation with *Hey*, while the unprofessional message started with *Yo!*

The profile was manipulated by varying the different elements of an Airbnb profile to either be positive or negative. The attributes that were manipulated were picture, amount of reviews, verified information and the date the person became a member of the platform. Picture was either a visible and friendly face or an unfocused body image with a hardly recognizable face. Date of membership was either from 2015 or 2018. Reviews was either eight or zero, and verified information was either email, phone and identification or nothing. This setup produced two extremes, one trustworthy profile and a less trustworthy profile. The stimuli of the pre-test can be found in Appendix 2.

The procedure was as follows: Participants were asked to imagine renting out their own house on Airbnb, followed by reading a request message from a prospective guest. This is the first stage in the impression formation process and based upon self-generated

information. Participants were asked answer three open-ended questions after viewing the request message to measure the initial impression.

"Imagine you are renting your house on Airbnb and you receive this message"

1. *What is the first thing that you notice? And second? And third?*
2. *What is important for you if you are renting out your house and receive such a message?*
3. *What is your first impression? Try to elaborate as much as possible.*

Then, participants were presented with either a positive or negative profile. Thereafter, the respondents were asked the following open-ended questions.

"Following the request message, you see this corresponding profile"

1. *What attributes do you notice first? And second? And third?*
2. *Would you accept the request of this person and explain why/why not?*
3. *Does the profile change your initial impression?*

Results of the pre-test showed that professional messages were indeed judged to be more positive than unprofessional messages. All eight participants who saw an unprofessional profile indicated that the guest was informal and did not trust him, and three participants that saw an unprofessional message answered that trust is a key element for Airbnb users. Moreover, all participants that saw an unprofessional message would not accept the guest's request but answered that they like to view additional information to form their impression to thoroughly make a decision, whereas all participants that saw a professional message would accept the guest's request.

After exposure to the profile, all participants mentioned that reviews were the most important indicator to form an impression of the profile owner, while other attributes were mentioned much less. The most interesting result is that participants who saw a professional message but a negative profile or who saw an unprofessional message but a positive profile, resulted in seven out of eight participants to change their initial impression, in contrast to their first answer to accept or deny the guest. One participant that saw an unprofessional message but a positive profile stated: "I *do think more positive about this person, but I rather rely on my first impression*". See Appendix 3 for all findings.

To conclude, results indicated that almost all participants relied more on other-generated information with regard to the two-stage impression formation process of Airbnb.

Impressions changed either positively or negatively as opposed to the first impression. Moreover, reviews were the most important other-generated information forming the impression. The pre-test provides first indication that people are indeed influenced by both the initial message and the profile, and that their opinion may sway in the other direction if profile information does not match with the initial request message. Therefore, results expressed an indication in support of the warranting principle on Airbnb. Finally, based on the pre-test, we noticed a small amount of flaws that were eliminated from the experiment. The final version slightly differs on three different aspects. First, the request message was changed, removing the sentence that explains if it is possible for the guest to stay. Participants were confused by this sentence because the guest already made a reservation with the host. Second, the name "Biaggo" proved a strange name, withdrawing the attention from where it was needed. Third, the country of residence was changed to a different country, as participants thought it was weird to stay in an Airbnb if the guest was from the same country. Therefore, we chose a neutral name, country and changed the request message.

2.5 MEASURES

2.5.1 DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Impression. To measure impression, it was decided to adopt the communion and agency scale from Wojciszke, Abele and Baryla (2009). The scale distinguishes between these two factors and consisted out of 10 questions, five for each factor. The questions were revised to fit this research and were asked on a 7-point likert scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*). Participants were asked amongst others: *"The guest is a well-organized person" or "The guest is sincere"* (Appendix 4).

It was decided to perform a factor analysis to verify the scale construction and to efficiently decide if the scale could be constructed as one dimension. The factors forming impression were asked two times within a condition, after the request message (i.e., impression 1) and after viewing the profile (i.e., impression 2). Therefore, a factor analysis was performed over both constructs. A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the 10 items of impression 1 and 2 with orthogonal rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, *impression 1*: KMO = .91, *impression 2*: KMO = .95. All KMO values for individual items were *impression 1*: > .88, *impression 2*: > .93, which is well above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2009). Bartlett's test of sphericity *impression 1*:

2(45) = 1185.66, *p* < .001, *impression 2*: 2(45) = 2499.11, *p* < .001, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Only one component had an eigenvalue over Kaiser's criterion of 1 which explained *impression1*: 58.68%, *impression 2*: 79.23%, of the total variance. Thus, the data showed that all components are accepted as one factor. The alphas were respectively α = .92 (*impression* 1) and α = .97 (*impression* 2).

Trust. To measure trust, this research adopted a scale inspired from McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002). More specifically, this research adopted their "trusting beliefs" scale. Their study focused on the development of trust for e-commerce. Three factors form the basis of the scale: (1) Benevolence (having the best intentions and interest towards the truster), (2) competence (the ability to act accordingly towards the truster's needs and wants) and (3) integrity (reliability and honesty of the trustee). The scale is revised to fit this research but nevertheless uses the same three elements and contained 10 questions in total. Benevolence and competence contained three questions while integrity contained four. All questions were measured on a 7-point likert scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*) (Appendix 4) and were asked amongst others: *"The guest is truthful in its dealings with me"* or *"The guest is interested in my wishes, not just its own"*.

Just like the scale to measure impression, it was decided to perform a factor analysis to verify the scale construction of trust, and to efficiently decide if the scale could be constructed as one dimension. Trust was asked two times within a condition, creating two trust variables (i.e. trust 1 and trust 2). Therefore, a factor analysis was performed over both constructs. A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the 10 items of trust 1 and trust 2 with orthogonal rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, *trust 1*: KMO = .95, *trust 2*: KMO = .96. All KMO values for individual items were *trust 1*: > .92, *trust 2*: > .95. Bartlett's test of sphericity *trust 1*: 2(45) = 1995.81, *p* < .001, *trust 2*: 2(45) = 3187.72, *p* < .001, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Only one component had an eigenvalue over Kaiser's criterion of 1 which explained *trust 1*: 76.72%, *trust 2*: 88.55%, of the total variance. Thus, the data confirmed that trust can be constructed as one scale. The alphas were respectively α = .97 (*trust 1*) and α = .99 (*trust 2*).

Acceptance intent. Hosts on Airbnb are the decisive factor that determines if a guest is accepted to rent your apartment. The host decides, based upon their impression and trusting stance if the guest is up to their standards. To measure the intent of hosts accepting the prospective guest's request, this research adopted a scale deriving from Kim and Lennon (2000). Their purchase intent related scale was revised to fit this research and consisted out of one question: *How likely is it that you will accept the guest's request to stay in your apartment?* The question was measured on a 7-point likert scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*) (Appendix 4).

2.5.2 CONTROL VARIABLES

Besides demographics information, such as gender, age and nationality, two other control variables were added.

Personal experience with Airbnb. Participants are presented with a hypothetical situation: *"Imagine you are renting your house on Airbnb and you receive this message".* Bad personal experiences of this platform might influence responses. Participants could be more careful who to trust leading to a stronger attitudes and/or behaviour. Therefore, we ask participants the question: *"did you ever use Airbnb to rent out your own house or apartment?"*. If participants answered yes, we ask the following two questions: *"How many times did you rent out your house or apartment"* and we asked participants to rate their personal experience as an Airbnb host, measured on a 5-point likert scale (1 = *very bad*, 5 = *very good*).

Disposition to trust. The scale to measure a participant disposition to trust also derives from research by McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002). People naturally have different perceptions and perspectives on trust in general and they state that: "*Disposition to trust is the extent to which a person displays a tendency to be willing to depend on others across a broad spectrum of situations and persons".* The scale uses the same three factors as their trust scale and also adds one element: Trusting stance. Meaning that people assume others to be reliable and therefore creates a better outcome when dealing with others. The scale consisted of 12 questions which were also measured on a 7-point likert scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*).

It was decided to perform a factor analysis to verify the scale construction and to efficiently decide if the scale could be constructed as one dimension. A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the 12 items (4 factors) of disposition of trust with

orthogonal rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .85, and all KMO values for individual items were > .73. Bartlett's test of sphericity 2(66) = 1170.15, $p < .001$, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Three components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 70.82% of the variance. Given Kaiser's criterion on three components, this is the number of components that were retained in the final analysis. Table 3 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same components suggest that component 1 represents benevolence and integrity, component 2 competence, component 3 trusting stance. The alphas were respectively $\alpha = .88$ (benevolence & integrity), $\alpha = .90$ (competence) and $\alpha = .81$ (trusting stance).

