Gordon Institute of Business Science
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Cognitive biases in the Sharing Economy

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Abstract

The Sharing Economy (SE), also known as collaborative consumption, is an unregulated industry, with individuals renting out underused assets to other individuals via a third-party platform. Due to the nature of the SE, there is an imbalance of information, service-standard heterogeneity and risk involved in transacting with strangers. Despite these factors, the SE has disrupted traditional industries, with millions worldwide participating in this economy in one form or another, indicating that there are underlying factors which impact consumption behaviour in this economy.

The SE uses online platforms and the ubiquitous nature of internet connectivity to reach global audiences, and similarly so, uses various online signals to convey information to those audiences. Online star rating systems and participant profile pictures are some key examples of digital signals employed in a typical SE business to convey information that would otherwise have been deemed unnecessary or automatically trusted in traditional economy businesses. When considering the short-term accommodation industry in the traditional economy, a 4-star rated hotel is accepted to depict an agreed level of service quality because that rating is assigned by a third-party regulatory board, underpinned by local government policy. Whereas a 4-star service rating score in the SE is based on individual experiences, which is highly subjective. Profile pictures are a core visual element on SE platforms, such as Airbnb, whereas that visual element is completely absent from hotel websites and their online booking systems.

One research dimension lacking in current literature, is in consumer psychology, specifically that which is associated with biases in the Sharing Economy. This research focuses on cognitive biases, viz. bandwagon effect and affinity bias. Through an online survey of 165 respondents, various online signals were tested to determine if impacts consumption behaviour in the short-term accommodation SE, using Airbnb as a representative SE. The analysis indicated that affinity bias influenced responses to visual cues. Respondents, who had character traits of having affinity bias, used guest or host profile pictures in their SE participation decision-making

Key words

Sharing Economy, Airbnb, Bias, Bandwagon Effect, Affinity bias, Star-rating, Profile pictures, social media hype

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

27 November 2022

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research Problem

The Sharing Economy (SE), also referred to as a peer-to-peer marketplace or collaborative consumption, has rapidly emerged where individuals are able to access services from a non-firm entity, the transaction of which is wholly facilitated and hosted by a third-party digital platform, fundamentally changing consumption as we know it (Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Cheng, 2016; Eckhardt et al., 2019).

The SE has disrupted and disintermediated traditional industries, whereby any private citizen can partake in such an economy as a direct supplier, as opposed to firm-only participants. A sector of SE or peer-to-peer proliferation is within the travel and tourism industry, most notably that of Uber and Airbnb, the latter being an archetype of such an economy (Guttentag, 2015).

Industry disruption is possible when a solution is created "that offers customers something they didn't have before or provide a service or product to a customer base that is underserved" (Glazer, 2018, para. 6). This is how Airbnb disrupted the hotel industry. They re-invented the concept of travel where any tourist could visit any global destination without having the restriction of staying in specific geographical locations based on hotel accommodation and affordability, yielding their current slogan: "Belong Anywhere". This speaks directly to their vision of inclusivity and 'belonging'. However, because so little is known about the SE and it's a unique economy, a host of new biases and decision-making behavior elements may be introduced, and this research need has been highlighted amongst scholars, particularly pertaining how decision-making is driven in such an economy, as well as the biases that come into play, as research into consumer decision-making has been focused on the traditional economy (Ert et al., 2016; Eckhardt et al., 2019). This uncertainty raises questions in two ways:

1- What kind of decisioning elements are at play for the SE's rapid growth? Given that digital companies have a strong digital presence, and with the advent of influencer marketing, could the rapid growth of the SE be attributed to bandwagon behavior?

2- To what extent does biases impact the SE and how does it affect their propensity to participate in the SE, seeing that Airbnb has detected discrimination amongst

hosts, having to remove 1.3M from their platform to date and having to launch a project called Project Lighthouse and the 'We Accept' campaign to try and combat this issue (Airbnb, 2020; Davis & Hillier, 2019). However, not enough is known in this regard and even less about biases that guests may have when participating or planning to participate in the SE.

1.2 Defining the Research Problem (theoretical underpinning)

The SE is also referred to as "Collaborative Consumption" and is a peer-to-peer business model which enables anyone to partake as both consumer and provider, typically with providers placing underused resources (Cheng, 2016) on the market via an online platform which is managed by a third party. The SE is an access-based consumption model and excludes the transfer of resource ownership to the consumer (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Kathan et al. (2016, p. 663) provides a good characterization of the SE as one that represents "non-ownership, temporary access, and redistribution of material goods or less tangible assets such as money, space, or time". Earlier literature suggests that ownership for exclusive use is the natural relationship between people and material things, however, sharing has always been practiced socially and a common behavioural element throughout history (Rudmin, 2016). The SE, however, represents a unique take on sharing in terms of scale and unfamiliarity between exchange partners.

This new sharing phenomenon is only possible due to underpinning technological factors such as digital technology advancements, particularly in smart phone technology coupled with the ubiquity of satellite navigation (McGinn, 2017) as well as global internet connectivity.

The quintessential model and paragon of the SE is that of Airbnb, where a property owner, who has a residence that is not occupied year-round, hire's that residence out on a temporary basis, the transaction of which is conducted via a third-party digital platform (Airbnb). Guttentag (2015) has branded Airbnb as a textbook example of disruptive innovation, which despite the value proposition of having an authentic experience, "underperform in comparison with hotels when considering traditional hotel performance attributes like cleanliness, quality assurance, and the check in/out process" (Guttentag & Smith, 2017, p.3).

Because of disintermediation of the industry, regulatory bodies are equipped to regulate traditional industry, leaving the SE mostly self-regulated, highlighting specific challenges in quality assurance and information accuracy, and specifically highlighted by Filippas et al. (2018), the case of inflated ratings. Traditional market exchanges are governed not only by regulators but also by trust (Eckhardt et al., 2019) but the role of regulatory mechanisms is more pronounced in instilling consumer confidence in instances of low trust (Chiles & McMackin 1996). Even though rating systems are used extensively in the SE, they are not an accurate barometer of trustworthiness, as rating systems in the SE are also underpinned by contributor anonymity (Botsman 2017).

Thus, in systems of self-regulation and inflated rating systems, what prompts consumers to move away from traditional regulated markets and participate in the SE?
Ert et al. (2016) spoke about the lack of understanding in the SE regarding the impact of information (visual and other) that is availed on their platforms and the potential biases it may evoke to influence decision-making. “To date, this literature has focused on decision-making strategies and biases that drive the consumption of goods that are owned […] Thus, an important question is, what types of judgments, heuristics and **biases** affect the consumption of shared (as opposed to owned) resources?

The sharing economy’s unique characteristics are likely to introduce a new set of heuristics and biases that may affect consumer decision making” (Eckhardt et al., 2019, p.9). Based on academic literature (as summarised in table 1), a specific line of enquiry has been raised about the types of consumption biases that exists in the SE.
Given that the global revenue generated within the next 2 years is forecasted to be $335B, it’s imperative to gain more understanding about the consumption trends within this economy and the underpinning decision-making elements and biases that drive it (Marchi and Parekh, 2015).

Thus, the focus on this paper is on consumer bias, which is an extensive area of consumer behaviour in decision-making, and for purposes of this study, specific consumer cognitive biases have been investigated. The research will broaden the SE literature on consumer behaviour in such an economy and provide key insights into marketing psychology. This element of cognitive behaviour allows further understanding to how consumers and service providers react to the SE, which could thus inform tailored SE marketing strategies as well as mitigating tools to deter unfavourable consumer or service-provider behaviour.

Table 1: SE Research Opportunity

Research Need	Reference	Journal Name	ABS Journal Quality
"However, sharing economy platforms must understand what consumers infer from both visual and the non-visual information posted on their sites and should design their sites accordingly to attempt to reduce potential biases." (p. 72)	Ert, Fleischer, and Magen (2016)	Tourism Management	4
"Different rules and consumer decision making are at play here, and a fuller examination of these is still needed to shed light on how this economy really operates." (p. 72)	Ert, Fleischer, and Magen (2016)	Tourism Management	4
"we view this paper as a window for tourism and hospitality researchers to contribute to the thinking around the digital discrimination with the rapid growth of the sharing economy. Hence, this research note invites future research and debates around the discrimination issues in the sharing economy." (p.98)	Cheng and Foley (2018)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	3
"To date, this literature has focused on decision-making strategies and biases that drive the consumption of goods that are owned… Thus, an important question is, what types of judgments, heuristics and biases affect the consumption of shared (as opposed to owned) resources? The sharing economy's unique characteristics are likely to introduce a new set of heuristics and biases that may affect consumer decision making" (p. 9)	Eckhardt et al. (2019)	Journal of Marketing	4*

Source: Author

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the research opportunity, the following research questions have been posed:

RQ1: What is the role of consumer cognitive bias in the Sharing Economy?

- **RQ1A: What is the role of the social proof cognitive bias, "Bandwagon effect", in people participating in the Sharing Economy?**

- **RQ1B: What is the role of the cognitive bias, "Affinity bias", in people participating in the Sharing Economy?**

The academic literature has been very specific in identifying the behaviour research needs in the SE (Table 1). According to Ert et al. (2016), there is a need for SE platforms to "understand what consumers infer from both visual and the non-visual information posted on their sites and should design their sites accordingly to attempt to reduce potential biases." (p. 72). This refers to inherent biases that SE participants (consumer and service provider) may have that may result in unfavourable (discriminatory) behaviour (mapped to RQ1A and RQ1B). Krieger (1995) suggests that disparate or discriminatory treatment of others, even in its most subtle and unconscious form, is attributed to cognitive biases, rather than being motivational in nature, the latter of which most anti-discriminatory laws and policies are developed on. In other words, cognition biases are antecedents to discriminatory behaviour. Cheng and Foley (2018) "invites future research and debates around the discrimination issues in the sharing economy" and specifically addresses tourism and hospitality researchers to better understand digital discrimination in the SE (p.98). It is RQ1B that may contribute to the understanding and debate around actual or perceived discrimination in the SE by understanding the cognitive biases that underpin such behaviour.

Furthermore, its recognised that "Different rules and consumer decision making are at play here, and a fuller examination of these is still needed to shed light on how this economy really operates" (Ert et al., 2016, p. 72). In this instance decision-making can be mapped to any form of cognitive bias and thus relates to both research questions.

Three years later, Eckhardt et al. (2019) raises similar lines of enquiry to Ert et al. (2016), corroborating the same research need as it relates to consumer decision-making and biases because it highlights that "To date […] literature has focused on decision-making strategies and biases that drive the consumption of goods that are owned […] The

sharing economy's unique characteristics are likely to introduce a new set of heuristics and biases that may affect consumer decision making" (p. 9). In this regard, the line of enquiry relate to both RQ1A and RQ1B.

1.4 Research Aim and Scope

This research seeks to explain to what extent cognitive biases impact the SE, particularly that which can explain the rapid adoption thereof, such as the possibility of bandwagon behaviour as well as the prevalence of another potential cognitive bias, Affinity bias, both of which would shed light about the consumer psychology at play in the SE.
The research further seeks to explain the extent of these cognitive biases and how that would influence the response to both digital and visual cues that are prevalent on SE platforms (using Aribnb platform as the research subject).

The research scope is focused on the commercial application of the SE, specifically Airbnb, in a global context, from both a guest or potential guest and host or potential host perspective, and the potential cognitive biases that may exist in the two groups and how the presence of the specified cognitive biases influence how respondents react to platform cues (such as star-ratings, reviews, guest/host profile pictures).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is arranged in 3 overarching sections, as per the following sections highlighted in Figure 1:

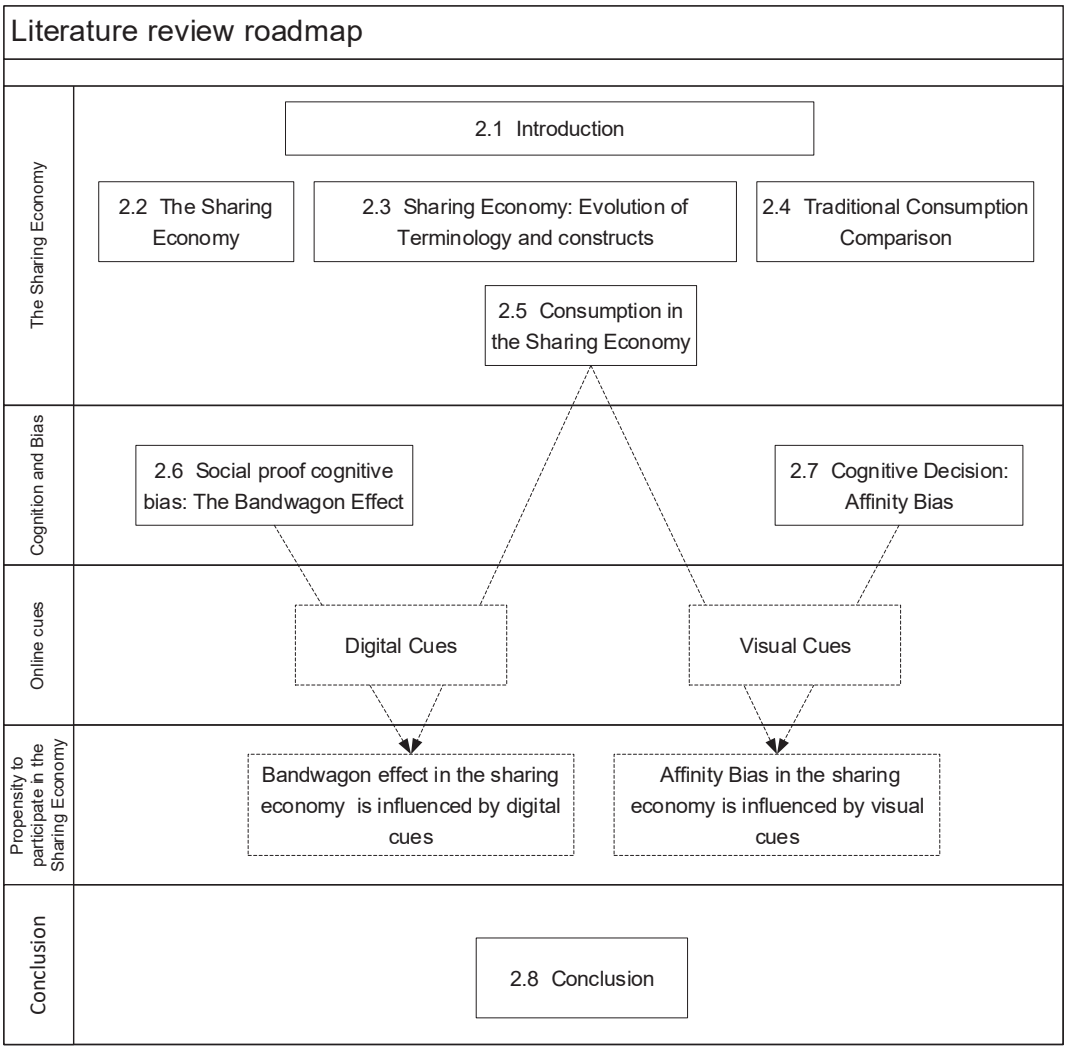


Figure 1: The literature review roadmap

Source: Author

The literature review first explores the concept of this new economy and briefly sets the context for further sections. It explores the various characterisations of the SE very briefly and recognizes that there is, indeed, an evolution of terminology and core constructs. This section also touches on the social concept of sharing as well as overarching benefits and drawbacks of the SE.

The evolution of the SE terminology is then explored deeper, from its initial definitions and constructs to the interpretation that was adopted for the purposes of this research. This section also brings to the fore the attractive nature of the SE to meet rapidly changing needs of consumers, which ushers in the next section of literature review, positioning the SE as an economy to that of the traditional economy.
Further review introduces the concept of consumption in the SE and what may propagate that consumption. To further understand this, consumer psychology constructs, cognitive biases specifically, are further explored and together with the SE consumption literature, opens the line of enquiry of this research and forms the basis of the conceptual model formulated.

2.2 The sharing economy

Aristotle said: “On the whole, you find wealth much more in use than in ownership”

This sets the foundational elements of the concept of the SE. Aristotle’s sentiments are echoed in the SE characterisation by Hawlitschek et al. (2016) about the temporal nature of resource exchange from a private individual to a consumer for a usage fee, is very closely aligned to that of Kathan et al. (2016), who highlights the access-based (non-ownership) element from a consumer perspective. A broader definition of the SE includes the technological and process aspect of sharing exchanges being mediated by a (third party) platform (Eckhardt et al., 2019). One nuance highlighted is that the traditional sentiment of the word ‘sharing’ doesn’t apply to the SE as it’s not altruistic in nature and thus the distinctive difference between ‘access’ and ‘sharing’ is emphasized (Belk, 2010; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

The case of Airbnb represents an archetypal model of the SE, specifically in a commercial context, where a private property owner rents out a portion of or their full property to a visitor, in exchange for a fee, with the full transaction mediated and managed by a third-party platform owner (Airbnb). The underlying motivation for the host is to make an income by using excess realty capacity. In contrast to the traditional economy, assets are owned by firms (e.g., hotel chain) and utilised to make a profit with transactions being mediated by in-house software (e.g., hotels booking system). Further differences are apparent, for instance, hotels have operational and customer service elements (e.g., quality assurance, concierge service or room service) which out-perform Airbnb, therefore Airbnb competes with middle to lower tier hotels instead of upmarket

varieties, because Airbnb serves a different kind of traveller to one that would frequent a high-end traditional establishment (such as a businessperson for example) (Guttentag & Smith, 2017).

Apart from service-attribute disparities, implementing safety measures (e.g., presence of permanent security guards) is not within the ambit of control of the platform company (Richard & Cleveland 2016), resulting in safety concerns about using Airbnb due to the instinctive sense of stranger-danger (Guttentag, 2015) with more pronounced criminality findings with Airbnb's room-share offering (Xu et al., 2019). Having said that, Airbnb always sought to offer authentic travel experiences, where apart from it being a more cost-effective alternative, guests want to engage with the locals (Guttentag, 2015). Recently, however, the theme of "belonging", inclusivity and diversity has become more prominent with Airbnb's CEO reaffirming Airbnb's commitment to having global communities, hosts and guests alike, feel like they belong as Airbnb's greatest challenge they face currently, is discrimination (Chesky, 2022).