Table 3. Summary of exploratory factor analysis result for the SPSS disposition to trust scale (N = 179)

Item	**Rotated Factor Loadings**		
	Benevolence & Integrity	*Competence*	*Trusting Stance*
Q1. Most of the time, people care enough to try to be helpful, rather than just looking out for themselves.	**.793**	<.30	<.30
Q2. In general, people really do care about the well-being of others.	**.792**	<.30	<.30
Q3. The typical person is sincerely concerned about the problems of others.	**.791**	<.30	<.30
Q4. Most people are honest in their dealings with others.	**.786**	<.30	<.30
Q5. In general, most folks keep their promises.	**.731**	<.30	<.30
Q6. I think people generally try to back up their words with their actions.	**.668**	<.30	<.30
Q7. Most professionals are very knowledgeable in their chosen field.	<.30	**.888**	<.30
Q8. A large majority of professional people are competent in their area of expertise.	<.30	**.882**	<.30
Q9. I believe that most professional people do a very good job at their work.	<.30	**.839**	<.30
Q10. My typical approach is to trust new acquaintances until they prove I should not trust them.	<.30	<.30	**.877**
Q11. I usually trust people until they give me a reason not to trust them.	<.30	<.30	**.804**
Q12. I generally give people the benefit of the doubt when I first meet them.	<.30	<.30	**.766**
Eigenvalues	5.31	1.79	1.40
% of variance	44.22	14.90	11.70
α	.88	.90	.81

3. RESULTS

The sample (N = 179) revealed that 65.9% of the participants had indicated to have experience as an Airbnb guest while only 6.7% had said to have experience as an Airbnb host, and that, on average, hosts experiences with Airbnb were positive. For this study we asked participants to imagine being a host of Airbnb, and as aforementioned, all dependent variables were asked two times in the survey to measure the effect of other-generated information on the first impression. To measure hypothesis 1, we used the impression, trust and acceptance scores of participants given at time one. To measure hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c, we used the impression, trust and acceptance scores of participants at time two. For hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d we used both times for a repeated measures ANOVA, and in order to investigate hypotheses 4a and 4b, we created a new variable that measured the absolute difference between both times. All means and standard deviations can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of means (N= 179)

Message	Reviews		Impression T1	Impression T2	Trust T1	Trust T2	Acceptance T1	Acceptance T2
Professional	Negative	Mean	4.74	2.50	4.90	1.87	4.12	1.55
	(*N* = 26)	SD	1.47	0.78	1.55	0.82	1.21	0.76
	Non	Mean	4.80	4.46	4.93	4.71	4.38	3.53
	(*N* = 32)	SD	1.08	0.98	1.11	0.92	0.61	0.98
	Positive	Mean	5.36	5.74	5.36	5.90	4.26	4.58
	(*N* = 31)	SD	0.93	0.88	0.96	0.92	0.68	0.62
Unprofessional	Negative	Mean	3.86	2.24	3.35	1.70	2.23	1.30
	(*N* = 30)	SD	0.76	0.89	0.98	0.75	1.07	0.54
	Non	Mean	3.75	3.82	3.06	3.72	2.24	2.93
	(*N* = 29)	SD	0.77	0.92	1.04	1.13	1.19	1.28
	Positive	Mean	3.86	5.07	3.35	5.26	2.48	3.97
	(*N* = 31)	SD	0.84	1.11	1.02	1.01	1.09	0.80

3.1 MANIPULATION CHECKS

After the data was collected, responses were filtered and analysed on manipulation checks. The manipulation check for the request message consisted out of one statement. Participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which they perceived the request message of guests to be professional (1 = extremely unprofessional, 5 = extremely professional). An independent t-test showed that a positive message (N = 89, M = 3.87, SD = 0.77) was indeed reported to be more positive than a negative message (N = 90, M = 2.02, SD = 0.91). The difference was significant, $Mdif$ = -1.84, $t(177) = 14.59$, $p < .001$, 95% CI (1.59, 2.09). Thus, the manipulation for the request message was successful.

Moreover, the manipulation check for reviews also consisted out of one statement. Participants were also asked to evaluate the extent to which they perceived the reviews to be positive (1 = extremely negative, 5 = extremely positive). A univariate ANOVA revealed that positive reviews (M = 4.52, SD = 0.59) was indeed reported to be more positive than negative reviews (M = 1.54, SD = 0.93). Additionally, participants found no reviews (M = 3.10 SD = 1.06) more positive than negative reviews. The overall ANOVA was significant, indicating that there are differences between the means, *Welch's* $F(2, 107.27) = 216.28$, $p < .001$. Therefore, we can conclude that both manipulations were successful.

3.2 HYPOTHESIS TESTING

3.2.1 THE EFFECT OF MESSAGE TYPES

In order to test if the independent variable, type of message has an effect on the dependent variables impression, trust and the acceptance intent of hosts, it was decided to perform an independent sample t-test. We measured participants scores on impression, trust and acceptance intention after they were exposed to the request message (e.g., time 1)

Impression. Results revealed that a professional message (M = 4.98, SD = 1.18) reported a more positive impression of the guest than an unprofessional message (M = 3.82, SD = 0.79). The difference between the two messages was significant, $Mdif$ = 1.15, $t(177) = 7.68$, $p < .001$, 95% CI (0.86, 1.44), r = .50 / d = 1.16.

Trust. A professional message (M = 5.07, SD = 1.21) reported a higher level of trust towards the guest than an unprofessional message (M = 3.26, SD = 1.01). The test indicated a significant difference between the messages $Mdif$ = 1.81, $t(177) = 10.86$, $p < .001$, 95% CI (1.48, 2.14), r = .63 / d = 1.62.

Acceptance. A professional message (*M* = 4.26, *SD* = 0.85) resulted in a higher intention to accept the guest than an unprofessional message (*M* = 2.32, *SD* = 1.11). The difference between the messages was significant *Mdif* = 1.94, *t*(177) = 13.13, *p* < .001, 95% CI (1.66, 2.21), *r* = .70 / *d* = 1.96.

We can conclude that a professional message formed a more positive impression, lead to a higher level of trust and higher intention to accept the guest than an unprofessional message, confirming hypothesis 1. Moreover, a multivariate ANOVA indicated to be non-significant with regard to disposition to trust (benevolence & integrity, competence and trust stance). Thus, disposition to trust can not account for the difference of significance between a positive and negative message.

3.2.2 THE EFFECT OF REVIEW TYPES

In order to test if the independent variable, type of review has an effect on the dependent variables impression, trust and the acceptance intent of hosts, it was decided to perform a one-way ANOVA. We measured participants scores on impression, trust and acceptance after they were exposed to the profile (e.g., time 2)

Impression. The overall ANOVA was significant for impression, indicating that there were differences between the means *F* (2, 176) = 145.08, *p* < .001. Positive reviews (*M* = 5.40, *SD* = 1.05) formed a more positive impression of the guest than negative reviews (*M* = 2.36, *SD* = 1.47), *Mdif* = 3.04, 95% CI (2.63, 3.46). No reviews (*M* = 4.15, *SD* = 1.00) also formed a more positive impression of the guest than negative reviews *Mdif* = 1.80, 95% CI (1.39, 2.20), and positive reviews formed a more positive impression than no reviews *Mdif* = 1.25, 95% CI (0.83, 1.66). In testing the specific contrasts, we first tested the idea that positive reviews form a more positive impression than negative reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, *t*(176) = 16.99, *p* < .001, *r* = .62. We then tested the idea that positive reviews form a more positive impression than no reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, *t*(176) = 7.12, *p* < .001, *r* = .22. Finally, it was found that no reviews formed a more positive impression than negative reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, *t*(176) = 9.98, *p* < .001, *r* = .36. Finally,

Trust. The overall ANOVA was also significant for trust**,** *Welch's F* (2, 116.16) = 278.78, *p* < .001. Positive reviews (*M* = 5.58, *SD* = 1.01) resulted in a higher level of trustworthiness than negative reviews (*M* = 1.78, *SD* = 0.78), *Mdif* = 3.80, 95% CI (3.41, 4.19). No reviews (*M* =

4.24, *SD* = 1.13) also formed a higher level of trustworthiness than negative reviews *Mdif* = 2.46, 95% CI (2.04, 2.88), and positive reviews formed a more positive impression than no reviews *Mdif* = 1.34, 95% CI (0.92, 1.76). In testing the specific contrasts, we first tested the idea that positive reviews form a higher level of trust than negative reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, $t(113.44) = 22.99$, $p < .001$, $r = .82$. Next, we then tested the idea that positive reviews form a higher level of trust than no reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, $t(119.02) = 6.93$, $p < .001$, $r = .29$. Lastly, it was found that no reviews formed a higher level of trust than negative reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, $t(107.10) = 13.79$, $p < .001$, $r = .64$.