Airbnb has a self-regulatory system where previous guests can rate their stay according to a 5-star system, as a reputation management tool, however, Ert et al. (2016) found that an astoundingly high average rating of 4.5 to 5.0 was found in European countries, making individual ratings indistinguishable. This corroborates Eckhardt et al.'s (2019) sentiment that SE rating systems are not a gauge of trustworthiness. Trust is an important social construct that comes up when reviewing the SE marketplace. In any market transaction, regulatory governance as well as trust between stakeholders, are important elements of exchange-facilitation (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Chiles and McMackin (1996) observed that in situations of uncertainty, external legal and governance elements (regulatory) come to the fore to foster trust in the exchange, such as drawing up legal contracts with safeguarding clauses for example, so does that infer (in the case of low or self-regulatory markets) that trust is the dominant requirement when participating in the SE?

Because the core element of the SE is the transactional nature between two individuals, the element of trust and risk aversion is a fundamental element in SE engagement (Santana & Parigi, 2015), particularly when sharing a private home space with a stranger. The literature on trust and its precursors, in context of the SE, is inadequate (Ter Huurne et al., 2017). Because so "little is known about the nature of trust and its role as a regulatory institution in the sharing economy... an important question is, what types of

judgments, heuristics and **biases** affect the consumption of shared (as opposed to owned) resources?" (Eckhardt et al., 2019, p.9 &11)

2.3 The sharing economy: evolution of terminology and constructs

There is a lack of consistency or beyond-inchoate definition of the SE, where ironically, as Botsman proclaimed: "The sharing Economy lacks a shared definition". The reason for this is due to different contexts and definitions of 'sharing', which may or may not be altruistic in nature. As Belk (2007) points out, traditionally sharing refers to an "act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use as well as the act and process of receiving something from others for our use" (pg. 127). Belk (2007) further alludes that this is more contexualised for interactions between familiar people; with strangers being less welcomed in that transactional process. This is significantly different to the SE, where the concept of sharing is between strangers and in a different commercialized context, removing the altruistic element of that type of human interaction.

The SE is also referred to as peer-to-peer sharing, collaborative or access-based consumption. A key benefit of peer-to-peer sharing, and collaborative consumption is the accessibility to services whilst service providers have an opportunity to earn an income. According to Sundararajan (2016), there might be a viable reason for that in that the SE allows individuals to consume based on immediate need rather than simply consuming because it offers a lower cost alternative to what is offered in the traditional economy.

A very powerful example was offered by Sundararajan (2016): in a world with transactional seamlessness and zero transactional cost, it would be easy for someone to purchase a high-end sports car today for a luxury driving experience and then selling that and replacing it with a minivan for a family camping trip. However, this is not possible since "durable goods are "illiquid"—you can't just simply buy and sell them instantly. There are significant and large transaction costs associated with buying and selling" (Sundararajan, 2016, pg. 94).

The very same can be applied to a house, where arguably, may incur higher levels of friction and transactional costs in its purchasing and selling cycle. This makes for an appealing case for Airbnb hosts, who offer temporary accommodation to guests for a fee, earning an income from an "illiquid" asset and potentially use that earning to enter the same SE as a guest. This would allow any consumer in the SE to live in various geographical locations, in a seamless way. Thus, it is comprehensible that the SE is

estimated to be worth billions of dollars and is growing on a rapid trajectory (Köbis et al., 2020).

When describing consumption in collaborative economy, Botsman and Rogers (2010), expound 3 system types:

1- "Product services systems"- where goods are not sold, but rather used as a service, enabling an end-user the benefit of use without having to purchase. This product may still be intermittently used by its owner
2- "Redistribution markets" – goods which are no longer needed by one party can be redistributed to someone else, either for free or as a swap-out or sold
3- "Collaborative lifestyles" - persons, usually strangers, with similar needs or interests, can share intangible assets such as space, time, and knowledge. A global example highlighted is that of Airbnb, where a guest can share a living space with a host, in what is referred to as peer-to-peer travel

Botsman and Rogers (2010), further substantiate what Köbis et al. (2020) observed about the SE being on a growth trajectory, by noting that the SE is not a knee-jerk response to recession, nor is it "a niche trend […] It's a socioeconomic groundswell that will transform the way companies think about their value propositions—and the way people fulfil their needs" (Botsman and Rogers, 2010, para 5).

Fulfilment of need is a central theme when reviewing the academic literature about the SE and how that definition has evolved somewhat between different scholars and their works.

Belk's (2014) work was centred around resource distribution between individuals for a fee, which is congruent to Frenken and Schor's (2017) definition in a commercial sense. The idea that resource-sharing occurs between individuals, as opposed to the business-individual traditional economic relationship. However, Belk's (2014) terminology does not highlight the temporal nature of the transaction and both Belk (2014) and Frenken and Schor (2017), reduce the compensation to the possibility of monetary gain. Based on this research, the SE definition that aligns with this research paper is one of commercial application, one which involves monetary exchange.

Chasin et al. (2018) describes a peer-to-peer economy as one that can be commercial in nature between two persons, in a transaction that is temporal in nature and that is IT enabled. Here the notion of 'peer' sharing is also evaluated, suggesting that this economy can indeed be one of altruistic-natured sharing, all the way to commercial benefit, which does not fully align with the exclusively commercial context that this research is based on, namely, Airbnb. Based on the commercial vs non-commercial

application of the SE, Sundararajan (2016) commonly uses the term ‘on-demand economy’ as an umbrella term to describe the ‘sharing economy’, to encompass all contexts. However, for purposes of this research, the term ‘sharing economy’ has been retained.

A hybrid terminology between several works would best be suited for the context of this research:

1- encapsulates the IT-enabled (and online platform) aspect of Chasin et al (2018)
2- merged with Hawlitschek et al. (2018) terminology that sees the transaction as solely commercial in nature
3- and Eckhardt et al.’s (2019) qualification that the transaction is not only IT-enabled but is specifically third-party (platform) mediated.
4- And Kathan et al.’s (2016, p. 663) characterisation of the SE as one that represents “non-ownership, temporary access, and redistribution of material goods or less tangible assets such as money, space, or time”.
5- Where temporary access granted to a consumer is based on the service providers ownership of an under-utilised asset (Frenken and Schor, 2017)

The evolution of terminology, its main constructs and its application in this research can be seen in figure 1, which was compiled using the terminology of Belk (2014), Frenken and Schor (2017), Chasin et al. (2018), Hawlitschek et al. (2018) and Eckhardt et al. (2019).

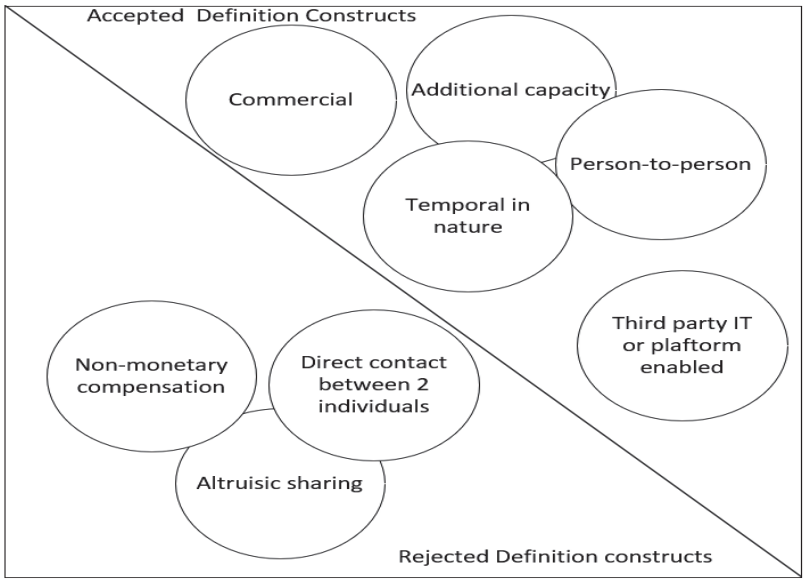


Figure 2: Accepted and Rejected SE definition constructs

Source: Author (based on the scholarly works of: Belk (2014), Frenken and Schor (2017), Chasin et al. (2018), Hawlitschek et al. (2018) and Eckhardt et al. (2019))

2.4 Traditional economy consumption comparison

Traditionally, one could call in to a hotel's sales center to reserve a room for short-term accommodation. Given the advancement of digital technologies, one could arguably make an online hotel booking now. However, this is not an exclusive sales channel as a guest can simply call the hotel reception and speak to an employee, unlike the mechanism of interaction when engaging with the SE as a consumer whereby third-party owned platforms, manage host-guest interaction exclusively in a 1:1 communication.

Another element to note is that digital advancement has allowed a level of marketing and operational sophistication and personalization, which allows platform-based SE firms to match client to service provider. It should be noted, however, that consumer platforms have a high level of asymmetry in that sellers have a greater growth-effect on buyers than vice versa (Chu and Manchanda, 2016). This makes sense as Airbnb's quantity and diversity of the accommodation listings essentially provide an extensive selection list to choose from as a guest, driving growth in the buyer base as Chu and Manchanda (2016) asserts.

Traditional firms are commercial asset owners, with the likes of hotels or car rentals investing in commercial assets, whereas in the SE, individuals are asset owners, renting out spare personal capacity to other individuals. In this regard, Dellaert (2017) refers to SE service providers as producers or co-producers, and thus asserts that firms need to "rethink their role in the marketing value creation process. Firms need to define new marketing actions that create value for consumers who are also co-producers" (pg. 1).

However, it must be noted that should this value creation be realised, the heterogenous offering from the SE still presents a unique value proposition with respect to diversity of accommodation and geographical offerings. This contrasts with a hotel chain that, for all intents and purposes, presents a standard offering in prescribed locations.

Another element which distinguishes the traditional short-term accommodation economy from the SE (such as Airbnb), is the level of expectations guests have. For example, with Airbnb, a host can rent out a room, whilst remaining on the property (Yang et al. 2019), with hosts fulfilling multiple roles, whereas traditional establishments have a complement of staff that fulfil various and diverse functions including porters, receptionists, service staff, concierge services and security, to name a few. Invariably, such a stark difference will give rise to unmet SE service expectations.

From a security perspective, Guttentag (2015), has highlighted that some consumers are wary of security concerns of staying in a stranger's home and view such engagement as a high-risk encounter. It is evident from Xu et al.'s (2019) research, that high crime rates have been demonstrated in the SE, particularly with Airbnb's shared-room listings. With traditional establishments in the short-term accommodation sector, there are general security measures in place to deter criminal activity and have guest safety policies in place, usually with full-time security personnel (Chan and Lam, 2013). With Airbnb, the listing's security measures are varied and host dependent, with the platform itself having no direct control measures to maintain a basic security standard (Richard and Cleveland, 2016). Furthermore, additional personal safety security measures are prevalent in hotels such as fire detection sensors and evacuation plans (Richard and Cleveland, 2016), compliance of which are driven by national regulatory bodies, whereas the SE is not subject to the same.

When considering how star-ratings work in the traditional hotel sector as compared with Airbnb, it is evident that there are varying interpretations about that star-ratings mean. This is a problematic area in the SE because even though star ratings are generally used on e-commerce sites and other online purchasing platforms, the bilateral rating mechanism employed on Airbnb is perceived to be a system that encourages covert coercion (in that guests rate host and host rates guest, creating an agreeable rating environment more than an objective one), thus bring the credibility of such as rating system into question (Berg et al., 2020). This could provide reasoning as to why Airbnb ratings are generally very high. Whereas hotel star-ratings are regulation driven bringing credibility and trust in the ratings applied.

Another element of concern is where Airbnb star-ratings are conflated with the star-rating system of the traditional short-term accommodation sector, where star ratings are used to define the level of luxury as opposed to Airbnb, where star ratings are meant to determine the level of met-expectations. Thus, some hosts may provide the guest with the what was expected 100% (which should render a 5-star rating), yet their rating may be a 3 or 4 because the guest has based that on the modest nature of the accommodation (Porges, 2016). Similarly, novice Airbnb travellers may choose a 5-star rated listing only to be disappointed because their expectations of what 5-star means, is aligned to the traditional hotel sector star-ratings. Another misrepresentation is when average high star-ratings are misperceived as cues of popularity instead of 'expectations met', which is why Kim and Gambino's (2016) specifically refer to star-rating systems as

‘bandwagon cues’. This is why Ert el al. (2016), affirm that “sharing economy platforms must understand what consumers infer from both visual and the non-visual information posted on their sites and should design their sites accordingly to attempt to reduce potential biases.” (p. 72)

The SE also presents multiple positive experiences, which explains why companies such as Airbnb have experienced such rapid growth and disrupted established firms in the traditional economy. Mody et al. (2017), conducted comparative research between hotel and Airbnb and described the Airbnb experience as an accommodation ‘experiancescape’, because it represents a holistic experience. In fact, Mody et al. (2017), highlight findings that Airbnb guests “indicated a significantly greater experience of all eight dimensions—entertainment, education, escapism, esthetics, serendipity, localness, communitas, and personalization—than those who stayed at a hotel. The importance of the additional dimensions is evidenced by the fact that two of the top three areas in which Airbnb outperforms hotels are communitas and localness” (pg. 30)

2.5 Consumption in the sharing economy

The SE represents a business model that has transformed the way people access goods and services, in that it shifts the focus from ownership to access (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). In this economy, people partake as consumers through accessing goods rather than owning it and despite the two vastly different methods of consumption (ownership vs access), the very act of consumption yields the same outcomes for the consumer (Chen, 2009). For example, the host of a beach house is privy to the same facility and seaside views as the Airbnb guest. From a traditional economy perspective, a similar notion exists, as Chen (2009) highlights in the example of art appreciation, whereby art pieces can be enjoyed by a private owner in the privacy of their home or by a visitor to a museum or gallery.

Consumers realise the value in an access-based market over one that focuses exclusively on ownership (Chen, 2009). In traditional consumer behaviour, possession or ownership, through acquisition, has been an extension of self and thus synthesised the consumer’s self-worth, but that perception has changed with the advent of the SE model (Chen, 2009). In addition to an extension of self, societies have an evolving perception about what constitutes value, and the access consumption mode of the SE

has opened an avenue to adapt to a society with fluid perceptions of what constitutes value (Bardhi & Eckhardt,2012).

There has been interesting and intriguing literature on what perpetuates success in the SE. Many articles underpin the element of trust as a key driving factor of participation as well as increased profit for service providers in the SE. For example, an appealing profile picture of an Airbnb host, or one that exudes trustworthiness, allows a host to charge a higher rate (Ert et al., 2016). Similarly, Karlsson et al. (2017), purports that guests who exude a sense of trustworthiness in their profile picture, are more likely to get their booking request accepted. However, the construct of 'trustworthiness' is a subjective concept. Someone that may appear trustworthy to one person may not appear to be trustworthy to another. Thus, what profile-picture elements generate trust to the person viewing it? Could it be as simple as judging someone to be 'similar to me' or how close does that trustworthiness teeter on the discriminatory?

Given that accommodation SE platforms such as Airbnb have very little verified information linked to its respective listings, profile pictures (visual cues) seemingly play a role in SE decision-making according to Karlsson et al. (2017) and Ert et al. (2016). Linked to this, is the similarity perception that guests and hosts have of each other, in terms of education level as well as age, which may catalyse trust partnerships in such an economy (Kwok and Xie, 2018). This is indicative that there is no rational basis for such judgement. How would one make rational judgements when engaging in the accommodation SE, given that a host and potential guest are strangers to each other, with sparse and unverified information?

It is part of human cognitive psychology that explain how human beings become subject to different types of cognitive biases when decision-making happens under conditions of uncertainty and low information utilities, even in the context of extremely important strategic decisions (Das and Teng, 1999). This is an extension of what was echoed more than a decade prior, that these subjective judgements are used to simplify a hard mental task that's brought about in a situation of uncertainty; and even though it may materialise positively in some situations, it may lead to serious consequences with continued and engrained application (Barnes Jnr., 1984). Outside of a "similarity affiliation" to a profile picture or background information (such as age or education level), positive rating and reviews in the SE play a positive role in a host's ability to charge higher prices, due to the digital cue being a 'trust signal' (Wang et al., 2019)

‘Trust’ is a common theme when reviewing the SE. As Köbis et al. (2020) states: “Trust is the fuel of economic transactions, especially in the sharing economy” (pg. 318). This is sound statement considering the SE, by its very nature, is highly intimate in that it requires a consumer to temporarily occupy the personal space of a private individual, who is unknown to that consumer. Airbnb has had numerous instances of poor customer service complaints including fake listings or reviews, deceptive listing attributes, unsafe and unsanitary conditions, as well as discrimination against special needs people, or people different race groups and sexual orientation (Fergusson, 2021).

Hawlitschek et al. (2016) purports that in low-trust environments, there are other constructs at play that may explain the motivation of consumer and buyer in the SE, such as social experience, belonging, heterogeneity of product and pro-sharing to name a few. However, scarcity, anti-capitalism and income are not motivators to participate in the SE.

Hawlitschek et al.’s (2016) study does not represent an exhaustive list of the plethora of possible psychological constructs that may come into play in the SE.

2.6 Social Proof Cognitive Bias: The Bandwagon Effect

The bandwagon effect is a form of cognitive bias where a person’s actions are motivated by the actions of others to gain conformity with a greater group. Engrained as a political concept initially, the idea started evolving to include consumerism as far back as 1949, where Bindra et al. (2022) highlights the role Duesenberry played in initiating the conversation about consumption being influenced by the spending patterns and habits of others, but it was only in 1979 that the concept was adopted in business spheres. Literature on online consumerism in the luxury brand market demonstrates that “bandwagon behaviour plays a powerful double role. Specifically, it may impact on both the cognitive beliefs and conative judgements […] of consumers” (Mainolfi, 2020, p.291). Thus, cognition about whether something is worthwhile pursuing as well as conative judgement as to formulate the intention to pursue, are part of bandwagon behaviour. Mainolfi (2020) further elaborates how the bandwagon effect transpires in the context of an individual’s social evaluation against the societal group as a barometer to determine what constitutes a desired social status. This is what Shaik et al. (2015) calls ‘Interdependent Orientation’. For example, a food connoisseur will seek out a restaurant that has been critiqued by a reputable newspaper to have their own culinary experience (even though that restaurant may be at 50% capacity), as opposed to someone who

waits in line at a busy restaurant that they have never visited before but heard about through social media as the '*it* place to be'.

Due to the ubiquitous nature of the internet and social media, what was once considered popular in a localised setting, has now become a global and interrelated environment of what is deemed popular, hence the global followers of social media influencers. Social media "micro-celebrities" or "Influencers" are social media users, who make lifestyle content, have accumulated a large on-line following and are paid by companies to promote their product or brand with paid appearances at major social events (Jin et al, 2019).
The reason for this following is because social media users can relate to these social media influencers/celebrities and feel they are authentic in ways that traditional celebrities are not. This is also due to the ease of social interaction and communication with a social media personality as opposed to a traditional celebrity. This social presence is highly elevated in social personalities and a follower could easily follow the trajectory of their everyday life, comment on it and even have bi-directional communication with the personality they are following (Jin et al., 2019).

However, it was traditional celebrity leverage that catapulted Airbnb's influencer marketing strategy when Mariah Carey booked a luxurious mansion in Malibu, California and tagged Airbnb. This sparked collaboration efforts between Airbnb and influencers, to give rise to Airbnb's influencer marketing strategy, which is to collaborate in a very deliberate, selective, and strategic way with only with the most prominent influencers at the time. The transaction involves the influencer taking a picture of themselves at a very luxurious Airbnb location and tagging Airbnb in the post, in exchange for the influencer staying cost-free at that luxurious and costly location (Lets Influence, 2020).

The organic nature of this marketing model makes it very appealing for Airbnb as the influencer has a large social media following already, and the content the influencer posts is automatically viewable by followers. The interaction of follower to influencer is captured by social media platforms in three ways:

1- Covert digital tags such as number of views to indicate how many times a piece of content was viewed
2- Overt digital tags such as number of likes/dislikes or star ratings (1 for bad and 5 for excellent)
3- Digital interactions such as comments made by both influencer and follower

Thus, depending on the digital platform, users may interact with content by viewing it, liking or disliking it, commenting on it on the content page thread and, in the case of Airbnb, use as a 5-star rating system for users to show various levels of sentiment.

Furthermore, Neubaum and Kramer (2016), found that online comments regarding media stories alter the perception of those stories depending on crowd-opinion. Waddell and Sundar (2020) further purports that the sentiment (determined through likes/dislikes as well as comments) and audience size influences the extent of the bandwagon effect, where these comments (reviews), called audience cues, shape audience expectations. Thus, it is through public (digital) cues or signals (such as star ratings) that bandwagon behaviour is perpetuated. Kim and Gambino's (2016) specifically refer to star-rating systems as 'bandwagon cues'. This is why Ert el al. (2016), affirm that "sharing economy platforms must understand what consumers infer from both visual and the non-visual information posted on their sites and should design their sites accordingly to attempt to reduce potential biases." (p. 72)

Based on the above literature, bandwagon bias traits have been established, viz. 'susceptibility to social media influence' and Groupthink and how these character traits influence responses to digital (or bandwagon) cues:

- *$H1_a$: Social media susceptibility influences the response to digital cues*
- *$H2_a$: Susceptibility to Groupthink influences the response to digital cues*

2.7 Cognitive Decision: Affinity Bias

Affinity bias, interchangeably referred to as similarity bias, is an area of psychology that remains fascinating. It is a psychological construct that involves people having an affinity to- or liking of- an individual based on an 'in-group' notion such as 'same as me' whilst potentially disliking or having an aversion to someone who is an 'out-group' member or 'different to me' (de Kock & Hauptfleisch, 2018).

One form of similarity or affinity bias is that of racial similarity bias, where a person favours another based race. However, similar biases exist and is based on demographic information, such as ethnicity or gender and happens in environments where there is a poor level of detailed or structured information beyond demographics (de Kock & Hauptfleisch, 2018). In this instance, looking at someone picture or online profile divulges basic demographic insights but not much more than this. So why is having such visual information on display on social media or other sites important?

Nødtvedt et al. (2021) investigated the concept of self-congruence in sharing economy from a racial bias perspective, assessing behaviour between in-group (people like self in appearance (race/ethnicity)) and out-group (people different in appearance to self (race/ethnicity)) categories. The findings suggest that people use Airbnb host profile pictures as a visual signal or cue to formulate an opinion about whether the host is favourable or not (by assessing their in-group/out-group status) and thus, whether the listing would suffice (Nødtvedt et al., 2021).

This is supported by Ert et al. (2016), who reaffirm that guests use host profile pictures as a trust signal without knowing any other information about them, and subsequently "make purchase decisions based on these impressions" (p.69). However, based on Airbnb's own testimony, discriminatory behaviour was identified in hosts and recognised it as a problem significant enough to warrant a specialised project (called Project Lighthouse) to address it, and have "since 2016 […] removed 1.3 million people from Airbnb for declining to treat others without judgment or bias—but there's still a lot more work to be done" (Airbnb, 2020).

The concept of affinity bias is more encompassing than racial bias even though affinity bias (like racial bias) is rooted in self-congruence, such as unconscious bias, which is a form of affinity bias that Evans and Maley (2021) highlighted as the most significant (bias) finding when evaluating women's stifled progression to senior leadership roles in Australian firms. This bias is where men on the top echelons of firms recruit, sponsor and promote other (similar) men, to the exclusion of females irrespective of merit (Evans & Maley, 2021).

In consumer psychology, a known phenomenon occurs when a consumer, if faced with products that are very similar with no real differentiating elements, will use visual judgements in choice selection (Milosavljevic et al., 2012). How would this consumer psychology transpire when dealing with the SE?

SE platforms represent a host of digital cues, both visual and non-visual and the onus rests on platform owners to understand what their consumers infer from such information so that they can design their platforms accordingly, to minimise potential biases (Ert et al., 2016).

Outside of star-ratings and reviews, Airbnb also publish visual information in the form of listing pictures as well as participant profile pictures.

Based on the literature about affinity bias and known visual elements (such as Airbnb participant profile pictures) that may elicit specific responses, the following hypothesis have been formulated:

- *$H3_a$: 'Profile-picture affiliation' influences the response to visual cues*

2.8 Conclusion

To address the research question about cognitive biases in the SE, several hypotheses were developed and formulated into a conceptual model (Figure 3). In 2021, Airbnb had 2.9 million hosts globally, with 7 million active listing across 100 000 cities, spanning 220 countries (Dean, 2022). This is phenomenal growth considering Airbnb's first listing was in 2007, therefor understanding potential biases which may affect consumption in the SE would provide insightful information about consumption psychology. Understanding what kind of cognitive biases (if any) drive consumption in the sharing economy would contribute to the current literature of which (Eckhardt et al. (2019) highlights) so little is known. Furthermore, understanding if these biases influence responses to digital and visual cues that's platform-published:

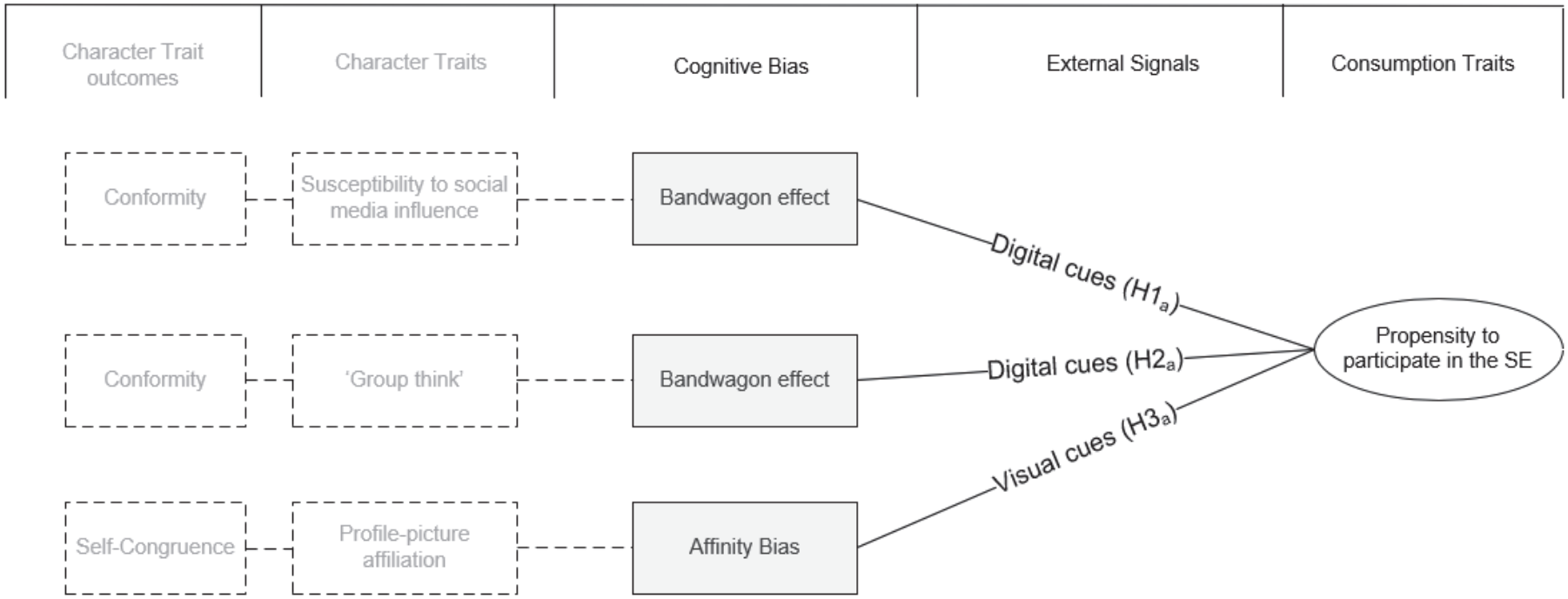


Figure 3: Conceptual Model

Source: Author

3 Research Methodology

The research methodology section has been outlined in the roadmap below (Fig. 4):

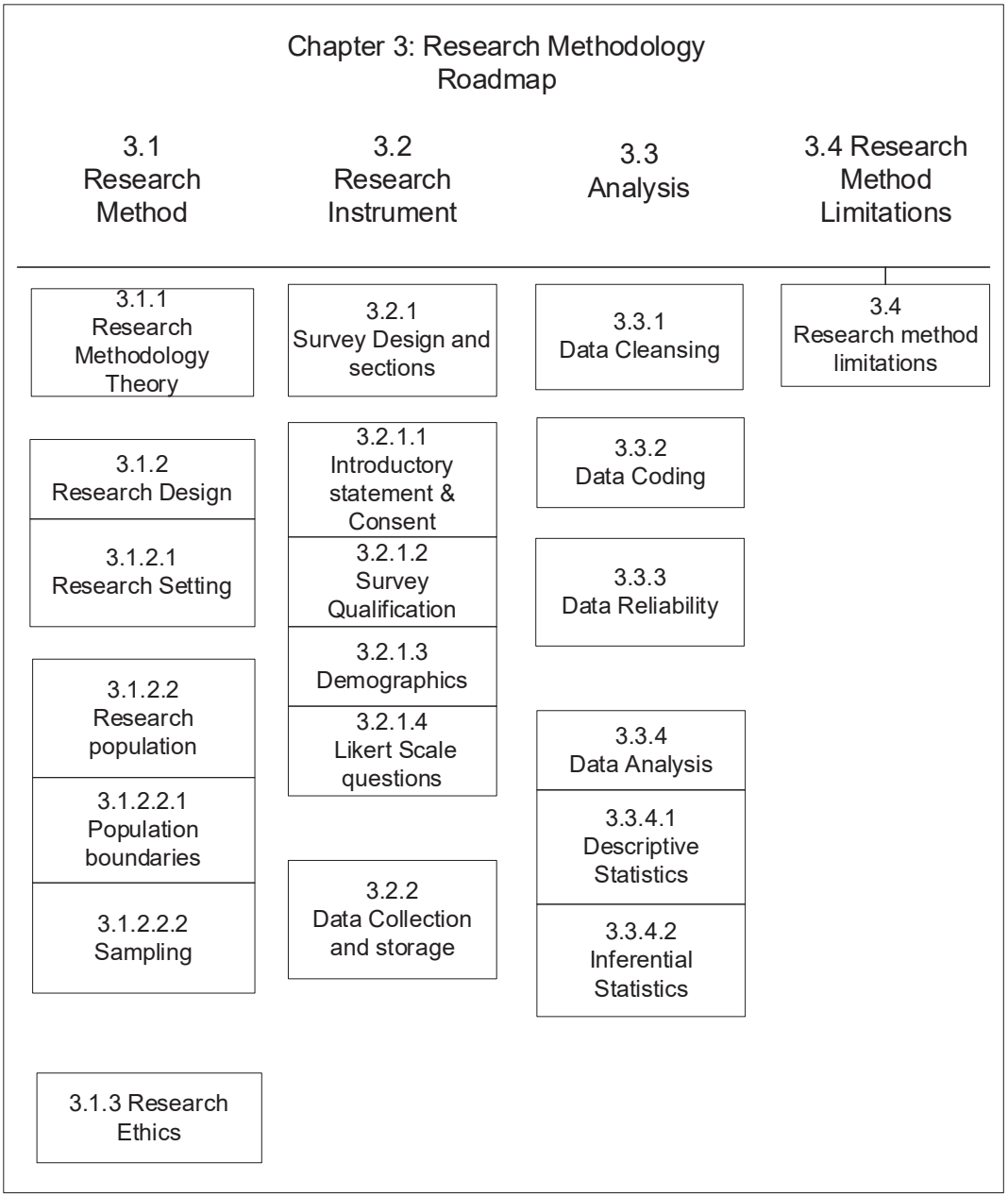


Figure 4: Research methodology roadmap

3.1 Research Method

3.1.1 Research methodology theory

After careful review of the various elements that comprise research methodological choices that would best suit this research, it was decided to follow a positivist epistemological approach, because the theory is rooted in scientific methods of research ("phenomenalism", "deductivism" and objectivity) and supports hypotheses formulation against which to test data collected (Bell et al., 2019, p.30).

Sousa (2010) describes positivists as those who "take observation and experimentation procedures as primordial ways to attest ontological claims, thus privileging the observable over the unobservable" (p.9). It is due to this observable phenomenon that embeds positivism as an empirical (verifiable by the researcher) ontology (nature of being), where occurrences are detectable and thus measurable (Sousa, 2010).
When considering the hypotheses that were formulated relating to both cognitive bias types (viz. Bandwagon effect and Affinity bias), the literature and theory exists in areas of consumer psychology and human behaviour.

Thus, based on accepted theory in cognitive bias, the research will either prove or disprove the hypotheses about whether such psychology indeed exists in the SE. Therefore, this research is deductive in nature. Deductive logic is used when empirically assessing developed theories (by scholars) against developed hypotheses (by researchers) (Bell et al., 2019).

The positivist approach is one that favours an etiological ideology where any observed event, has a preceding causative event, in a cause-effect relationship, with cause-effect relationships forms the basis of hypothesis development in 'scientific type' positivist research (Sousa, 2010).

However, correlational studies are included in the realm of positivist research, especially in situations where experimental tests are not viable. For example, when hypothesising that fast foods cause childhood obesity, it would be unethical to scientifically prove this by cause-effect trials in children, by feeding the test group fast-food whilst maintaining healthy meals in the control group. Thus, the study can make inferences through a

correlation study by hypothesising that the number of fast-food outlets operating in a particular area is positively correlated to childhood obesity in that area (Mukherji & Alban, 2014).

Similarly, with psychological constructs, upon which this research is based, directly testing affinity or similarity bias would not only be unethical but also unviable, as affinity bias may present in different forms. Affinity bias may present in different individuals based on various types of 'in-group' affiliation, such as gender, race, religion, or any other distinct element that may resonate with someone. For example, affinity bias may present itself where someone has an affinity to another based on gender, irrespective of race or ethnicity, whereas another person may have an affinity to someone based on shared ethnic identity, irrespective of gender.

3.1.2 Research Design

3.1.2.1 Research setting

The research setting aims to explain the experimental and social context that the research was conducted in. Airbnb is one of two popular SE models operating in South Africa (Mara, 2010) and because Airbnb represents a typical model of the SE and has the digital and imaging signalling cues on their platform (viz. star ratings and host /guest profile pictures respectively), Airbnb was selected as SE platform against which Airbnb participants or potential participants (part of my professional LinkedIn Network) were asked to partake in completing an online questionnaire.

Even though Guttentag (2019) has voiced an expressed need for more research to be conducted in Africa, coupled with the ever-changing regulatory environment in which Airbnb operates, no constraints were placed to focus on specific geographical regions and the research piece was approached as region-agnostic.

Overall, more research is needed to further improve the "understanding of this growing sector and its new consumers […] so as to continuously refine new product offerings and management practices" (So, Oh & Min, 2018, pg. 234). Based on this, the commercial context of the SE, Airbnb, was used in this study.

3.1.2.2 Research population

3.1.2.2.1 Population boundaries

The previous section outlined the research setting as that of Airbnb, being a quintessential model of the commercial context of the SE. With global connectivity, and Airbnb's presence across 220+ countries (Airbnb, 2022), the research will not be limited to any specific geographical region as it would represent a more expansive view about the consumer psychology as it pertains to Airbnb.

The research population is set against the abovementioned research setting and is defined in 3 ways:

- Unit of analysis (level)
- Population boundaries
- Sampling and Sample size

The level or unit of analysis for this research is a micro-level study, analysing the behaviour of individual persons. The unit of analysis represents the actor that is being analysed and is the entity of the study from which data is collected, and in this quantitative study, the unit of analysis are individuals who know what Airbnb is and who have stayed in temporary accommodation before or are planning to. The population also includes individuals who are, have been or plan to be Airbnb hosts.