Acceptance. Finally, the overall ANOVA was also significant for acceptance, *Welch's F* (2, 114.14) = 242.30, $p < .001$. Participants that read positive reviews (*M* = 4.27, *SD* = 1.47) accepted the guest more than negative reviews (*M* = 1.41, *SD* = 0.65), *Mdif* = 2.86, 95% CI (2.55, 3.18). Participants that saw no reviews (*M* = 3.25, *SD* = 1.16) also accepted the guest's request more than negative reviews *Mdif* = 1.84, 95% CI (1.42, 2.25), and participants that read positive reviews also accepted the guest more than no reviews *Mdif* = 1.03, 95% CI (0.65, 1.41). In testing the specific contrasts, we first tested the idea that participants that read positive reviews accepts the prospective guest more than negative reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, $t(115.56) = 21.80$, $p < .001$, $r = .78$. Next, we then tested the idea that participants that read positive reviews accepts the guest more than no reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, $t(103.99) = 5.76$, $p < .001$, $r = .24$. Finally, it was found that participants exposed to no reviews accepts the guest more than negative reviews, which was confirmed by the contrast analysis, $t(96.01) = 10.62$, $p < .001$, $r = .70$.

To conclude, hypotheses H2a, H2b and H2c were all confirmed. There was a significant effect on impression, trust and acceptance between the comparison of positive and negative reviews. Moreover, results revealed that a profile containing no reviews scored more positive on impression, trust and acceptance than a profile containing negative reviews, but scored more negative while comparing no- and positive reviews. Finally, disposition to trust (benevolence & integrity, competence and trust stance) was proven non-significant. Thus, disposition to trust can not account for the significant results between testing positive, negative and no reviews displayed on a person's Airbnb profile.

After verifying that there was an effect of review type on impression, trust and acceptance, we were interested in examining whether there was an interaction effect

between the type of message and type of review on the dependent variables at time 2. To examine this effect, a multivariate ANOVA was conducted.

The assumption of homogeneity of variances was not met for acceptance because the Levene's test of equality of error variances was significant ($F(5, 173) = 8.90$, $p < .001$). Since the ANOVA is less robust against the violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances, it should be noted that the p-value for acceptance may be somewhat biased. Results showed that there were no significant interaction effects of request message and reviews for Impression $F(2, 173) = 0.87$, $p = .419$, partial eta$^2 = .010$, trust $F(2, 173) = 2.75$, $p = .067$, partial eta$^2 = .031$, and acceptance $F(2, 173) = 0.87$, $p = .420$, partial eta$^2 = .010$.

3.2.3 THE EFFECT OF OTHER GENERATED CONTENT

In order to test the hypotheses (H3a, H3b, H3c, H3d) if other-generated content is more valuable for hosts than self-generated content to form an impression, establish trust and the decision to accept the guest than a self-generated message, a repeated measures ANOVA was performed. We examined if the second time participants scored their impression, trust and acceptance after being exposed to other-generated content significantly differed in relation to their first scores. For each condition, being: (1) professional/negative, (2) professional/positive, (3) unprofessional/negative, (4) unprofessional/positive, the results for each dependent variable (i.e., impression, trust, acceptance) was provided. Participants scores of Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2) were also reported and the independent variables were, respectively, message and review type. Conditions with no reviews were excluded.

Impression. While comparing the impression scores for participants exposed to a professional message T1 ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 0.93$) and positive reviews T2 ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 0.88$), the repeated measures test was proven non-significant $Mdif = 0.38$, $p = .079$, 95% CI (-0.05, 0.81). Thus, the positive impression that stem from a professional message did not became more positive after reading positive reviews of the guest. While analysing participants that were exposed to a professional message T1 ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.47$) and negative reviews T2 ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.78$), the repeated measures test was proven significant, indicating that there were differences between the means $Mdif = -2.24$, $p < .001$, 95% CI (-2.71, -1.77), r = .69 / $d = 1.90$. Thus, the positive impression that resulted from reading a professional message became significantly negative after reading negative reviews of the guest. When comparing the impression scores for participants exposed to an unprofessional message T1 ($M = 3.86$, $SD =$

0.84) and positive reviews T2 (*M* = 5.07, *SD* = 1.11), the repeated measure test was proven significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = 1.21, *p* < .001, 95% CI (0.78, 1.64), r = -.52 / *d* = -1.23. Thus, the negative impression that stem from reading an unprofessional message became significantly more positive after reading positive reviews of the guest. Finally, with regard to the impression scores for participants exposed to an unprofessional message T1 (*M* = 3.86, *SD* = 0.76) and negative reviews T2 (*M* = 2.24, *SD* = 0.89), the repeated measures test proved significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = -1.62, *p* < .001, 95% CI (-2.06, -1.19), r = .70 / *d* = 1.96. Thus, the negative impression that resulted from reading an unprofessional message became significantly more negative after reading negative reviews of the guest. In conclusion, reviews significantly altered impressions formed after reading the request message with an exception of participants exposed to a professional message and positive reviews.

Trust. While comparing the trust scores for participants exposed to a professional message T1 (*M* = 5.36, *SD* = 0.96) and positive reviews T2 (*M* = 5.90, *SD* = 0.92), the repeated measures test was proven significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = 0.54, *p* = .013, 95% CI (0.12, 0.97), *r* = -.28 / *d* = -0.57. Thus, the positive evaluation of trust that stem from reading a professional message became significantly more positive after reading positive reviews of the guest. While analysing participants that were exposed to a professional message T1 (*M* = 4.90, *SD* = 1.55) and negative reviews T2 (*M* = 1.87, *SD* = 0.82), the repeated measures test was also proven significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = -3.02, *p* < .001, 95% CI (-3.49, -2.56), *r* = .77 / *d* = 2.44. Thus, the positive evaluation of trust that resulted from reading a professional message became significantly negative after reading negative reviews of the guest. When comparing the trust scores for participants exposed to an unprofessional message T1 (*M* = 3.35, *SD* = 1.02) and positive reviews T2 (*M* = 5.26, *SD* = 1.01), the repeated measures test also proved significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = 1.91, *p* < .001, 95% CI (1.48, 2.33), *r* = -.69 / *d* = -1.88. Thus, the negative evaluation of trust that stem from reading an unprofessional message became significantly more positive after reading positive reviews of the guest. Finally, with regard to the trust scores for participants exposed to an unprofessional message T1 (*M* = 3.35, *SD* = 0.98) and negative reviews T2 (*M* = 1.70, *SD* = 0.75), the repeated measures test was found to be significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = -1.65, *p* < .001, 95% CI (-2.08, -1.22), *r* = .69 / *d* = 1.89. Thus, the

negative evaluation of trust that resulted from reading an unprofessional message became significantly more negative after reading negative reviews of the guest. To conclude, reviews significantly altered impressions formed after reading the request message among all different conditions.

Acceptance. While comparing the acceptance scores for participants exposed to a professional message T1 (*M* = 4.26, *SD* = 0.68) and positive reviews T2 (*M* = 4.58, *SD* = 0.62), the repeated measures test was proven non-significant, *Mdif* = 0.32, *p* = .099, 95% CI (-0.06, 0.71). Thus, the positive intention of hosts to accept the guest that stem from reading a professional message did not become more positive after reading positive reviews of the guest. While examining participants that were exposed to a professional message T1 (*M* = 4.12, *SD* = 1.21) and negative reviews T2 (*M* = 1.54, *SD* = 0.76), the repeated measures test was proven significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = -2.58, *p* < .001, 95% CI (-3.00, -2.16), *r* = .79 / *d* = 2.55. Thus, the positive intention of hosts to accept the guest that stem from reading a professional message became significantly negative after reading negative reviews of the guest. When comparing the acceptance scores for participants exposed to an unprofessional message T1 (*M* = 2.48, *SD* = 1.09) and positive reviews T2 (*M* = 3.97, *SD* = 0.80) the repeated measures test was also proven significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = 1.48, *p* < .001, 95% CI (1.10, 1.87), *r* = -.62 / *d* = -1.56. Thus, the negative intention of hosts to accept the guest that resulted from reading an unprofessional message became significantly more positive after reading positive reviews of the guest. With regard to the acceptance scores for participants exposed to an unprofessional message T1 (*M* = 2.23, *SD* = 1.07) and negative reviews T2 (*M* = 1.30, *SD* = 0.54), the repeated measures test was proven significant, indicating that there were differences between the means *Mdif* = -0.93, *p* < .001, 95% CI (-1.32, -0.54), *r* = .48 / *d* = 1.10. Thus, the negative intention of hosts to accept the guest that stem from reading an unprofessional message became significantly more negative after reading negative reviews of the guest. To conclude, reviews significantly altered the acceptance intention formed after reading the request message with an exception of participants exposed to a professional message and positive reviews.

In sum, impression, trust and acceptance were all found significantly different between participants'' first scores after reading the guest's request message and the second scores when exposed to other-generated information about the guest, with an exception for the

impression and acceptance scores of participants that read a professional request message and positive reviews. Nevertheless, the most positive scores were given by hosts to guests that wrote a professional message and had positive reviews. Thus, due to the warranting value of reviews, other-generated information was more valuable to hosts to form their impressions, evaluation of trust and decision to accept the guest, and consequently the decisive factor to confirm or deny their initial thoughts. Therefore, we can conclude that hypothesis H3a is partially supported and H3b, H3c and H3d were fully supported. The output tables from all dependent variables can be found in Appendix 5.