To test the hypotheses that were developed for this research, specific population boundaries have been articulated. The target population (figure 5) and identified for this research are individuals that are 18 years of age or older, who know what Airbnb is and who fulfil one or more of the following criteria:

1- Stayed at an Airbnb previously
2- Or are considering staying at an Airbnb
3- Or stayed in temporary accommodation previously
4- Or are considering staying in temporary accommodation
5- Or are previous or current Airbnb hosts
6- Or are considering becoming an Airbnb host

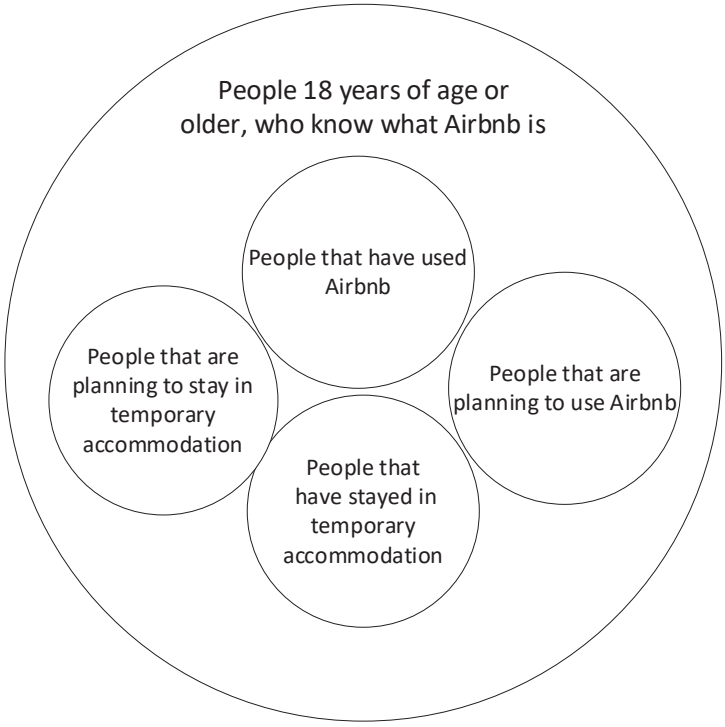


Figure 5: Scope of the target population

Source: Author

3.1.2.2.2 Sampling

There are 2 general methods when broaching the topic of sampling, probability and non-probability sampling (Bell et al., 2019). A probability sample is meant to be is a representative subset of a larger population under study, however, “quite a lot of research is based on non-probability samples […]. Sometimes the use of non-probability samples will be due to the impossibility or extreme difficulty of obtaining probability samples” (Bell et al., 2019, p.183). This research was based on respondents from the researcher’s professional network who have participated in or are planning to participate in the temporary accommodation market and all of whom should have knowledge about Airbnb. Having had no access to customer and/or host information or databases due to Airbnb’s Information Privacy Policy (Airbnb, 2020) and with the general privacy laws recognised in many countries, the only plausible solution was to conduct non-probability sampling.

As mentioned in the previous section, the population for this study was identified as adults who know about Airbnb but who have also participated or plan to participate in the temporary accommodation market. However, it is not possible to conduct a study of the

global population of temporary-accommodation-market hosts or guests, and as such, the sampling frame is represented by the researcher's professional network mainly.

Non-probability sampling was used and comprised of the following sampling methods:

- Convenience sampling: the survey was distributed to researcher's network (LinkedIn)
- Subscription sampling: the survey was loaded on a professional survey website (surveycircle.com) for subscribers to complete at their will
- Snowball sampling: the researcher's network or subscribers could pass on the survey to their respective networks to complete. Even though Bell et al. (2019, pg. 396) says that it is "very unlikely that the sample will be representative of the population, though, as […] suggested, the very notion of a population may be problematic in some circumstances"

3.1.3 Research Ethics

The researcher ensured that all research conducted was done in an ethical way and subscribed to the University of Pretoria's ethical research practices and policy. This entailed getting ethical clearance prior to any research was conducted and thereafter conducting research according to what was cleared by the university's ethical revision committee. See appendix 1 for the researcher's Ethics clearance application and appendix 2 for the ethics clearance confirmation the researcher received from the GIBS ethics review committee.

The researcher undertook to maintain the core principles that comprise ethical research standards, as outlined by Bell et al. (2019), by:

1- Ensuring no harm (physical or psychological) to survey participants by not posing questions that are offensive
2- Ensuring that only responses were captured for respondents who gave explicit consent to participate by ending the survey if a respondent did not consent
3- Ensuring that the research methods did not invade the privacy of any participant by not capturing any personal identifiers and only asking generic demographic questions to understand the population being surveyed
4- Ensuring that no deception occurred whilst conducting the research by identifying the researcher, their supervisor and informing the audience about the context of the research being conducted

3.2 Research Instrument

The research instrument used was a cross-sectional survey where respondents answered an online questionnaire designed in Qualtrics. This type of cross-sectional survey design is “a research design that entails the collection of data on more than one case […] and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables”, the data of which is analysed “to detect patterns of association” (Bell et al., 2019, pg. 59)

3.2.1 Survey Design and Sections

The following sections outline the various elements of the cross-sectional survey and its design that was employed in this research:

- Introductory statement and consent
- Survey qualification criteria and process flow
- Demographic information collected
- Likert scale questions posed for hypotheses testing

3.2.1.1 Introductory statement and consent

The introductory paragraph was placed at the beginning of the survey, so that potential respondents could learn about who the researcher and their supervisor is; what their respective contacts details are; the institution the researcher is working under and the context of the research for which the survey was developed for.

The introduction also called for people over the age of 18 to respond, as the survey called for consent to be given, and because the age of majority in South Africa was lowered from 21 years to 18 years in 2008 (Faber & van Vuuren, 2009), all persons aged 18 or older were allowed to consent and partake in this research survey.

3.2.1.2 Survey qualification criteria and process flow

The survey was designed with 3 levels of qualification criteria. The first qualification criterion was a consent request. If the respondent did not give consent, the survey would end. The second qualification criterion was assessing if the respondent knows what

Airbnb is. If the respondent affirmed in the negative, the survey would end. The third qualification is a multi-layered qualification that subscribes to the population boundaries highlighted earlier. Albeit that the survey did not automatically end if the respondent affirmed in the negative, these boundaries were applied to the resulting analysis whereby respondents outside of the population boundary were excluded from the results.

The process flow depicted in figure 6 outlines the qualification criteria and how it was applied.

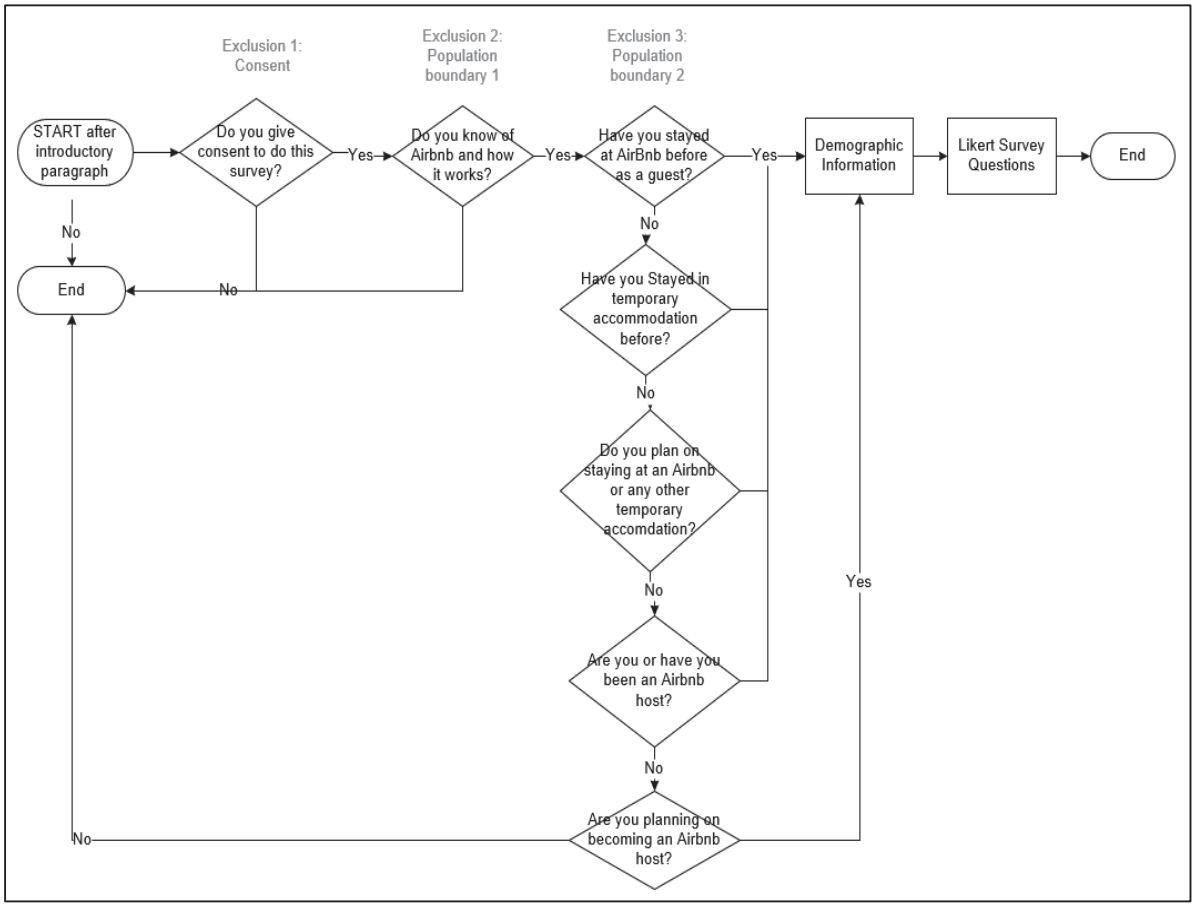


Figure 6: Survey design: flow and logic
Source: Author

3.2.1.3 Demographics

The types of demographic questions are quite standard in terms of the various demographic elements that are prompted for responses, which includes race or ethnicity, age, gender and education level (Hughs et al., 2016). Even though Hughs et al. (2016)

also includes the geographical location as a common demographical question, it was excluded from the researcher's survey as today's globalised communities may align their national identity with the place of their birth instead of the place of their residence.

The question about gender has transformed lately, with a much more expansive array than the previously documented binary choice, hence, the researcher adapted the survey questionnaire accordingly.

Mittendorf et al. (2019), purports that when it comes to the SE, millennials (born between 1981 and 1996), are more willing to engage in the SE and in fact says that "The sharing economy is a defining feature of the millennial generation" (pg. 1083). The age groups of the survey were approximated to collect data that represents the various 'generations'.

Because the research did not focus on any specific geographical region, the researcher included a comprehensive racial and ethnicity identification demographic question (merged into a single construct) that represents generic global ethnic/racial populations, including Polynesians and Native Americans.

Andreotti et al. (2020), states "that a number of sociodemographic antecedents affect participation in the sharing economy, such as age, gender, education, or income. These variables may directly influence participatory behaviors" (pg. 3). As such, the researcher included, over and above age and gender, all levels representative of the full education spectrum (from 'Some school' to PhD).

All sociodemographic questions were also given an option for the respondent to 'prefer not to say' to protect their individual right to abstain from answering such questions. The full spectrum of demographic questions can be seen in table 2 below.

To ensure that respondents complete the survey, the number of questions as well as demographic information was limited to what was required for the study to prevent survey fatigue.

Table 2: Sociodemographic questions and response options presented in the survey

Sociodemographic question	Response options
What gender do you identify as?	Male Female Non-binary/third gender Prefer not to say
What is your ethnicity?	Asian or Middle Eastern Black Hispanic or Latino/a Multi-ethnic or mixed race Native American Polynesian White Other Prefer not to say
What is your age?	18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 55+ Prefer not to say
What is your relationship status currently?	Married or in a relationship Unmarried and single Prefer not to say
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Some school High School Technical qualification or trade school Bachelor's degree Honor's degree Master's degree PhD or higher Prefer not to say

Source: Author

3.2.1.4 Likert scale questions for hypotheses testing

A Cross-sectional survey is an appropriate instrument that is used in social surveys and entails multiple data cases as a snapshot in time as opposed to measuring responses over a period of time. That single snapshot view produces data that is analysed to detect patterns and relationships between various entities (Bell et al., 2019).

Even though digital and visual cues are integral to testing the relevant biases, no vignettes or graphically representations will be considered in the assessment protocol because of the diverse demographics of potential respondents that would make selecting 'objective' visual cues (such as profile pictures specifically), impossible.

Albeit the “advantage of the vignette over such an attitude question is that it anchors the choice in a situation and as such reduces the possibility of an unreflective reply” (Bell et al., 2019, p.264), using vignettes would not be a viable application for the purposes of this research. Applying a Likert scale to a vignette is designed to determine cognitive behavioural qualities, however, applying a Likert scale to a vignette is not viable given the nature of this research.

Correct survey design is imperative to get responses that reflect the truth as it pertains to the subject matter being surveyed. Thus, this research was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale. A 5 or 7-point scale has been found to be the optimal range, which is inclusive of a neutral midpoint, as a 5-point scale caters for adult respondents (as opposed to children where a 3-point scale is more suitable), and a scale narrow enough to maintain cognitive ease among respondents yet represents a wide enough response range to acceptably capture the respondents’ psychometric spectrum (Leung, 2011; Chen et al., 2015).

It was further “recommended using fully labelled 5-point scales for the general population and fully labelled 7-point scales for populations with high levels of verbal skills and experience with using survey questionnaires” (Chyung et al.,2017, pg. 20), hence the researcher opted for a 5-point scale.

It is also purported that there are fewer instances of mis-responses in cases where ‘reverse questions’ are asked (Chyung et al., 2017) and tests the same construct more thoroughly by framing the survey question in the affirmative and formulating a similar question but formulating it using its opposite, such as:

i. I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too
ii. I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it

Both questions are interrogating the same psychological construct. A respondent who answers “agree” to i, should answer “disagree” to ii and vice versa.

As earlier mentioned, the survey was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale to assess the respondent’s psychometric outcomes based on the survey statements posed Appendix 3). A natural question then arises as to why a more comprehensive (say a 13-point) or a more concise (say a 3-point) scale is not used. Research has shown that 5- or 7-point scales are optimal with 7 being particularly useful for professionals with a relatively high cognitive ability and the survey can be completed fairly quickly (Chen et al., 2015).

However, higher-scale surveys may require the use of more cognitive effort and would take longer for respondents to complete even though such scales have more comprehensive and applicable psychometric responses for respondents to choose from, yielding a lower midpoint result. (Chen et al., 2015). The use of a 7-pont scale (as with any odd-numbered Likert scaling system) means the deliberate inclusion on a midpoint and its inclusion is to avert “forced-choice scales” as respondents will be forced to select any response even if they truly feel that a midpoint response would have been most suitable (Chyung et al., 2017, pg. 17). Chyung et al. (2017) also highlights the drawback of including a midpoint response as it is not definitive and can be attributed to respondents being indifferent to the survey statement; they neither agree nor disagree; they do not understand the statement or is simply a response used as a “dumping ground when they are responding to survey items that are unfamiliar to them, or items that are ambiguous or socially undesirable” (pg. 17)

However, Chyung et al. (2017) have demonstrated in early studies by Matell and Jacoby in 1997, that surveys with more anchors deter respondents from having a midpoint response tendency, thus, this research used 5 anchors in the scale statements presented in the survey. Wording of midpoint option is important because if the anchor depicts the sentiment of neutrality such as ‘neither agree or disagree’ or ‘neutral’, the respondent’s opinion could be considered as midway between agreement and disagreement, whereas it doesn’t truly reflect the instance when a respondent is undecided or doesn’t know (i.e. the difference between a neutral opinion and the absence of opinion) (Chyung et al., 2017). To mitigate this scenario, this survey maintained a neutral midpoint anchor, but also include an ‘I don’t know/ undecided’ survey option outside of the scale.

This would distinguish a neutral opinion from one which has no opinion. Furthermore, “it is feasible that participants of higher cognitive capacity would be less likely to endorse the middle response for reasons other than moderate trait standing” due to the intellectual satisfaction of providing accurate responses (Kulas and Stachowski, 2013, pg. 256). The assumption here is that the population selected for this study is considered as higher cognitive individuals. It must also be noted, like any other social survey, an element of ‘social desirability’ bias may result as some respondents would reply, based on what they perceive to be socially acceptable responses (Chen et al., 2015).

Because bandwagon bias is not a psychological construct that can easily be measured as a single psychological dimension, the underpinning characteristics require assessment. This research used two elements to test bandwagon bias: viz. Groupthink and 'Susceptibility to social media'. In the case of Groupthink and 'Susceptibility to social media influence'; both character traits require the belief that "the individual must then trust the intentional nature of the behavior" of someone else (Bindra et al., 2022, pg. 308) and have a "belief in the inherent morality of the group" (Janis, 1991, pg. 239), which are inherently testing the same concept. This is congruent to Janis' (1991) extension which also highlights further Groupthink psychological traits (drawing further congruency between bandwagon bias to both Groupthink and social media susceptibility in that there's a belief in "Collective Rationalization", "Out-Group Stereotypes" and "illusion of Unanimity" (pg. 239)

Based on this the researcher has tested bandwagon bias based on Groupthink and 'social media susceptibility as depicted in table 3.

Table 3: Bandwagon bias character trait testing: Groupthink and 'Social media susceptibility

Group Think	GroupThink1	I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too
	GroupThink2	I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself
	*GroupThink3	I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it
Social media susceptibility construct	SocialM 1	I follow at least one social media influencer
	SocialM 2	If there is a large social media hype about a product, I am more likely to buy it

Source: Author *Reverse formulated question

Like bandwagon bias, affinity bias is not a psychological construct that is easily tested given the extensive array of affinity traits that exist (for example: affinity to another based on religion, gender, ethnicity or race, education level, nationality etc.). A form of affinity bias is where a person has an affinity, a liking or hold in favour a person (over others), based on that person's demographic information, such as race, ethnicity, or gender without knowing much else of that individual apart from demographic-type information (de Kock & Hauptfleisch, 2018). A way to garner superficial demographic information, is by looking at someone's profile picture or photograph. Thus, to test affinity bias character

traits, the trait of ‘online profile-picture affiliation’ was used in this research and was represented in the survey as per table 4.

Table 4: Affinity bias character trait testing: Online profile picture affiliation

Online Profile-Picture affiliation	PPA1	If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture
	PPA 2	Someone’s profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort
	PPA 3	I need to see someone’s profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort

Source: Author

Because this research was based on the SE, Airbnb was used as the representation of that, the research was interrogating the use of digital cues to see if individuals, who displayed bandwagon bias traits (such as Groupthink *and* ‘susceptibility to social media’) were influenced by online digital cues such as star ratings and/or social media hype.

Additionally, this research also tested the use of online visual cues to see if individuals, who displayed traits of ‘profile-picture affiliation’ were influenced by online visual cues such as profile pictures of others.

Based on the above, the digital and visual cues were used to test its influence on individuals who display the cognitive bias traits of bandwagon bias and affinity bias respectively. This relationship testing is represented in figure 7.

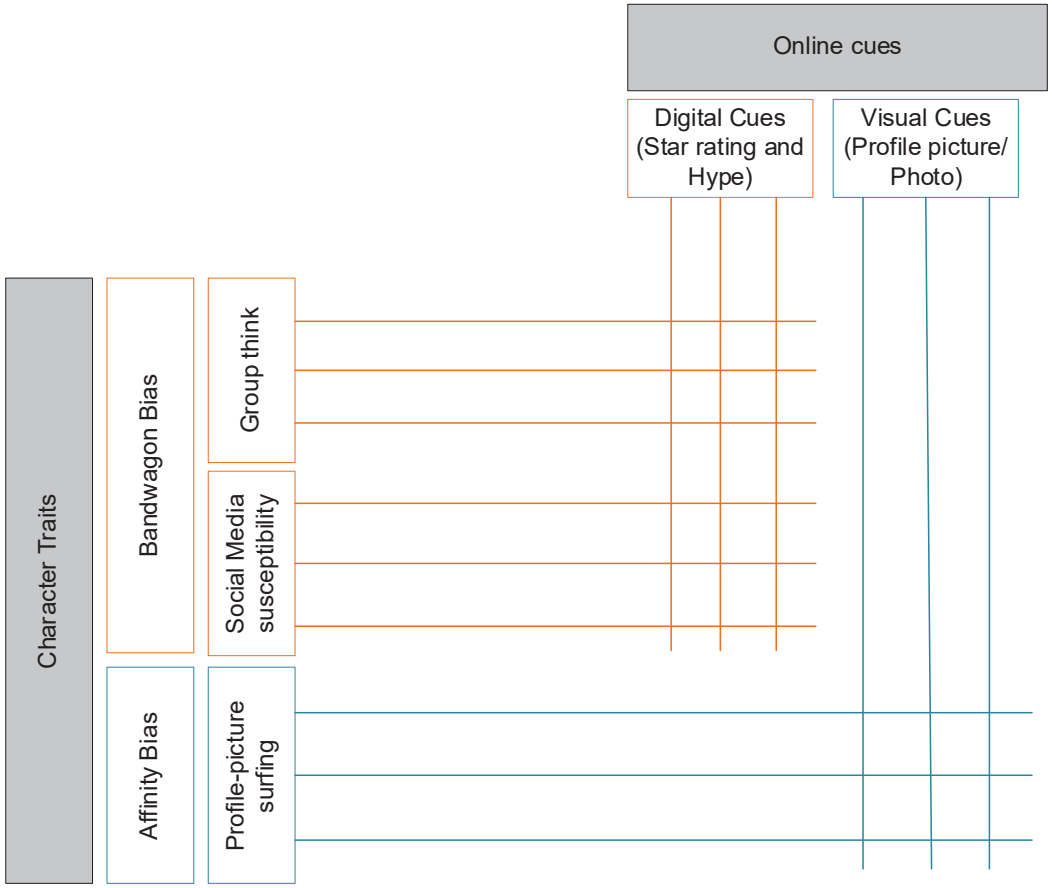


Figure 7: Relationship and hypotheses testing (Online cues vs character traits to determine presence of cognitive biases in the SE)
Source: author

3.2.2 Data Collection and Storage

A snowball sampling method was applied where the researchers LinkedIn connections could forward the survey for their respective networks to opt-in. Furthermore, an opt-in sampling method was used by publishing the survey on a survey site. Thus, 3 methods of data gathering were applied:

1- Convenience sampling whereby the researcher's direct social networks could complete the survey
2- Snowball sampling whereby the researcher's network could distribute the survey to their own connection networks to complete
3- Opt-in sampling, where the survey was published to a survey website for anyone to opt-in to complete

Chidlow et al. (2015) defines “rigor as to the extent to which the researcher is thorough and precise in the data-collection procedures” through consistent and appropriate surveys, which will be applied to the survey design and distribution (pg.26).

The choice of sampling method has further implications because “not following the principles of probability sampling carries implications for the kind of statistical analysis that can be employed” (Bell et al., 2019, p.183). Because the survey was designed to measure respondent attitudes, a Likert scale was adopted, and the results quantified to yield both descriptive and inferential analysis outputs.

The data gathered in the survey was collected and stored with no personal identifiers and as such, remains anonymous. The raw data of which is stored on a secure, access-based file on a private-access server, for a period of 10 years. True anonymity arises when a research participant is untraceable (Coffelt, 2017) and in this survey format, no names or personal identifiers was requested nor captured with an added layer of anonymity applied in that the IP address of the respondents’ devices (from which they complete the survey on), was not logged or saved.

3.3 Analysis

3.3.1 Data cleansing

Prior to conducting descriptive or inferential data analysis, the researcher inspected the survey data set collected, to determine which records could and could not be used. Based on the population parameters outlined earlier. The data was carefully managed to ensure invalid entries were removed, so that the researcher could maintain the validity of the sample (Bell at al., 2019)

3.3.2 Data coding

Most demographic data elements of a non-numeric nature were coded to assign it a relevant numeric value, in preparation for the data to be uploaded into the IBM SPSS statistical program, with all scaled data coded (Pallant, 2019).

The following represents the qualifying and demographic questions and their respective assigned codes:

Table 5: Data coding

Variable	Variable Number	Code allocation
Planning to Stay	Q4	1 = yes, 2 = no, 3 = missing
Currently staying	Q5	1 = yes, 2 = no, 4 = missing
Want to be a host	Q6	1 = yes, 2 = no, 3 = missing
Gender	Q7	1 = Female, 2 = Male, 3 = Prefer not to say and blank
Age	Q9	18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 55+

Source: Author

Table 6 represents the scaled data and its respective assigned codes.

Table 6: Scale data and its respective codes

Linkert Scale Variables	Code
Disagree	5
Somewhat Disagree	4
Neutral; Don't know	3
Somewhat Agree	2
Agree	1

Source: Author

Reverse coding was applied, because "If your scale contains some items that are negatively worded (common in psychological measures), these need to be 'reversed' before checking reliability.

As such, two scaled data elements had to be reverse coded to account for the negative wording applied:

- I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it
- If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all

3.3.3 Data reliability

To ensure a scale is measuring one dimension or construct, it is important to conduct internal reliability testing to measure the inter-relatedness of the construct (Pallant, 2019). A method to test internal reliability of a scale, is by mearing the Cronbach alpha of a construct (Pallant, 2019). It must be noted that "Cronbach alpha values are, however, quite sensitive to the number of items in the scale. With short scales (e.g. scales with fewer than ten items) it is common to find quite low Cronbach values" (Pallant, 2019, pg. 116)

Cronbach alpha tests were run on each of the constructs. The constructs and its individual variables are represented in appendix 6.

3.3.4 Data analysis

The data was collected and analysed in 3 phases:

1) Data preparation
2) Internal Reliability testing
3) Correlation and hypothesis testing

The abovementioned data stages as well as the respective tools and software used at each stage is tabulated in table 7:

Table 7: Data stages and software used

DATA STAGE	SOFTWARE USED	STEPS
DATA PREPARATION	Excel; IBM SPSS	Data coding Data cleansing
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS	Excel	Check for violation of assumptions Demographic analysis Likert scale heat maps
INTERNAL RELIABILITY TESTING	IBM SPSS	Cronbach alpha testing
INFERENTIAL STATISTICS	IBM SPSS	Kruskal-Wallis tests for hypothesis testing

Source: Author

3.3.4.1 Descriptive statistics

There are three main reasons as to why descriptive statistics would be run against a sample, two of which were applied in this research:

1) To understand the underlying characteristics of the sample collected from a demographics perspective and gain high level aggregation analysis of the sample
2) To "check your variables for any violation of the assumptions underlying the statistical techniques that you will use to address your research questions" (Pallant, 2016, pg. 69)

The common descriptive statistics conducted on variables include means, stand deviation, skewness of data and kurtosis (Pallant, 2016). The descriptive statistics applied to categorical variables (which ordinal data forms part of), which this research is based on, would warrant frequencies to be measured as measuring means and standard deviation etc. would not make sense nor be meaningful (Pallant, 2016).

3.3.4.2 Inferential statistics

Parametric analysis would be warranted if the data meets the assumptions of having a normal distribution. In cases where the data yields skewed distributions, the application of parametric tests would not be a viable option, thus non-parametric test options can be run, such as the Kruskal-Wallis test (Pallant, 2016)

Even though non-parametric tests, such as Kruskal-Wallis test do need to meet some, but less stringent, assumptions. It should be noted that all parametric tests have non-parametric alternatives albeit they are less powerful and less sensitive in diagnosing relationships or differences among groups. This research used the Kruskal-Wallis test (which is the non-parametric version of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA))

The Kruskal-Wallis test compares the medians between two or more groups (>=2 groups of independent variables on an ordinal (dependent) variable), with the null hypothesis assuming no difference in medians between the groups. In the case where there is a notable difference, the researcher can reject the null hypothesis.

These still come with some assumptions, but less stringent ones. Some of the assumptions of the data include These non-parametric alternatives tend to be not as powerful; that is, they may be less sensitive in detecting a relationship or a difference among groups.

3.4 Research Method limitations

Bell et al. (2019) confirms that “probability sampling stands a better chance than non-probability sampling of keeping sampling error in check” and represents “statistical significance that permit inferences to be made about the population from which the sample was selected” (p.190). Because non-probability sampling was used for this study, sampling bias and sampling error was unavoidable as the participants were not randomly selected and the resulting data output would have had compromised statistical weighting as its applied to the overall population being studied. Snowball sampling invariably exacerbates the ‘unrepresentativeness’ of the sample.

Regarding construct validity, researcher-designed questions were posed to respondents and much benefit would be derived from using validated surveys.

In terms of the generalizability of the proposed study, Airbnb may not be representative of all SE platforms or business models. Furthermore, it is understood that similar visual or digital cues may be absent in other SE platforms, which mean that findings cannot be appropriated to those platforms in the absence of context or further study.

3.5 Conclusion

Based on the research opportunity identified (table 1), there was a need to assess what types of biases exist in the SE that may impact consumption. Based on that, two cognitive bias types are being tested viz. Bandwagon Effect and Affinity Bias. The research was conducted according to a positivist epistemological approach by conducting a cross-sectional survey where respondents completed a questionnaire that was developed to measure respondents attitudes. Non-probability sampling was applied due to a lack of a base dataset from which to conduct probability sampling. Internal reliability tests were conducted across the several constructs tested by running Cronbach alpha tests.

Thereafter, a non-parametric test, Kruskal-Wallis, was employed to conduct inferential analysis on the dataset, to determine correlation between tested variables and thus conduct hypothesis testing.

4 Results

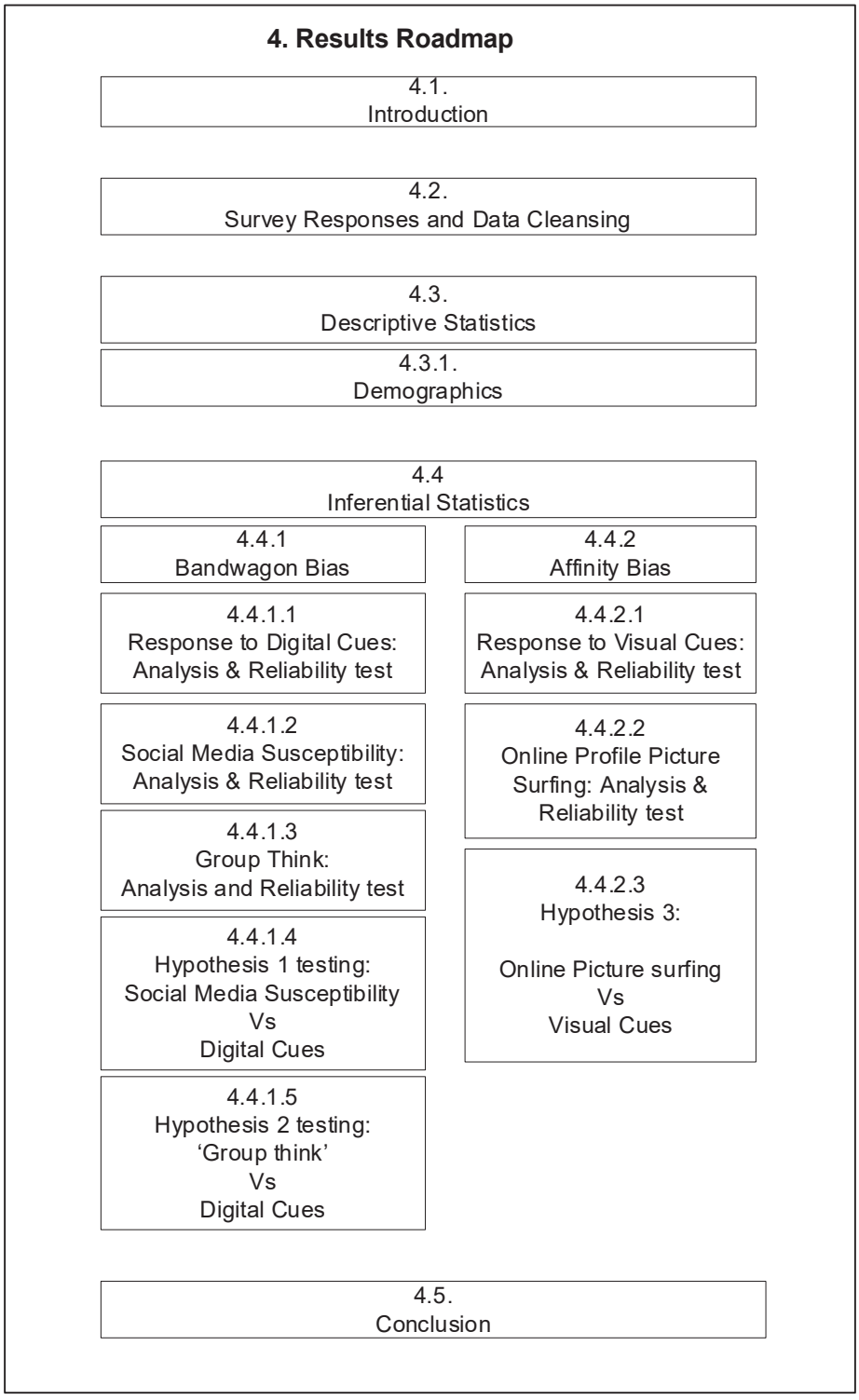


Figure 8: Roadmap of the results section

4.1 Introduction

The results were collected via an online survey, which was split into two survey parts (viz. demographics and Likert scale questions). The data from individuals who did not complete the demographics questions were retained for analysis, with data from incomplete Likert scale questions removed.

The data underwent data cleansing to remove non-viable data rows. This was followed by data coding. Thereafter, thorough descriptive analysis was conducted to get the relevant context and knowledge about the sample population. Each construct then underwent reliability tests and thereafter, underwent inferential statistical non-parametric testing. The non-parametric test employed was the Kruskal-Wallis test, due to the categorical nature of the data.

The results outcome of each method stated, is discussed in the sections that follow, as per the results roadmap highlighted in figure 8.

Both Social media susceptibility character traits and Groupthink *character* traits form the basis of bandwagon behaviour bias testing, whilst 'profile-picture affiliation' character traits form the basis of testing for affinity bias.

4.2 Survey responses and data cleansing

The target population are people 18 years of age or older, who have stayed at an Airbnb previously or are considering staying at an Airbnb, or stayed in temporary accommodation previously, or are considering staying in temporary accommodation. The population was estimated at 914 at the time of the study (assuming only direct members of the researcher's social network responded to the survey). The sample size of 217 was estimated at a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. A sample size of 220 was collected, 54 of the respondents did not meet the qualifying criteria, and one respondent did not answer all the variables. This report is based on 165 responses. Thus, the responses represent 18% of the population. An adequate sample size was collected as it exceeds 100 (Pallant, 2016)

The survey responses were collected between the 29th August 2022 and the 15th October 2022, with the response-per-day represented in figure 9.

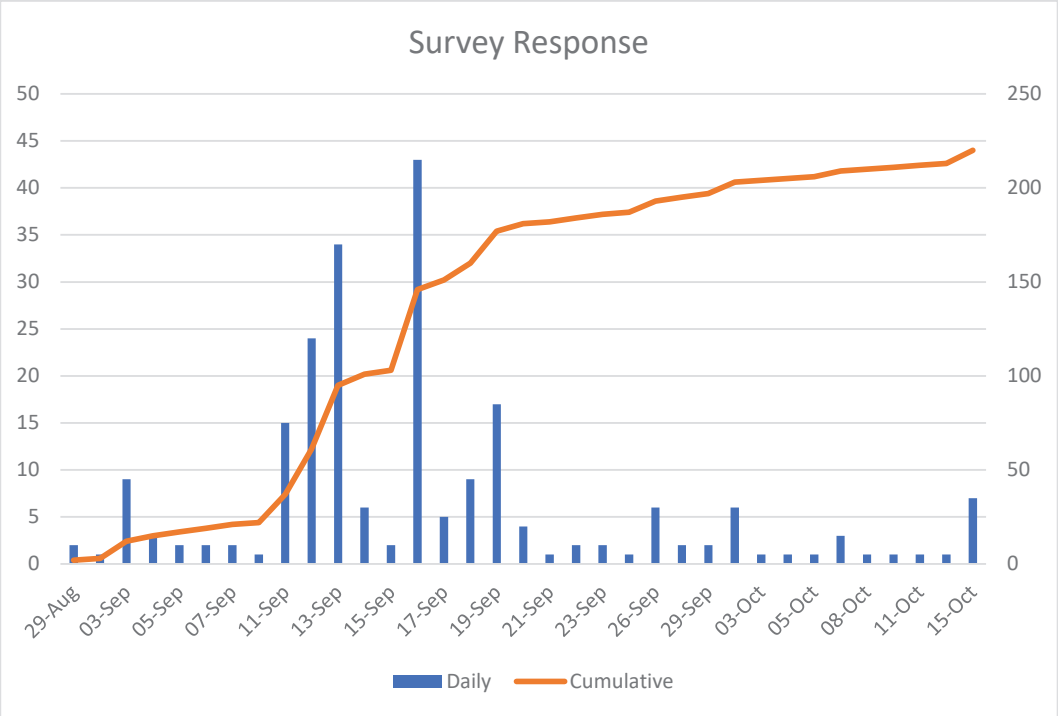


Figure 9: Number of responses collected over time

Source: Author

4.3 Descriptive statistics

4.3.1 Demographic analysis

After unviable data was removed, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to gain contextual insight into the population that opted to participate in the survey.