3.2.4 THE EFFECT OF NEGATIVE OTHER-GENERATED INFORMATION

The previous test revealed that for almost every condition, participants relied more on other-generated information than self-generated information. We were interested if negative other-generated information had a stronger effect on the impression, trust and acceptance level of a host than positive other-generated information (H4a and H4b). Therefore, we examined if there is a difference in the strength ones' impressions changes, depending on the order the information was presented. It was decided to perform an independent sample t-test, where the dependent variable measured the absolute difference between a person's initial scores of impression, trust or acceptance and their second scores on a 7-point scale. The independent variable represented the different conditions: professional/negative (*N* = 26) and unprofessional/positive (*N* = 31), professional/positive (N = 31) and unprofessional/negative (N = 30). Conditions with no reviews were excluded.

Impression. While examining the specific incongruent conditions, results indicated that on average, participants exposed to a professional message and negative reviews scored 2.39 (*SD* = 1.38) lower on impression. Participants exposed to an unprofessional message but positive reviews scored on average 1.40 (*SD* = 1.07) higher on impression. The difference between the incongruent conditions was significant, *Mdif* = 0.99, *t*(55) = 3.04, *p* = .004, 95% CI (0.34, 1.64), *r* = .37 / *d* = 0.80. While looking at the specific congruent conditions, results indicated that on average, participants exposed to a professional message and positive reviews scored 0.49 (*SD* = 0.58) higher on impression. Participants exposed to an unprofessional message and negative reviews scored on average 1.64 (*SD* = 1.12) lower on impression. The difference between the congruent conditions was significant, *Mdif* = -1.15, *t*(43.11) = -5.02, *p* < .001, 95% CI (-1.61, -0.69), *r* = -.54 / *d* = -1.29.

Trust. While looking at the specific incongruent conditions, results showed that on average, participants exposed to a professional message and negative reviews scored 3.04 (*SD* = 1.67) lower on trust. Participants exposed to an unprofessional message but positive reviews scored on average 1.96 (*SD* = 1.22) higher on trust. The difference between the incongruent conditions was significant, *Mdif* = 1.08, *t*(55) = 2.81, *p* < .007, 95% CI (0.31, 1.85), *r* = .35 / *d* = 0.74. While looking at the specific congruent conditions, results revealed that on average, participants exposed to a professional message and positive reviews scored 0.65 (*SD* = 0.50) higher on trust. Participants exposed to an unprofessional message and negative reviews scored on average 1.65 (*SD* = 1.01) lower on trust. The difference between the congruent conditions was significant, *Mdif* = -1.01, *t*(59) = -4.96, *p* < .001, 95% CI (-1.41, -0.60), *r* = -.53 / *d* = -1.26.

Acceptance. While looking at the specific incongruent conditions, results revealed that on average, participants exposed to a professional message and negative reviews scored 2.58 (*SD* = 1.33) lower on acceptance intention. Participants exposed to an unprofessional message but positive reviews scored on average 1.61 (*SD* = 1.09) higher on acceptance intention. The difference between the incongruent conditions was significant, *Mdif* = 0.96, *t*(55) = 3.01, *p* = .004, 95% CI (0.32, 1.61), *r* = .37 / *d* = 0.80. While looking at the specific congruent conditions, results indicated that on average, participants exposed to a professional message and positive reviews scored 0.39 (*SD* = 0.50) higher on acceptance intention. Participants exposed to an unprofessional message and negative reviews scored on average 0.93 (*SD* = 1.05) lower on acceptance intention. The difference between the congruent conditions was significant, *Mdif* = -0.55, *t*(41.03) = -2.62, *p* = .013, 95% CI (-0.97, -0.12), *r* = -.31 / *d* = -0.66.

To summarize, with regards to the incongruent conditions, results indicated that the scores on impression, trust and acceptance intention with participants being exposed to negative reviews were stronger than the effect of positive reviews. Thus, negative other-generated information has a greater effect on the impression formation process than positive other-generated information, confirming hypothesis 4a. Moreover, both congruent conditions lead the participant to strengthen their first impression, but participants exposed to negative congruent information demonstrated a greater impact on impression, trust and acceptance intention than positive congruent information, confirming hypothesis 4b. A summary of all findings was provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of hypotheses and findings

Hypotheses	Direction	Findings
Hypothesis $_1$	Professional > Unprofessional	Supported
Hypothesis $_{2a}$	Positive > Negative	Supported
Hypothesis $_{2b}$	Positive > No	Supported
Hypothesis $_{2c}$	No > Negative	
Hypothesis $_{3a}$	-	(Partially) Supported
Hypothesis $_{3b}$	-	Supported
Hypothesis $_{3c}$	-	Supported
Hypothesis $_{3d}$	-	Supported
Hypothesis $_{4a}$	Negative > Positive	Supported
Hypothesis $_{4b}$	Negative > Positive	Supported

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 GENERAL DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this experiment was to study the effect of the two-stage impression process through which the impression, trust and acceptance decision of Airbnb guests are formed. The research extends prior empirical research in various ways. First, by examining if the initial request message (i.e., positive, negative) written by the guest affects impressions. Second, by drawing conclusions on the differences between the type of reviews (i.e., positive, negative, no) as presented on Airbnb profiles and how it supports the second impression by investigating whether warranting theory applied to Airbnb. It was argued that a positive message or review would lead to a more positive impression than a negative message or review, and that other-generated content would be more valuable to participants, causing them to strengthen their first impression or deviate further from their original impression. Results showed that a positive message or positive review did form a significantly better impression, trust and acceptance intention than a negative message or review. Most importantly, our analysis revealed that warranting theory was supported and applied to Airbnb. It revealed that on Airbnb, people find other-generated information more valuable in the impression formation, the decision to trust and the decision to accept a guest than self-generated information.

With regard to the message, we questioned the following: does a professional message create a better impression and trust than an unprofessional message on Airbnb (H1)? The impression, level of trust and acceptance intention were all found to be significantly higher when the message sent by the guest was professional than when it was unprofessional. These findings were consistent with our expectations and with previous research such as the one by Toma (2010), which investigated the effect of visual and textual information as presented on dating profiles of online daters on perceived online trustworthiness. Their results affirmed that self-generated textual information that presents the self in an attractive manner, can hold a higher trustworthiness value than visual information. Therefore, a well-written message is the first step towards an adequate impression and is considered of significant value. Furthermore, impression formation and trustworthiness has been researched on social networking sites or sharing economy platforms regarding, facial attractiveness (Jaeger et al., in press), profile pictures (Ert & Fleischer, 2017) and names (Edelman et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, to our knowledge, our paper is the first study that investigated how self-generated textual information was related to the impression formation of Airbnb hosts. The present study extended findings related to a guest's self-generated textual approach on the impression formation of hosts.

When it comes to the valance of reviews, it was argued that positive reviews about a prospective guest formed a more positive impression, trust and had a higher intention to accept the guest than negative reviews (H2a). Our hypothesis was confirmed by the data, and the effect size accentuated for a strong effect. The findings match the ones of previous studies that found positive reviews to increase sales and brand equity (Ho-Dac, Carson, & Moore, 2013) and consumer awareness (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Additionally, we expected a profile with no reviews to form a more negative impression, trust and a lower acceptance intention than positive reviews (H2b), but a more positive impression, trust and acceptance intention than a profile with negative reviews (H2c). While the study revealed that an Airbnb profile with no reviews formed a more positive impression than a profile with negative reviews, it also showed that a profile with no reviews formed a less positive impression than a profile with positive reviews, confirming both hypotheses. This finding is interesting and directly related to the concept of uncertainty, which we mentioned earlier as being an impediment to the services of Airbnb. Pavlou, Liang, & Xue (2007) state that, even though the literature acknowledges uncertainty as a primary factor to online transactions, previous studies treated uncertainty as a background variable. Our study discovered how uncertain situations are managed within Airbnb. Mainly, we found that profiles that contain no reviews will have a higher intention of being accepted by the host than a profile with negative reviews, implying that negative reviews weights more than uncertainty in the host's decision-making process. In order worlds, Airbnb hosts would give the benefit of the doubts to a profile with no reviews but not to one with negative reviews. Overall, we can conclude that reviews are very crucial factors for hosts, where both positive and negative reviews have a stronger effect than no reviews at all. Through these findings, we extent current knowledge on uncertainty within the sharing economy and the effect of profiles with no reviews.