It was found that females dominated with 58% as compared to males who made up 41% of the sample (fig. 10).

The majority of the respondents are Asian or Middle Eastern (41%) followed by White and Black with 18% each. 36% of the respondents were aged between 36 – 45, they are followed by 46 – 55-year-olds representing 25% of the sample and 55+ respondents made up 8% of the sample (fig. 12).

Respondent's education levels range between those with matric (20%), bachelor's degree (21%) and the majority with honours degree (24%) (fig. 13). Overall, 78% respondents were tertiary educated with 42% in possession of a post-graduate degree.

Regarding the relationship status of the population surveyed, 66% were either married or in a relationship (fig. 11)

All descriptive statistics are summarised in table 8 for ease of reference.

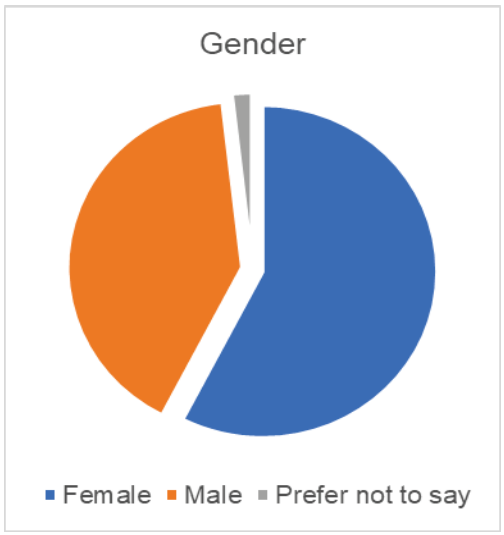


Figure 10: Gender split
Source: Author's compilation

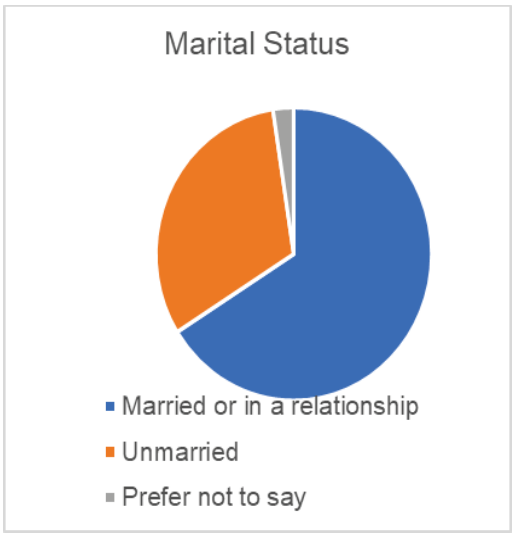


Figure 11: Marital status
Source: Author's compilation

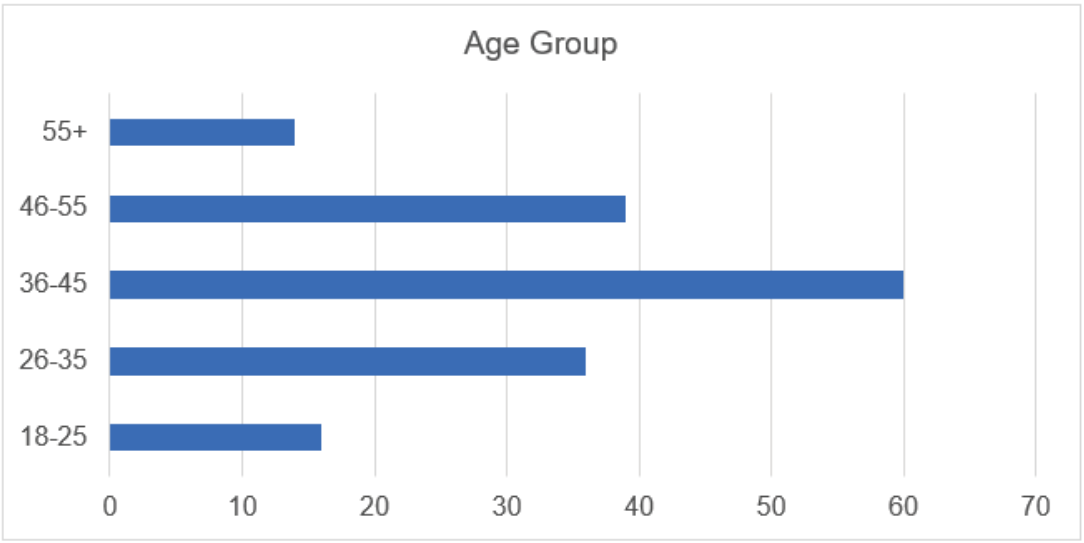


Figure 12: Age group composition
Source: Author's compilation

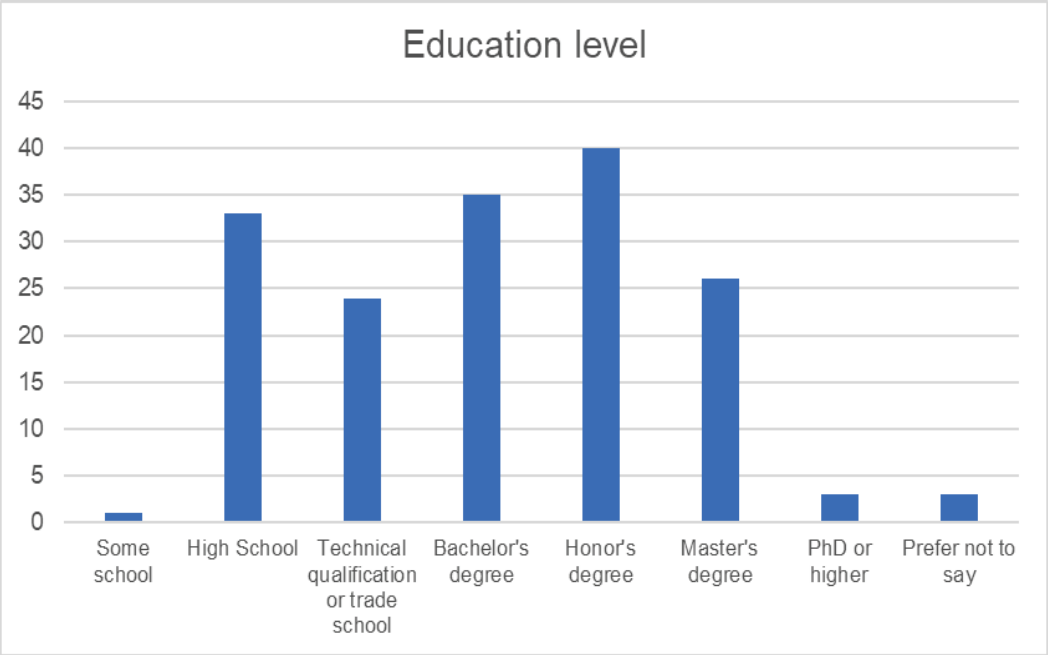


Figure 13: Education level composition
Source: Author's compilation

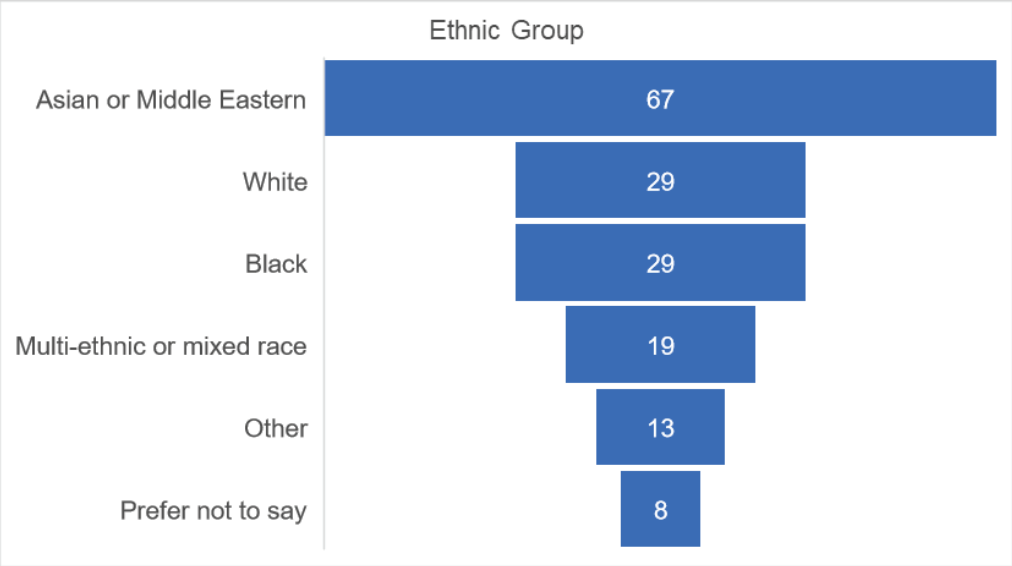


Fig: Eth: Ethnic group composition
Source: Author's compilation

Table 8: Descriptive statistics summary

Descriptive statistics	Frequency (N=165)	Percentage
Planning to Stay (STA, Airbnb)		
Yes	159	93%
No	6	7%
Have stayed (STA, Airbnb)		
No	156	97%
Yes	9	3%
Want to be a host		
No	134	81%
Yes	30	18%
Blank	1	1%
Gender		
Female	95	58%
Male	67	41%
Prefer not to say	3	2%
Ethnic group		
Asian or Middle Eastern	67	41%
White	29	18%
Black	29	18%
Multi-ethnic or mixed race	19	12%
Other	13	8%
Prefer not to say	8	5%
Age		
18-25	16	10%
26-35	36	22%
36-45	60	36%
46-55	39	24%
55+	14	8%
Marital status		
Married or in a relationship	109	66%
Unmarried	52	32%
Prefer not to say	4	2%
Education		
Bachelor's degree	35	21%
High School	33	20%
Honor's degree	40	24%
Master's degree	26	16%
PhD or higher	3	2%
Prefer not to say	3	2%
Some school	1	1%
Technical qualification or trade school	24	15%

Source: Author’s compilation

4.4 Inferential statistics

4.4.1 Bandwagon bias

4.4.1.1 Response to digital cues: analysis and reliability test

Table 9: Digital cues: Reliability test

Digital Cues: Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N items
0.13	7

Source: Author's compilation

The heat table below summarised Responses to Digital Cues. An overwhelming 75% of the respondents agreed that if something had an average 1-star rating, they would not buy it. Fewer respondents of 44% agreed and somewhat agreed that if something had an average 1-star rating, they would still consider other factors before making a final decision. Overall, 84% of respondents affirmed that generally, they use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions. A significant 87% said that if something has an average 4-star rating, they would still consider other factors before making a final decision. The responses were approximately split regarding "Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it".

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Missing
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would not buy it	123	19	8	4	10	1
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	36	37	4	19	67	2
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would go ahead and buy it	75	70	8	7	4	1
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	90	54	6	9	5	1
I generally use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions	100	39	12	7	7	0
I heard about Airbnb only because there was a hype about it on social media	47	18	15	30	55	0
Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it	34	42	22	25	41	1

Figure 14: Response to digital cues: heat map
Source: Author's compilation

The inter-term correlation matrix below indicates low correlation coefficients between the variables. Similarly, Cronbach's Alpha is equally low being <0.5. Removal several items, would improve Cronbach's Alpha to just over 0.5, however, a low Cronbach Alpha value can be expected when the items are less than 10 (Pallant, 2016). As such, each digital cue item was tested against each of the bandwagon character traits, and the resultant full correlation matrix was assessed in hypotheses testing.

4.4.1.2 Social media susceptibility: analysis and reliability test

Table 10: Social media susceptibility: Reliability test

Social Media Susceptibility: Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N items
0.44	2

Source: Author's compilation

To test the Social Media Susceptibility, the respondents were asked if they follow at least one social media influencer and if they are likely to buy products with large social media hype. 93/165 respondents would follow at least one social media influencer while 59/165 disagreed that they follow at least one social medial influencer. The majority (75) of the respondents indicated that they are more likely to buy a product with large social media hype. 29 of the respondents were neutral.

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Missing
I follow at least one social media influencer	84	9	11	5	54	2
If there is a large social media hype about a product, I am more likely to buy it	31	28	29	26	49	2

Figure 15: Social media susceptibility character traits: heat map of responses
Source: Author's compilation

The overall Cronbach's Alpha for this construct is 44%, with weak inter-item correlations between the variables of the construct. However, this is most likely due to the low number of items that are represented by the construct, whereby a low quantity of items invariably yields a low Cronbach Alpha (Pallant, 2016). Because there is a possibility of the low alpha value being attributed to a low item of 2, the social media susceptibility construct will still be used in hypothesis testing.

4.4.1.3 Groupthink: analysis and reliability test

Table 11: Groupthink: Reliability test

Groupthink: Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N items
0.799	2

Source: Author's compilation

The below table shows the heat map of the Group Think construct. It indicates that the respondents generally disagreed that if most people like doing something, then they probably like it too. 66 out of 165 respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that if something is popular, then it is worth trying it out for themselves, 36 of the 165 were neutral about the concept.

It is observed that 46 of the 165 respondents were neutral when asked if they feel is something is very popular then they are more sceptical about it.

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Missing
I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too	17	32	34	29	53	0
I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it's worth trying it out for myself	27	39	36	28	33	2
*I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it	26	35	46	35	22	1

Figure 16: Groupthink character traits: heat map of responses
Source: Author's compilation
*Reverse coded as it is inversely phrased to test the same response to the second Groupthink variable above

Data about Groupthink was collected using the 5-point Likert Scale. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure if the construct meets the internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha for Groupthink is 64,6% indicating a moderate consistency between the variables. The table below indicates that the variable "I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it" was perceived differently from the other two variables. If the variable is excluded from the analysis, then Cronbach's Alpha for Groupthink would increase to a much stronger level. However, if all items were retained, the alpha value is 64.6%. Thus, the third item (which was perceived differently) was removed, to improve the Cronbach Alpha to a strong and more credible level of 79.9%. The inter-Item correlation matrix is used to evaluate if there are stronger relationships between the variables.

The below inter-item correlation matrix indicates that the relationship between the variables is moderate, it is, however, noticeable that the correlation between the "I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too" and "I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself" is 66%, indicating a strong correlation.

This correlation is the highest in the inter-item correlation matrix. Due to the low number of factors, factor analysis will not be a required technique to apply. Thus, the reduced dimension of Groupthink was used in hypothesis testing.

Table 12: Groupthink Cronbach impact with inter-item correlation matrix

	I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too	I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself	I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it
I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too	1.000		
I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself	0.666	1.000	
I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it	0.167	0.279	1.000
Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	0.435	0.285	0.799

Source: Author's compilation

4.4.1.4 Hypothesis 1 test: Social media susceptibility vs response to digital cues

Social Media Susceptibility and their response to digital cues

$H1_0$: Social media susceptibility does not influence the responses to digital cues

$H1_a$: Social media susceptibility influences the response to digital cues

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to test if individuals prone to social media susceptibility, were influenced by various digital cues. The Kruskal-Wallis test is a rank-based nonparametric test that is used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between groups of an independent variable on an ordinal dependent variable like Likert Scale variables.

The table below indicates the Kruskal Wallis tests statistics and p-value. The correlation coefficient column will indicate if the variables of digital cues are related to Social Media Susceptibility.

In cases where the correlation coefficient is less than 70%, the two available are considered to have weak correlations (no influence on each other). The direction of the correlation coefficient will indicate if the two variables agree or not. These tests are performed at a 0,05 level of significance. The P-values of less or equal to 0,05 allows the researcher to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 13: Susceptibility to social media influence and digital cue responses: Correlation results

Response to digital cues	*Social Media 1			**Social Media 2		
	Test Statistics	Correlations coefficient	P-Value	Test Statistics	Correlations coefficient	P-Value
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would not buy it	8.972	0.249	0.062	7.594	0.173	0.108
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	1.543	-0.041	0.819	3.031	-0.007	0.553
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would go ahead and buy it	5.094	0.145	0.278	3.394	0.105	0.494
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	1.574	0.046	0.813	12.050	0.016	0.017
I generally use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions	7.076	0.204	0.132	6.652	0.167	0.155
I heard about Airbnb only because there was a hype about it on social media	1.291	-0.105	0.863	9.651	0.161	0.047
Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it	9.690	0.249	0.046	32.417	0.438	<.001

Source: Author's compilations
*I follow at least one social media influencer
** If there is a large social media hype about a product, I am more likely to buy it

According to the tests above, there are no strong correlations between Responses to Digital Cues and Social Medial Susceptibility. The variable “If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision” is negatively correlated with both Social Media Susceptibility variables.

There is a statistically significant relationship between following a social media influencer and “Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it” with a p-value of 0,046 at 0,05 level of significance and “If there is a large social media hype about a product, I am more likely to buy it” with a p-value of less than 0,001 at a 0,01 level of significance. The graphs below indicate that the Responses to Digital Cues in variables have a positive linear relationship with the responses to Social Medial Susceptibility

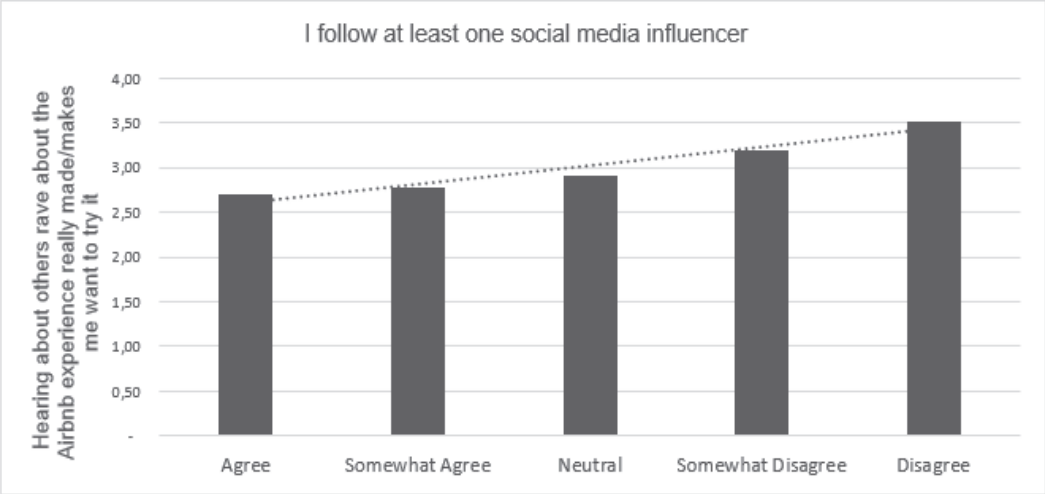


Figure 17: Linear Relationship: susceptibility to social media influence and positive Airbnb social media coverage
Source: Author’s compilation

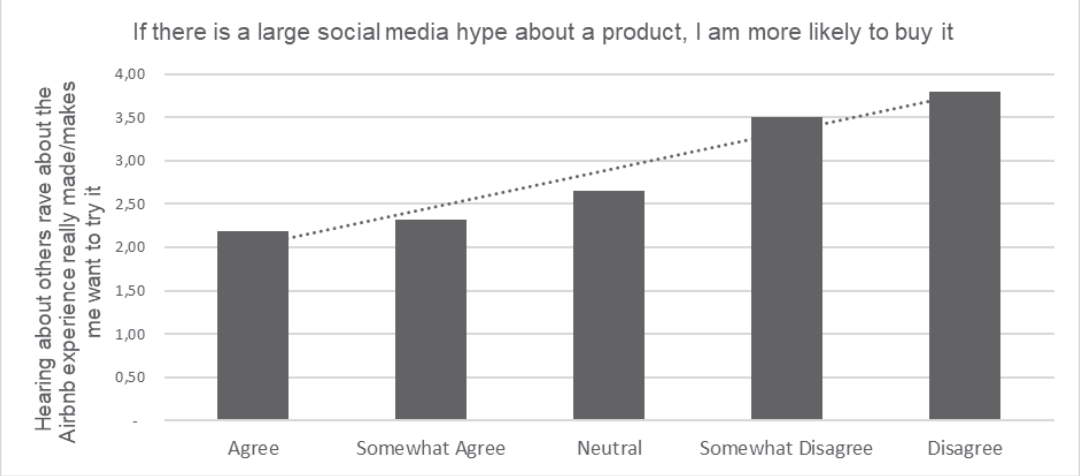


Figure 18: Linear Relationship: social media hype and positive Airbnb social media coverage
Source: Author's compilation

It is also observed that although the correlations between the two variables are low, the digital cues variable, "If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision" has a coefficient that is statistically significant with a p-value of 0,017 at a 0,05 level of significance.

Based on all 14 intercepts of hypothesis testing, the null hypothesis is accepted due to low correlation rates of 29% across the full matrix intersections. Over 71% of intersection matrix items show no correlation. Thus, social media susceptibility does not influence the response to digital cues.

Table 14: Hypothesis test outcome for hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 test outcome	
Hypothesis	Result
$H1_0$: Social media susceptibility does not influence the responses to digital cues *$H1_a$: Social media susceptibility has influences on the response to digital cues*	The null hypothesis is accepted

Source: Author

4.4.1.5 Hypothesis 2 test: Groupthink vs response to digital cues

Susceptibility to Groupthink and their response to digital cues

$H2_0$: Susceptibility to Groupthink does not influence the response to digital cues
$H2_a$: Susceptibility to Groupthink influences the response to digital cues

The tests below indicate very weak correlations between the variables of Group Think and Responses to Digital Cues.

Table 15: Groupthink susceptibility and digital cues: Correlation results

Response to digital cues	*Group Think 1			**Group Think 2		
	Test Statistics	Correlations coefficient	P-Value	Test Statistics	Correlations coefficient	P-Value
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would not buy it	2.573	0.066	0.632	1.420	0.070	0.841
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	3.057	-0.037	0.548	2.411	0.036	0.661
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would go ahead and buy it	.306	0.052	0.989	4.215	0.091	0.378
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	5.767	-0.014	0.217	14.749	0.044	0.005
I generally use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions	9.293	0.217	0.054	2.865	0.182	0.581
I heard about Airbnb only because there was a hype about it on social media	6.714	0.171	0.152	6.857	0.162	0.144
Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it	50.040	0.531	<0.001	29.267	0.407	<0.001

Source: Author's compilation

*I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too
** I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself

There is a statistically significant relationship between “Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it” and the Group Think variable of “I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too” and “I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself” at 0,01 level of significance with a p-value of <0.001. The two graphs below indicate that those who disagreed that Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes them want to try it, also disagreed with generally believing that if most people like doing something, they will probably like it too and that they generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for themselves.

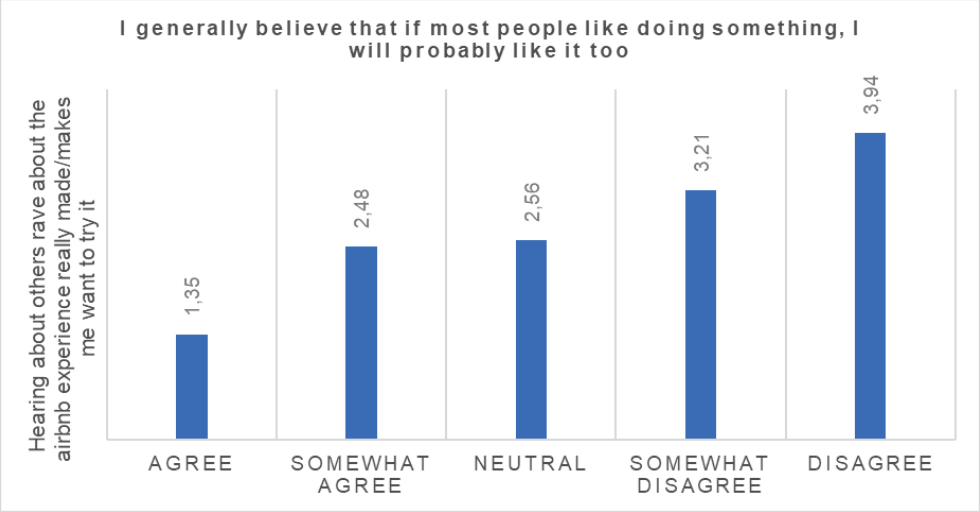


Figure 18: Group think and positive Airbnb social media coverage
Source: Author’s compilation

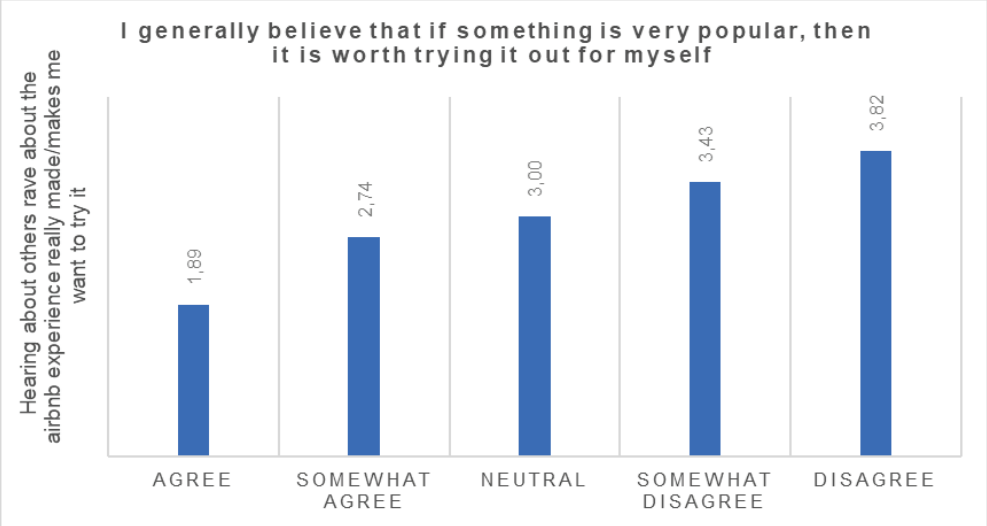
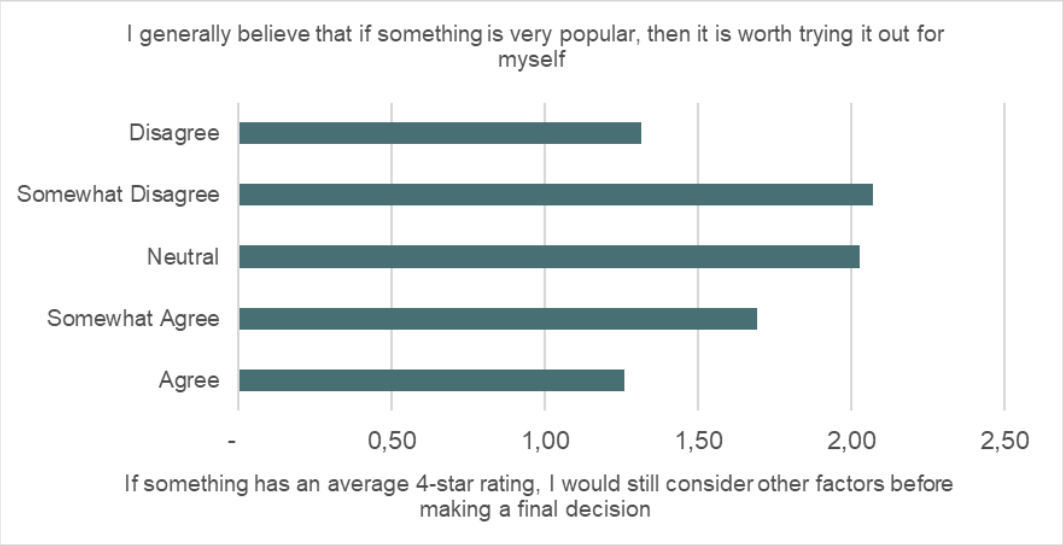


Figure 19: Group think and hype
Source: Author’s compilation

Generally, respondents agreed that if something has a 4-start rating, they would go ahead a buy it. There is a statistically significant relationship between “If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision” and “I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself” at a 0,01 level of significance with a p-value of 0,005. It is evident that most of the respondents if something has an average 4-start rating, they would still consider other factors before making a final decision. Of those respondents, most disagreed somewhat concerning trying out something for themselves based on popularity.



The P-values of less or equal to 0,05 allows the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. Based on the 21 matrix intersections, only 24% showed a correlation between the Groupthink variables compared to their response to digital cues. This indicates a staggering 76% matrix intersection have no correlation. Thus, Groupthink character traits have no influence on response to digital cues such as star ratings or social media hype.

Table 16: Hypothesis test outcome for hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 test outcome	
Hypothesis	Result
$H2_0$: Susceptibility to Groupthink *does not influence the response to digital cues* *$H2_a$: Susceptibility to ‘group-think’ influences the response to digital cues*	The null hypothesis is accepted

Source: Author

4.4.2 Affinity bias

4.4.2.1 Response to visual cues: analysis and reliability test

Table 17: Response to visual cues reliability test

Visual Cues: Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N items
0.82	7

Source: Author

There was general response of neutrality and affirmation regarding "If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all". Similar response sentiments were recorded about feeling a sense of comfort or regret after confirming a guests booking post seeing their profile picture. Most respondents disagreed that if they were Airbnb hosts, they would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes them feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy.

Of the respondents, 66 of 165 had sentiments of affirmation that they would not be bothered at all if Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, with a significant amount remaining to stay neutral. The same pattern of response was noticed when they were asked "If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret", whereby most disagreed.

Similar sentiments of disagreements were recorded when asked if they "would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes them feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy". The respondent generally agreed (59%) that if they were to be an Airbnb host, they would ask for someone's profile picture for the sole purpose of knowing how they look so they would know them when they see them. However, this item was removed from hypothesis testing as explained later.

Figure 20: Heat map: Response to visual cues

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Missing
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would bother me	58	28	35	19	24	1
If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation	32	39	30	28	36	0
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all	33	33	45	16	37	1
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded	54	30	27	15	39	0
If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret	36	33	42	22	31	1
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would ask for someone's profile picture for the sole purpose of knowing how they look so I would know them when I see them	59	38	19	19	26	4
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would never ask for the guest to upload their profile picture because I do not see the need	37	40	39	15	33	1
If I were an Airbnb host, I would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes me feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy	29	30	38	24	43	1

Source: Author's compilation

The Response to Visual Cues constructs presented a stronger Cronbach's Alpha of 77,2%. The Cronbach's Alpha would however improve if the variable, "If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would ask for someone's profile picture for the sole purpose of knowing how they look so I would know them when I see them" was removed. This has been made evident by the inter-term correlation matrix which indicates that the said variable was negatively correlated with the first 3 variables in the same construct. Even though the number of items is low (less than 10), the Cronbach Alpha is good. Removal of the problematic item increases the result to 82.3%. Thus, it was removed to substantiate a stronger reliability test as well as to promote a more accurate hypothesis test.

	If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would bother me	If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation	If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all	If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded	If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret	If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would ask for someone's profile picture for the sole purpose of knowing how they look so I would know them when I see them	If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would never ask for the guest to upload their profile picture because I do not see the need	If I were an Airbnb host, I would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes me feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would bother me	1.000							
If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation	0.542	1.000						
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all	0.453	0.510	1.000	.384				
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded	0.408	0.466	0.384	1.000				
If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret	0.263	0.402	0.377	0.541	1.000			
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would ask for someone's profile picture for the sole purpose of knowing how they look so I would know them when I see them	-0.072	-0.084	-0.066	0.015	0.146	1.000		
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would never ask for the guest to upload their profile picture because I do not see the need	0.284	0.369	0.476	0.455	0.407	0.091	1.000	
If I were an Airbnb host, I would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes me feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy	0.188	0.392	0.286	0.337	0.484	-0.007	0.339	1.000
Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	0.749	0.725	0.734	0.723	0.724	0.823	0.733	0.751

4.4.2.2 Online profile-picture affiliation: analysis and reliability test

Table 18: Online profile-picture affiliation: Reliability test

Online profile-picture affiliation: Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N items
0.62	3

Source: Author's compilation

The heat map (fig hm) displaying the Likert scale response to 'profile picture affiliation' character traits shows that respondents generally agree and somewhat agree that if a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, they gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture (42% and 17% respectively).

A combined 55% of respondents agree and somewhat agree that someone's profile picture might give them a sense of familiarity or discomfort. It is observed that 30 of the respondents completely disagreed that they need to see someone's profile picture because it gives them a sense of comfort
or discomfort while 39 of the respondents were neutral.

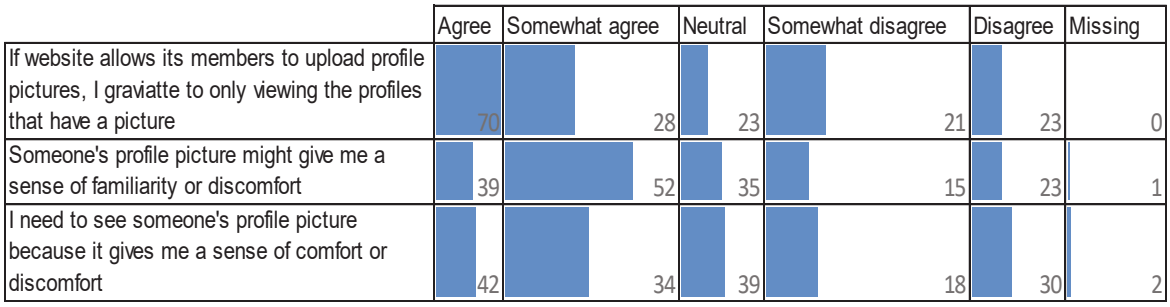


Figure 21: 'Online profile-picture affiliation' character traits: heat map of responses
Source: Author's compilation

Table 19: ‘Profile-Picture affiliation’: Cronbach impact

	If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture	Someone’s profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort	I need to see someone’s profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort
If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture	1.000		
Someone’s profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort	0.284	1.000	
I need to see someone’s profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort	0.304	0.482	1.000
Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	0.649	0.466	0.440

Source: Author’s compilation

Inter-term correlations for the ‘Online Profile Picture affiliation’ construct are weak with the highest being 48,2% between “Someone’s profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort” and “I need to see someone’s profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort”. Cronbach’s Alpha for the construct is 62.1% indicating a moderate consistency amongst the variables related to ‘online profile picture affiliation’. Deleting the first item would only increase the Cronbach alpha level marginally, hence no items were removed for hypothesis testing.

4.4.2.3 Hypothesis 3 test: Online profile-picture affiliation vs visual cues

Profile-picture affiliation and their response to virtual Cues

$H3_0$: Online profile picture affiliation does not influence the responses to visual cues

$H3_a$: Online profile picture affiliation influences the response to visual cues

"If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded" variable is strongly correlated "I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort" with the correlation coefficient of 72% and "If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret" with a correlation coefficient of 61%.

Table 20: Profile-picture affiliation and visual cues: Correlation results

Response to visual cues	*Profile Picture affiliation 1			**Profile Picture affiliation 2			***Profile Picture affiliation 3		
	Test Statistics	Correlations coefficient	P-Value	Test Statistics	Correlations coefficient	P-Value	Test Statistics	Correlations coefficient	P-Value
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would bother me	27.398	0.384	<.001	23.203	0.346	<.001	21.329	0.341	<.001
If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation	21.433	0.342	<.001	46.488	0.529	<.001	46.121	0.523	<.001
*If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all	12.902	0.241	0.012	42.106	0.500	<.001	40.286	0.493	<.001

If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded	8.669	0.208	0.070	30.125	0.386	<.001	85.450	0.722	<.001
If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret	14.951	0.229	0.005	29.116	0.393	<.001	61.866	0.617	<.001
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would never ask for the guest to upload their profile picture because I do not see the need	6.139	0.132	0.189	14.439	0.237	0.006	26.796	0.399	<.001
If I were an Airbnb host, I would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes me feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy	7.605	0.173	0.107	23.979	0.344	<.001	31.181	0.405	<.001

Source: Author's compilation

*If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture

**Someone's profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort

*** I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort

*Reverse coded

It is clear from the Kruskal Wallis test above that profile-picture affiliation has a statistically significant relationship with the Response to Visual Cues variable "If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures it would bother me" with a p-value of <0.001 at a 0.01 level of significance. Below are the graphs that indicate the relationship between the related variables. The first segment of the graph indicates the relationship between the Visual Cues variable "If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures it would bother me" and the 'profile picture affiliation' variable "If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture". The two variables indicate a positive linear relationship where they both seem affirm the same response to both questions.