Furthermore, although positive reviews have such a strong effect on the impression and trust, Airbnb users should be careful. Bridges and Vásquez (2016) state that there exists a positivity bias of Airbnb reviews. Namely because Airbnb is more personal than regular hotel stays, and therefore writing negative feedback may lead to an uncomfortable situation. Also,

there exist a lack of anonymity and due to social norms (e.g., politeness) people tend to write positive feedback. In line with research by Fradkin, Grewal, Holtz, and Pearson (2015), who state that Airbnb's users write positive reviews due to the expectation it is a reciprocal process and do not write negative reviews due to the fear of retaliation. Therefore, hosts and guests should be warned and base their decision on additional cues. Nevertheless, reviews are trusted by 70% of consumers because of their transparency value (Bridges & Vásquez, 2016). Regardless if there exists a positivity bias of reviews on Airbnb that consequently affect the reliability of reviews, results confirmed that positive reviews are responsible for the highest possibility to be accepted as a guest and nevertheless remains the strongest elements for the formation of impression, trust and intention to accept a guest.

With reference to warranting theory, the present research contributed to earlier literature in two important ways. First, this research provided further insight in the perspective of hosts. Airbnb's platform is constructed to place both hosts and guest into the driver's seat, where hosts face the biggest risks when using this platform. The current study revealed, what factors hosts consider important enough to accept the guest into their house and reduce these risks.

Second, we were especially interested in whether Airbnb users value other-generated information more than self-generated information (H3a, H3b, H3c, H3d). The current study shows the effect of other-generated information on impression, trust and the acceptance intention of hosts with the two-stage impression process of Airbnb. The results indicated that first impressions are not lasting on Airbnb but the warranting value of reviews significantly altered impressions formed after reading the request message. This confirmed that other-generated information was more valuable to evaluate a guest than self-generated information. The current study found evidence that warranting theory was supported on Airbnb, partially confirming hypothesis H3a, and confirming H3b, H3c and H3d. These findings are in line with research by Walther et al., (2009), and Moser et al., (2017), but contradict the one of Smith et al. (2014) stating that first impressions are lasting. However, these opposite results might be due to the fact that in this research impression were formed online whether than face-to-face. It can be argued that impressions are formed differently in online versus offline environments, unfortunately, research on the lasting of impression online is still lacking and limited.

The current study adds findings on the warranting value of reviews on Airbnb. Hosts eventually decide to accept the guest based on their profile, and the request message was not able to form final impressions. Our theory suggested that people seek additional information to affirm the first impression to make a final decision. Yet participants exposed to professional message and positive review did not form a more positive impression or higher intention to accept the guest. However, we found that negative information weighs more heavily to the decision than positive information. These results might be explained by negativity bias. Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2001) write in their paper that ignoring positive situations lead people to feel regret, nevertheless there will be no major consequences by ignoring these situations. However, people ignoring negative situations might end up dead or injured. People are more motivated to avoid negative information than to pursue good information. Thus, negative information is psychologically more important to people to manage certain types of situations than positive information. To conclude, while confirmative positive information was not found to be strong enough to change impressions, it did in the case of negative information, which could be caused by negativity bias on Airbnb and leading us to the next hypotheses.

Besides warranting theory, this research investigated the effect of negative other-generated information to examine if the order in which the information was presented to hosts had a bigger impact on the impression and trust evaluations of guests (H4a, H4b). The results revealed that hosts exposed to a professional message but negative other-generated information deviated further from their first impression than hosts exposed an unprofessional message but positive other-generated information, confirming hypothesis 4a. Moreover, the results also revealed that the second impression of hosts exposed to an unprofessional message and negative other-generated information was more strongly affirmed as opposed to their first impression than hosts exposed a professional message and positive other-generated information, confirming hypothesis 4b. Referring back to negativity bias, negative information carries more weight to the brain than positive information (Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998), especially with impression formation (Pratto, & John, 1991; Hamilton & Zanna, 1972), confirming results from previous research. Thus, if users of sharing economy platforms wish to form an adequate impression and create a trusted relationship, they have the best chance when they pay attention to their language by sending a professional request message and provide the best experience to gain positive feedback for their online profiles.

4.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the current study have implications for Airbnb hosts, guest, the organization itself and for the sharing economy in general. Due to the risks coming from online environments, trust is the foundation for any sharing economy platform, and such platforms need to invest in new possibilities for it to be successful. Our study revealed that negative other-generated information was the most important factor for hosts to deny a prospective guest. In addition, the current study also revealed that the most positive impression, trust and acceptance scores were given by hosts that read a professional request message and positive reviews. Therefore, guests need to make sure they receive positive reviews. Profiles need to be managed and maintained to market one selves in the sharing economy (Ravenelle, 2016). Guests should present themselves in a likable manner but also manage the platform continuously to gather positive reviews or gain a higher ranking, which in turn creates a higher success of impression making. So, if a guest does not have any positive reviews yet, they should make sure to receive them.

Furthermore, this research uncovered that other-generated information had the greatest effect on trust, the impression and acceptance intention of Airbnb hosts. At the present time, the profiles of guests are fairly limited compared to the profiles of hosts. One explanation might be that hosts need to provide substantially more information than guests and share personal information, showing amongst others their house, address and possessions. Because our results revealed that hosts rely on other-generated information to form their final impression, Airbnb should make sure the reviews of prospective guests are visible, transparent and might add visual cues such as stars on the guest's profile.

The term of transparency is of course relevant for online platforms like Airbnb. This research shows that transparency is key to the success of the sharing economy. As previously mentioned we found overall reviews to have the strongest consequences on impression, trust and acceptance than no reviews due to uncertainty, meaning that people indeed need information and transparency. Although, in the case of negative reviews, no reviews are better evaluated, the sharing economy needs information and inputs from users to function efficiency. Therefore, users but also investors need to promote transparency in the platform.

4.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The question remained how impressions were formed by Airbnb hosts through the two-stage impression formation process. Though this study adds important findings by showing that a host's ultimate decision whether to accept the guest, depends on the valance of other-generated information, this research acknowledges a couple of limitations.

A potential limitation of the current study is that participants who viewed a neutral profile containing no reviews might have based their opinions on the date of membership to form their impression. During the pre-test, participants stated that membership length was the second most important variable to form their impression, establish trust and the intention to accept the guest. The guest who has been a member since 2015 was rated more positive than the guest who was a member since 2018. Therefore, it is possible that the impression, trust and acceptance scores of hosts who read no reviews were effected in the present research, as we used 2015 as the date of membership of the guest. Even though the profile without any reviews holds a neutral position, the results may be somewhat positively influenced. Similarly, Cui, Lui, & Guo, (2012) state that especially in the beginning of a product or service, the number of reviews have a significant effect on sales. It could be interesting for future studies to investigate the difference between the membership length of a person in relation to the volume of reviews on sharing economy platforms, and disregarding the valence of reviews as researched in this study. Moreover, Airbnb might also be interested in which other variables (e.g., age, gender, location etc.) play a key role with the impression formation of Airbnb hosts. Hence, the impressions of hosts are not solely based on reviews, and might be beneficial to hosts considering there exists a positivity bias of reviews on Airbnb. In this way, hosts should be able to form their decisions on multiple cues rather than one very decisive factor. Apart from Aoirbnb , this knowledge might also be interesting for other sharing economy platforms, such as eBay or Couch Surfing. For such organizations to verify the safety of their platform, and doing so by finding honest ways users can sufficiently form their impression and create a trusted relationship, will help both parties to be more successful.

Furthermore, our paper examined the impression formation of Airbnb hosts and assumed that the first impression can change due to Airbnb's impression process by viewing other-generated information for the second impression. While the results indicated this assumption to be correct, we asked participants to imagine being a host of Airbnb. Around 66% of the participants indicated to have used Airbnb as a guest while only 6.7% had

experience as an Airbnb host. The unfamiliarity of the impression formation process of hosts and the fact there were only a limited number of actual experienced Airbnb hosts, might have influenced results. Future research can replicate this study by using Airbnb hosts as their sample.

Another limitation of the present study is the relatively small sample size, which raises external validity concerns. Due to the fact that our sample accounted mostly for young Dutch people, it is difficult to generalize the findings over the population. By replicating the present research with a larger and more diverse sample may restore the external validity confidence and enable the generalization of the results to the real population.

Finally, the result indicated that negative other-generated information was the strongest factor to influence the impression, trust or the acceptance intention. This means that having both positive and negative reviews might negatively affect the host decision to pick a guest. Given this finding one might be interested in looking at the extend to which negative reviews overrule positive reviews. A possible research question might be: *how many negative reviews cancel the validity of positive reviews?*

4.4 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study allow us to answer the research question: *What is the effect of self-generated information (stage 1) on impression formation by hosts of Airbnb and does other-generated information (stage 2) change the initial impression and evaluation of hosts of Airbnb either positively or negatively?* All hypotheses were confirmed by the data, and as a result, this study provides an indication that hosts of Airbnb are affected by the request message and the profile to decide whether they want to accept the guest. Reviews were able to convert participants' opinions into the other direction if they did not match the request message, but were also able to strengthen the opinion of the guest when reviews matched the request message. Consequently, this research confirmed that warranting theory applies to Airbnb's impression formation process of hosts. Moreover, negative reviews were stronger predictors to change or strengthen hosts opinions than positive reviews. But, a profile containing no reviews was found to be significantly more positive than a profile containing negative reviews.

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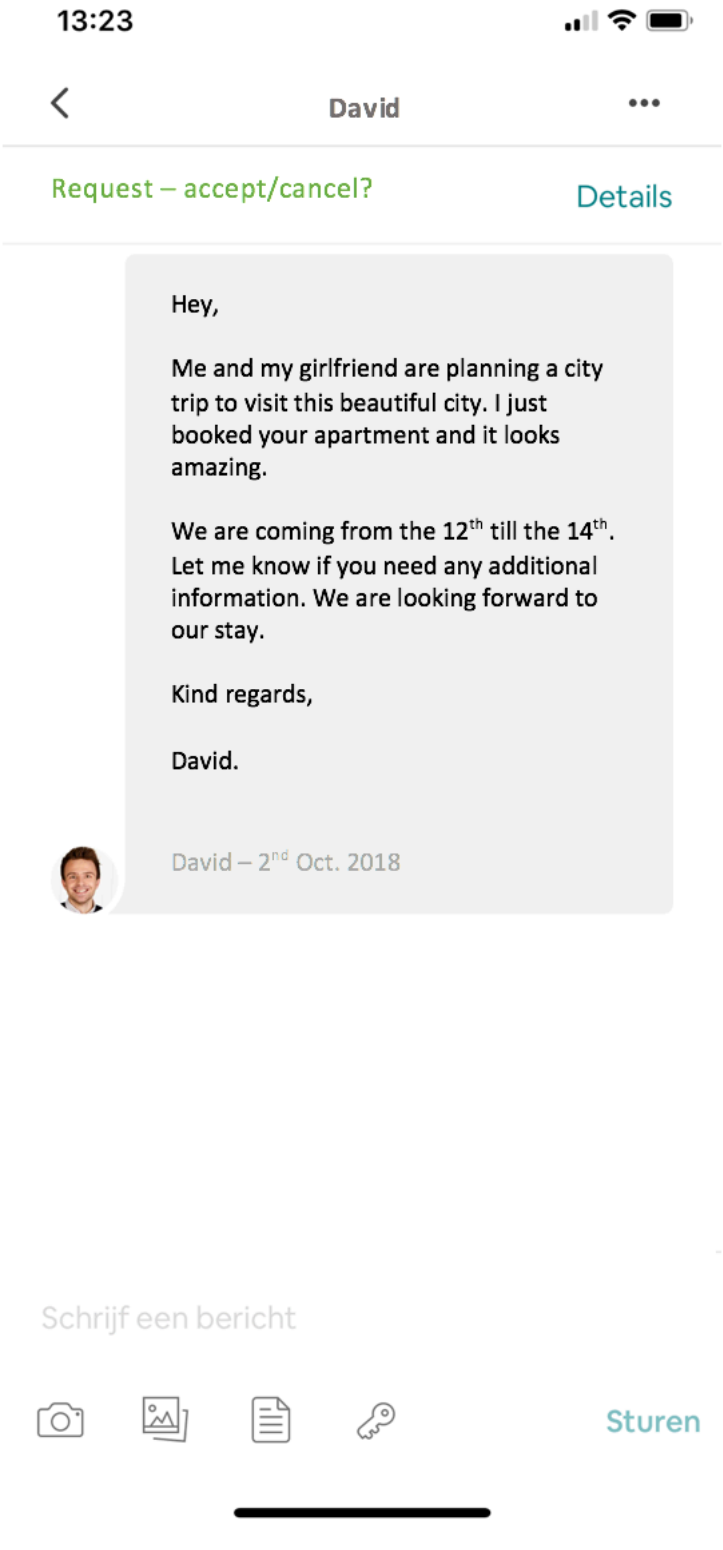
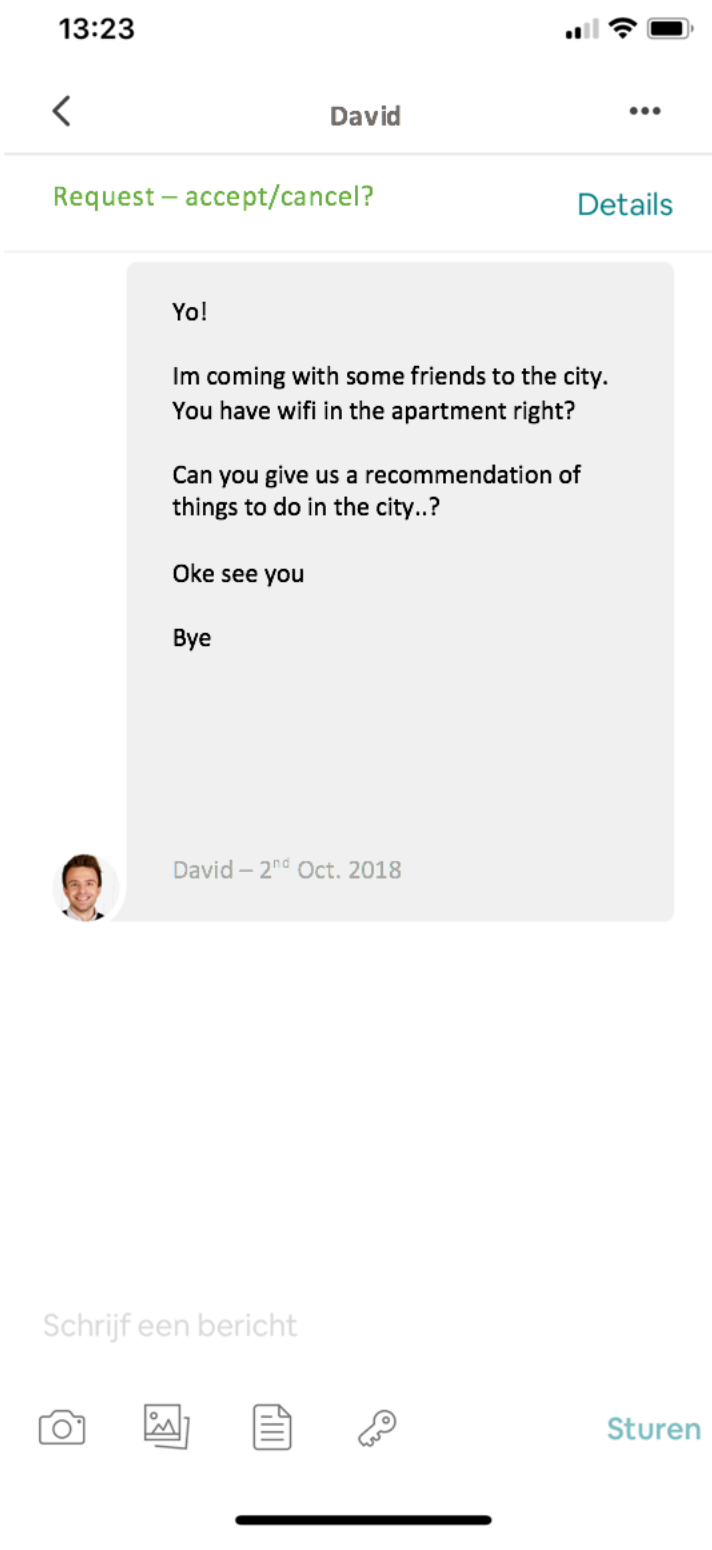
APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Stimuli Experiment

Professional request message and unprofessional request message.





Profile with positive reviews and a profile with negative reviews.

13:23

David
Manchester, England

3 Reviews

Chris - David has been a good guest, we had pleasant communication and he left the place very clean just like we agreed. I would recommend David as a guest.
Isabel – Very happy to have David as a guest.
Eva – Very friendly person. David is an example to all users of Airbnb.

Member since
december 2015

Verified information
Email address, Phone number, identification

Rapport this profile

13:23

David
Manchester, England

3 Reviews

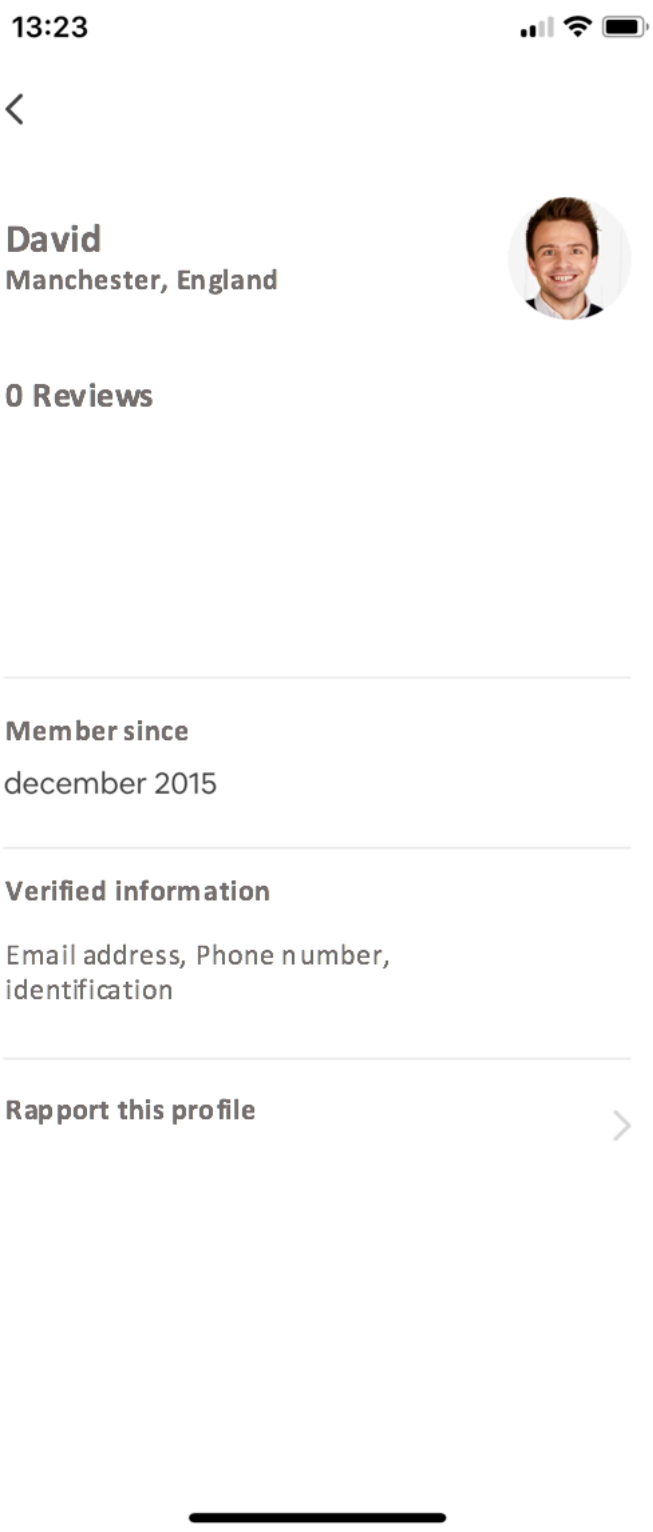
Chris - David has not been a good guest, there was hardly any communication and he left the place very dirty. I would not recommend David as a guest.
Isabel – I was very disappointed to have David as a guest.
Eva – Unfriendly person. David is not a good example of an Airbnb user.

Member since
december 2015

Verified information
Email address, Phone number, identification

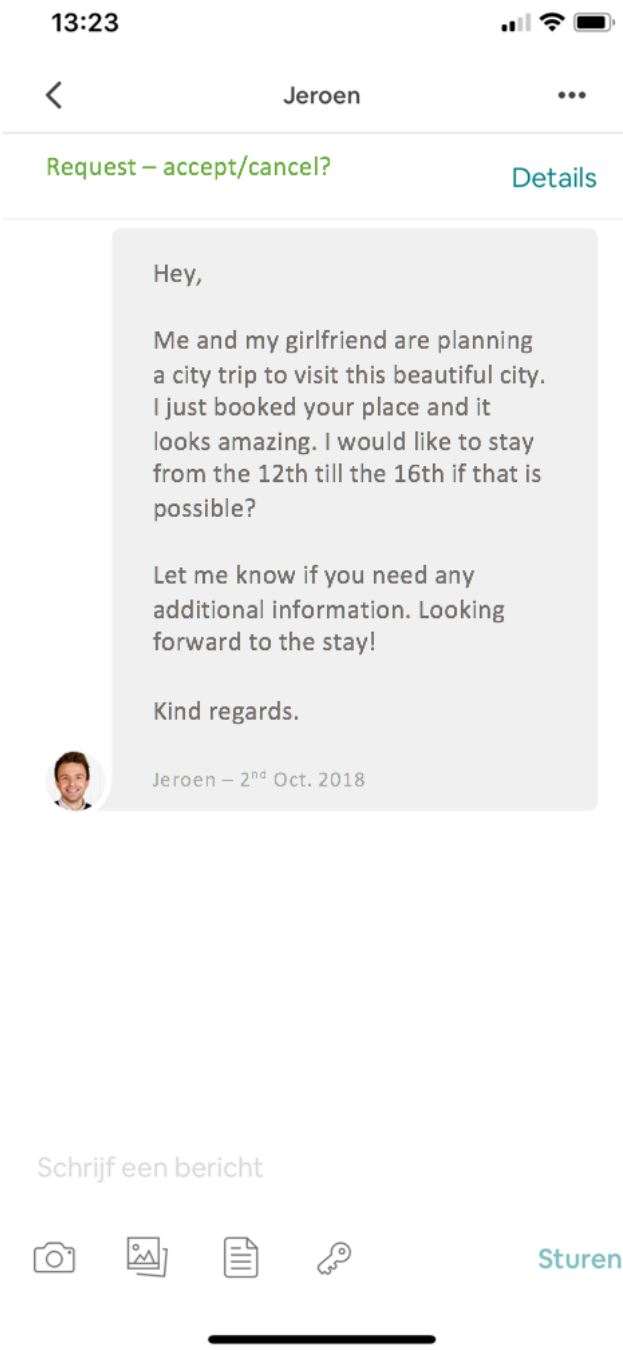
Rapport this profile

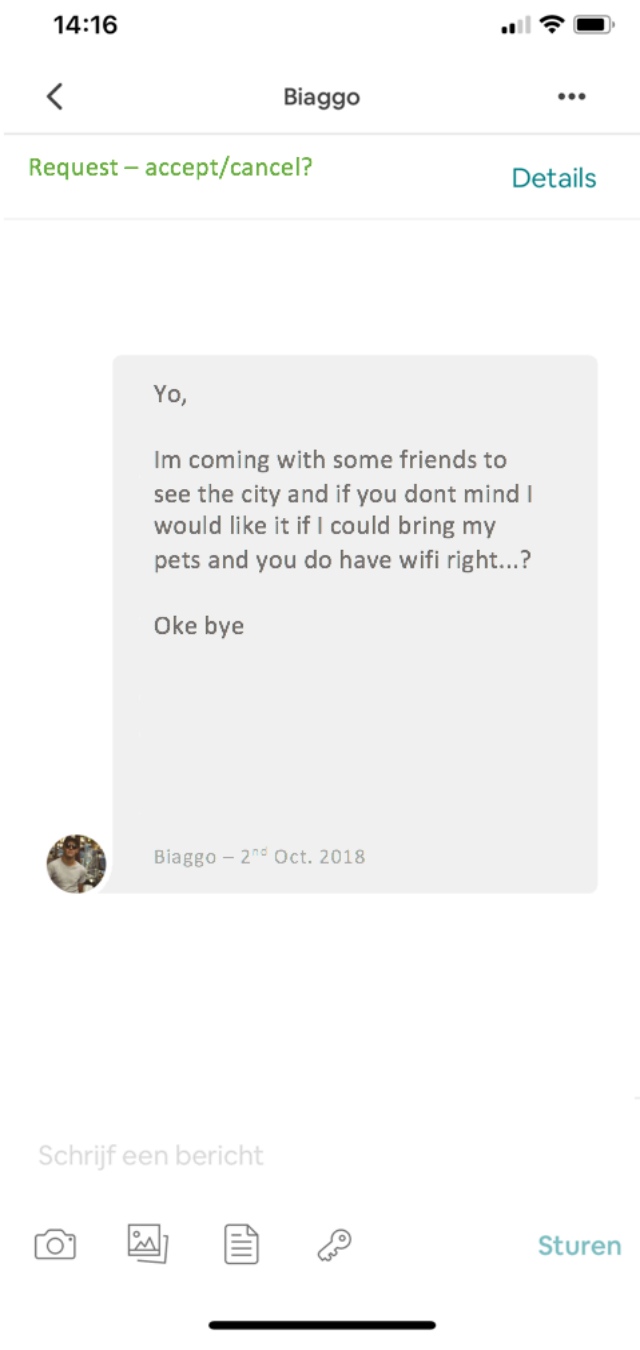
Profile with no reviews.



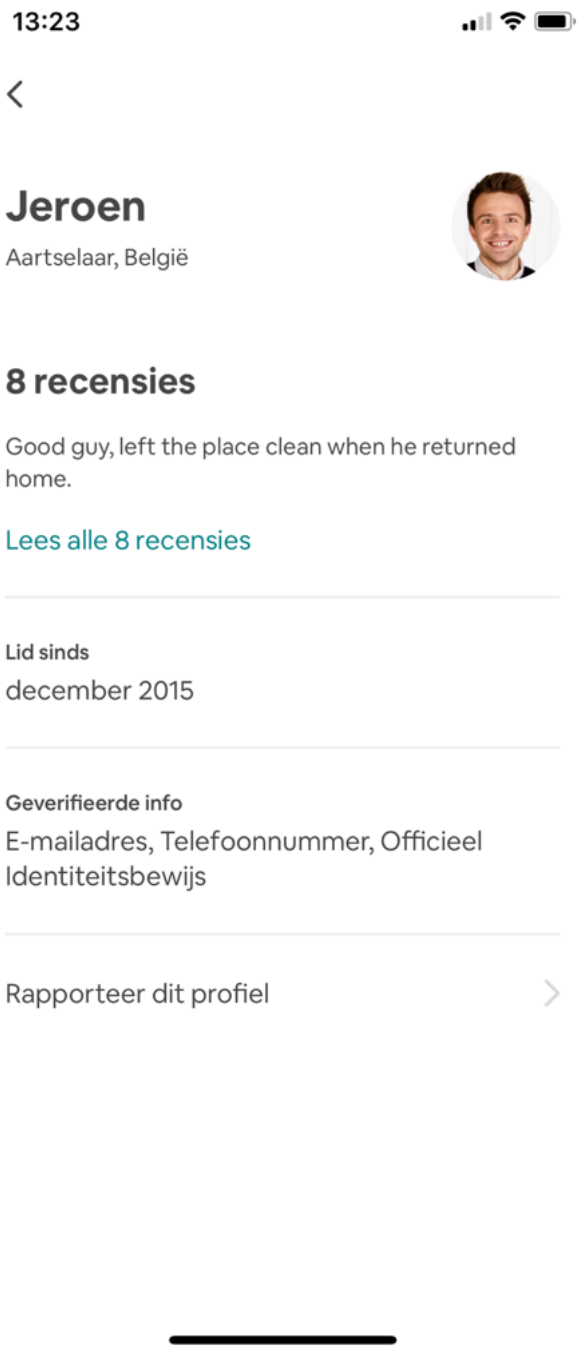
Appendix 2. Stimuli Pre-test

Professional request message and unprofessional request message.





Trustworthy profile and less trustworthy profile.



Appendix 3. Findings pre-test

Questions	Positive-Positive	Positive-Negative	Negative-Positive	Negative-Negative
Most noticeable attributes	- *(3) Positive message - Using kind words - Picture - Friendly ''normal guy'' - Friendly message	- (3) Friendly message - Kind words	- (4) Informal → to direct - Already set expectations → I first have to approve	- (4) Informal
What is important as a user of Airbnb?	- Treating house with respect. - No party person - Kindness	- (2) Politeness - Reviews	- (4) More information needed - (3) Trust	- (4) Need more information - Experiences - Screening from Airbnb
First impression	- (4) Nice person, would accept the request - Shows interest - Kind words	- (4) Kind person	- (4) Would not accept this person, not trustworthy	- (4) Disrespectful and not trustworthy
Most noticeable attributes	- (4) Reviews - (4) frequent user - Positive review	- (4) No reviews - (3) No frequent user - Bad picture - Not verified	- (4) Reviews - (3) Frequent user - (2) Verified info. - (2) Picture	- (4) Reviews - (3) No verified info - Picture - (3) No frequent user
Change in impression?	- (4) No change in impression, would accept this person's request	- (4) Change in impression, would not accept this person's request anymore	- (1) Changes positively, but rather rely on first impression. - (3) Changes positively	- (4) No change in impression, would not accept this person's request

*(X) Number of participants stating this answer

Appendix 4. Measures and scales

Measures impression

Agency scale

1. The guest is competent
2. The guest is efficient
3. The guest is clever
4. The guest is full of energy
5. The guest is a well-organized person

Communion scale

1. The guest is sincere
2. I think the guest is an honest person
3. The guest is fair toward others
4. The guest is a loyal sort of person
5. The guest is selfless

Measures trusting beliefs

Benevolence

1. I believe that the guest would act in my best interest.
2. If I asked the guest to comply with rules, he/she would do its best to do so.
3. The guest is interested in my wishes, not just its own.

Integrity

1. The guest is truthful in its dealings with me.
2. I would characterize the guest as honest.
3. The guest would keep its commitments.
4. The guest is sincere and genuine.

Competence

1. The guest seems competent.
2. Overall, the guest is a capable and proficient user of Airbnb.
3. In general, the guest is very knowledgeable about their best online appearance.

Measures to measure the acceptance intention of hosts

Acceptance intention

1. How likely is it that you will accept the guest's request to stay in your apartment?

Measures disposition to trust (control variables)

Benevolence

1. In general, people really do care about the well-being of others.
2. The typical person is sincerely concerned about the problems of others.
3. Most of the time, people care enough to try to be helpful, rather than just looking out for themselves.

Integrity

1. In general, most folks keep their promises.
2. I think people generally try to back up their words with their actions.
3. Most people are honest in their dealings with others.

Competence

1. I believe that most professional people do a very good job at their work.
2. Most professionals are very knowledgeable in their chosen field.
3. A large majority of professional people are competent in their area of expertise.

Trusting stance

1. I usually trust people until they give me a reason not to trust them.
2. I generally give people the benefit of the doubt when I first meet them.
3. My typical approach is to trust new acquaintances until they prove I should not trust them.

Measures manipulation check (control variables)

Message

1. To what extent do you perceive the request message to be professional?

Review

1. To what extent do you perceive the reviews of the guest to be positive?

Measures demographics

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your nationality?
4. Did you ever rented a house through Airbnb?
5. Did you ever use Airbnb to rent your own house or apartment?

IF ANSWER IS YES:

    1. How many times did you rent your house or apartment?
    2. My personal experience as an Airbnb host was:

Appendix 5. Findings hypothesis three

IMPRESSION

Estimates

Message	Review	Time	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Professional	Negative	1	4.74	.20	4.34	5.13
		2	2.50	.18	2.14	2.86
	Positive	1	5.36	.18	4.99	5.72
		2	5.74	.17	5.41	6.07
Unprofessional	Negative	1	3.86	.19	3.50	4.23
		2	2.24	.17	1.90	2.58
	Positive	1	3.86	.18	3.50	4.22
		2	5.07	.17	4.73	5.40

Message	Review	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Professional	Negative	1	2	2.242*	.000	1.774	2.711
		2	1	-2.242*	.000	-2.711	-1.774
	Positive	1	2	-.384	.079	-.813	.045
		2	1	.384	.079	-.045	.813
Unprofessional	Negative	1	2	1.623*	.000	1.187	2.059
		2	1	-1.623*	.000	-2.059	-1.187
	Positive	1	2	-1.206*	.000	-1.635	-.778
		2	1	1.206*	.000	.778	1.635

TRUST

Estimates

Message	Review	Time	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Professional	Negative	1	4.90	.22	4.46	5.34
		2	1.87	.17	1.53	2.22
	Positive	1	5.36	.20	4.95	5.76
		2	5.90	.16	5.58	6.21
Unprofessional	Negative	1	3.35	.21	2.94	3.76
		2	1.70	.16	1.38	2.02
	Positive	1	3.35	.20	2.95	3.75
		2	5.26	.16	4.94	5.57

Message	Review	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Professional	Negative	1	2	3.023*	.000	2.558	3.488
		2	1	-3.023*	.000	-3.488	-2.558
	Positive	1	2	-.542*	.013	-.968	-.116
		2	1	.542*	.013	.116	.968
Unprofessional	Negative	1	2	1.650*	.000	1.217	2.083
		2	1	-1.650*	.000	-2.083	-1.217
	Positive	1	2	-1.906*	.000	-2.333	-1.480
		2	1	1.906*	.000	1.480	2.333

ACCEPTANCE

Estimates

Message	Profile	Time	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Professional	Negative	1	4.12	.20	3.72	4.51
		2	1.54	.13	1.27	1.80
	Positive	1	4.26	.18	3.89	4.62
		2	4.58	.12	4.34	4.82
Unprofessional	Negative	1	2.23	.19	1.86	2.60
		2	1.30	.13	1.05	1.55
	Positive	1	2.48	.18	2.12	2.85
		2	3.97	.12	3.73	4.21

Message	Profile	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Professional	Negative	1	2	2.577*	.000	2.158	2.996
		2	1	-2.577*	.000	-2.996	-2.158
	Positive	1	2	-.323	.099	-.706	.061
		2	1	.323	.099	-.061	.706
Unprofessional	Negative	1	2	.933*	.000	.543	1.324
		2	1	-.933*	.000	-1.324	-.543
	Positive	1	2	-1.484*	.000	-1.868	-1.100
		2	1	1.484*	.000	1.100	1.868