The respondents who somewhat disagreed with the variable "Someone's profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort", were more neutral to the question "If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures it would bother me"

The respondents who disagreed and somehow disagreed that “I need to see someone’s profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort” were more neutral towards the variable “If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures it would bother me”.

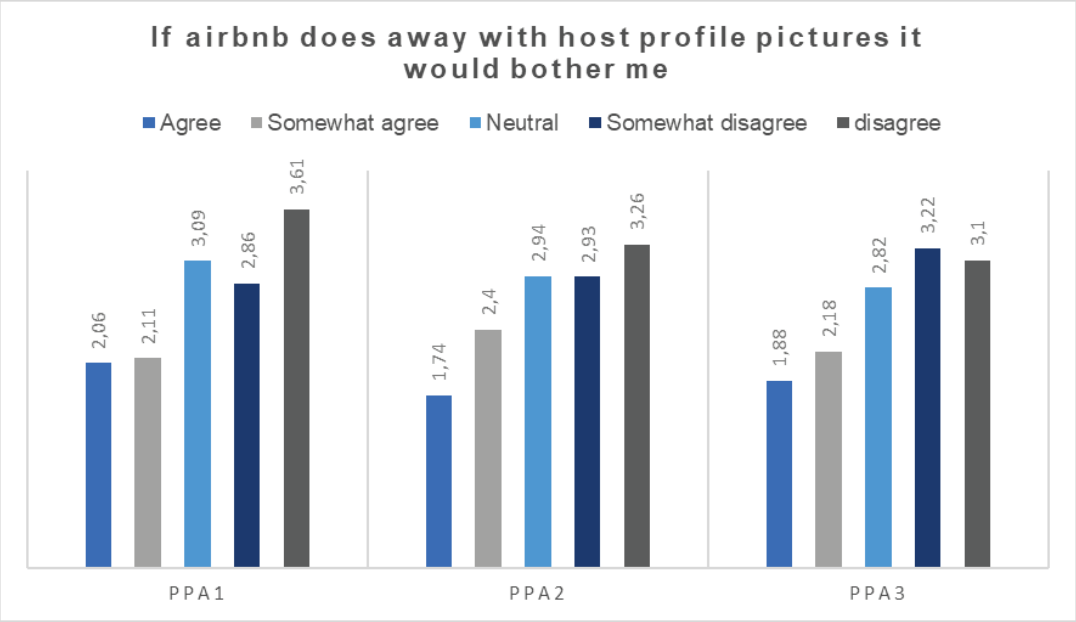


Figure 22: Doing away with Airbnb host profile picture vs profile picture affiliation character traits
Source: Author’s compilation
PPA1: If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture
PPA2: Someone’s profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort
PPA3: I need to see someone’s profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort

The variable “If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation” relationship with all variables of ‘profile-picture affiliation’ is statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance with the p-value of <0.001. The respondents with the same responses to “If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture” and “If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation”.

However, respondents who agreed that “Someone’s profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort” somewhat disagreed with “If I consider booking Airbnb

accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation".

Respondents generally disagreed with "If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation". Of those respondents, there was an almost equal split between those who agreed and disagreed with "I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort"

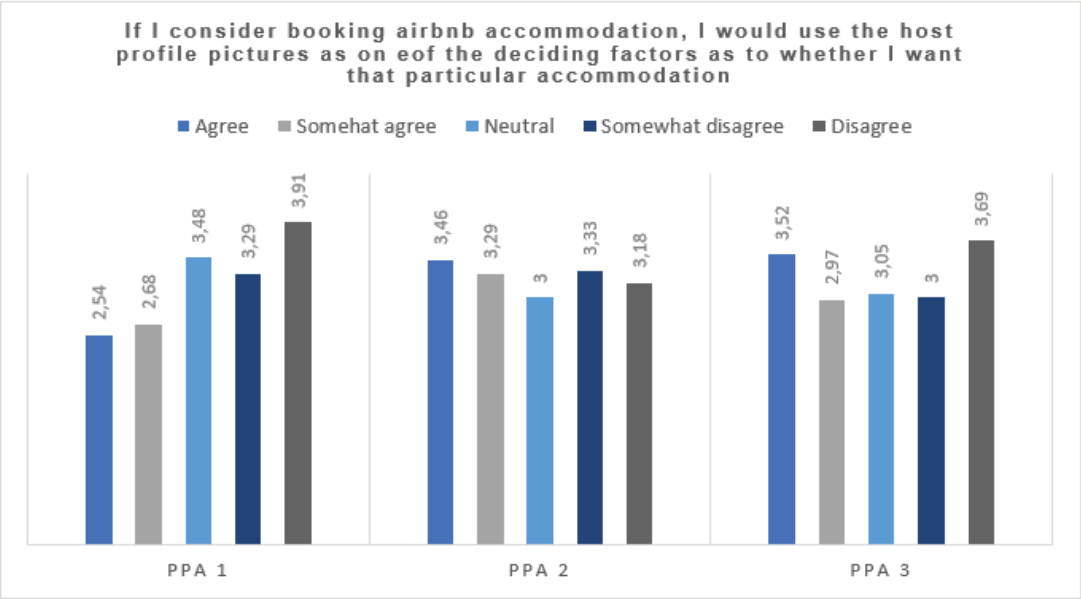


Figure 23: Using Airbnb host profile picture before booking vs profile picture affiliation character traits

Source: Author's compilation

PPA1: If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture

PPA2: Someone's profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort

PPA3: I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort

The relationship between "If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all" and all variables of the 'profile picture affiliation' was statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance with p-values of less than 0.01. There was a general consensus that respondents who gravitate toward only viewing profiles that had pictures, would also be bothered if Airbnb does away with its host profile pictures.

There is a much stronger and congruent relationship between feeling a sense of familiarity or discomfort when seeing someone's profile picture and being bothered if Airbnb does away with its host profile pictures.

There is a stronger correlation between "If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret" and "I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort", with a correlation coefficient of 61.7%. the two variables are also statistically significant with a p-value of <0.001 at a 0.01 level of significance.

Looking at the last quadrant of the graph below, this is evident that the majority of the respondents disagreed that if they were to be an Airbnb host and they ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), they may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret, and the same respondents also disagreed that they need to see someone's profile picture because it gives them a sense of comfort or discomfort.

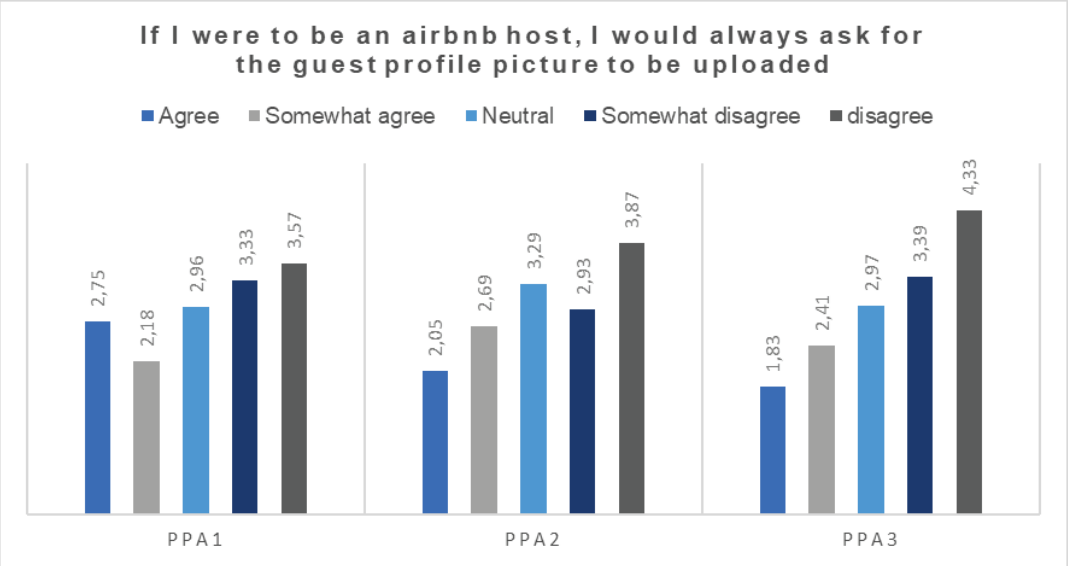


Figure 24: Asking guest to upload profile as a host vs profile picture affiliation character traits

Source: Author's compilation

PPA1: If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture

PPA2: Someone's profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort

PPA3: I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort

The P-values of less or equal to 0,05 allows the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. Based on the 21 matrix intersections that were tested (table 20), 86% intersection points

showed strong correlation between 'profile-picture affiliation' and responses to visual cues. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Indeed, individuals from the population sampled who experience affiliation toward strangers profile-pictures, do use Airbnb guest or host profile picture in their decision-making process to engage in the SE, and thus display traits of affinity bias when engaging or potentially engaging in the SE.

Table 21: Hypothesis test outcome for hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 test outcome	
Hypothesis	Result
$H3_0$: Online profile-picture affiliation influences Responses to visual Cues *$H3_a$: Online profile-picture affiliation influences Responses to visual Cues*	The null hypothesis is rejected

Source: Author's compilation

4.5 Conclusion

The results section was presented systematically by outlining the rate the data was collected using a survey and followed by the descriptive statics of the population sampled. The population was comprised of the following majority categories within each demographic measure: female, 36 to 45 years old, Asian or Middle-Eastern ethnicity, married or in a relationship and honour's level tertiary educated.

For each of the cognitive biases being tested, viz. bandwagon behaviour and affinity bias, each was tested using underpinning character traits of that particular cognitive bias. As such, bandwagon behaviour was tested using susceptibility to social media influence and Groupthink, whereas affinity bias was tested using 'profile-picture affiliation' character traits. The bandwagon variables were tested against response to digital cues, such as star ratings and hype whereas the affinity bias was tested using response to visual cues such as online profile pictures of people (guest or host) in the SE.

Each set of variables were tested by descriptive analysis on the Likert responses as well as reliability tests using Cronbach Alpha. Results on Cronbach alpha extended from low to good, with low alpha scores attributed to the low number of items in each construct. The full set of individual items were hypothesis-tested in a matrix format against each character trait construct against its relevant online cue construct. These tests were done using the Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test given the ordinal nature of the data.

The correlation results showed that both character trait constructs for bandwagon cognitive bias, viz. susceptibility to social media influence and Groupthink had no influence on how respondents reacted to digital cues such as star ratings and hype.

Conversely, 'profile-picture affiliation' has strong correlations to how respondents are influenced by online profile pictures of Airbnb hosts or guests and how they would engage in the SE based on someone's picture.

In summary, both null hypotheses that tested bandwagon behaviour bias traits in the SE, were accepted, indicating that there is no compelling correlation between bandwagon bias traits influencing individuals' responses to star ratings and hype. However, the null hypothesis that tested affinity bias in the SE has been rejected, indicating that indeed, people who have an affiliation toward certain profile pictures online and who use that as a gauge of judgment, indeed respond to Airbnb host or guest profile pictures when engaging or potentially engaging in the SE. The full summary of hypotheses testing is represented in table 22.

Table 22: Hypotheses summary

Summary: Hypotheses testing outcome			
Cognitive bias	Character traits	Hypothesis	Outcome
Bandwagon bias	Susceptibility to social media	*$H1_0$: Social media susceptibility does not influence the responses to digital cues*	The null hypothesis is accepted

		$H1_a$: Social media susceptibility influences the response to digital cues	
Bandwagon bias	Susceptibility to Groupthink	*$H2_0$: Susceptibility to 'group-think' does not influence the response to digital cues* *$H2_a$: Susceptibility to 'group-think' influences the response to digital cues*	The null hypothesis is accepted
Affinity bias	Profile-picture affiliation	*$H3_0$: Online profile-picture affiliation influences Responses to visual Cues* *$H3_a$: Online profile-picture affiliation influences Responses to visual Cues*	The null hypothesis is rejected

Source: Author

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The section of this research paper discusses the results that were shown in chapter 4. The results are discussed in depth as it pertains to the literature review, in chapter 2 of this paper. Each hypothesis will be discussed as it relates to the relevant scholarly literature published and may add additional insights which could potentially add some information to existing and known works and research gaps identified in the SE literature. Figure 25 below outlines the discussion roadmap of this chapter:

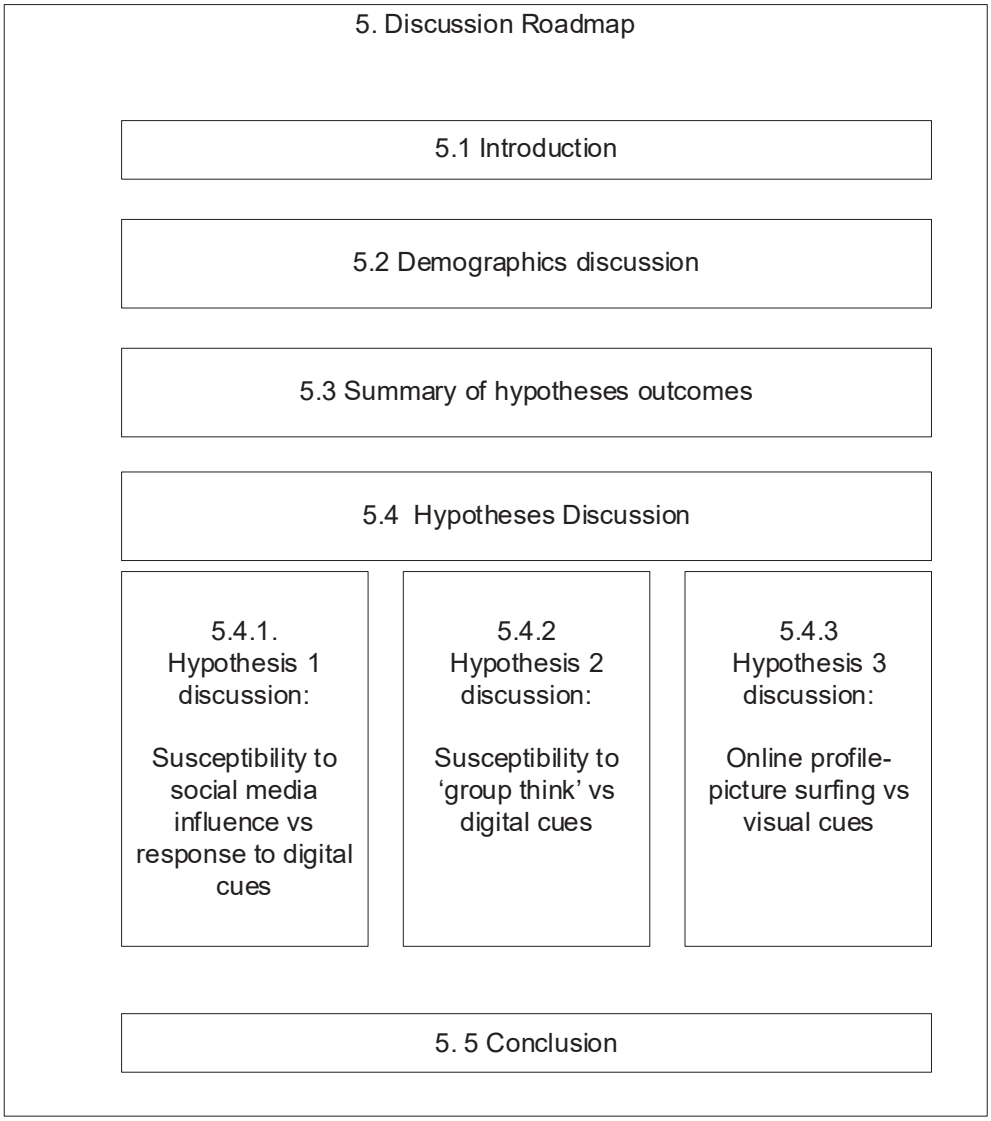


Figure 25: Discussion roadmap
Source: Author

5.2 Demographics discussion

Generic demographic information is always collected in survey studies, as it provides insights and the context of the population sample being surveyed. Various demographic questions are prompted by researchers when conducting surveys, the most common of which includes gender, ethnicity, and level of education (Hughs et al., 2016).

It was Karl Mannheim, who pioneered the concept of 'generations', the idea of categorising specific birth years to various generations. Naturally, the concept has been globally adopted, owned, and agreed as new categories emerge. However, Mannheim's fundamental element of grouping specific birth years into a common category is based on experience, viewpoints, and macro conditions of the time, and thus, people of the same generation share similar traits and hold the same generic opinions.

Of the various studies scholars have conducted about the SE, focal points of research have been centered around millennials (people aged between 26 and 41), as that represents the target market for the SE (Yang et al., 2019). The majority age-group of respondents to this survey represent millennials or the upper end of the millennial age range, at ~58%.

Mittendorf et al.'s (2017) research demonstrates that most respondents to their survey study were individuals who are tertiary educated, with 58% having a bachelor's degree or higher. This demographic is congruent to this research study in that the majority of respondents are tertiary educated ranging from bachelors to PhD (63%). People of this generation, amongst other traits, are known to be the 'achievement' generation, being very education-minded and driven (Garg, 2020). This is consistent with the higher education levels seen with the respondents of this study.

Garg's (2020) study about Airbnb and the factors that influence the choice of participating in Airbnb highlights the congruence of gender split to this study, both representing ~60:40 ration of females to males, with it being consistent with females playing a more impactful role in holiday or vacation planning as purported by Mottiar and Quinn (2004).

There is fair demographic comparison between this study and that conducted by SE scholars regarding gender, age, and education levels, however, due to the nature of the non-probability sampling technique employed in this study, generalisability is constrained to the population sampled and does not represent the greater SE community of Airbnb participants globally.

5.3 Summary of hypotheses outcomes

Three sets of dependent variables (2 representing bandwagon bias traits and 1 representing affinity bias traits), were tested against digital cues and visual cues respectively (fig. 25), using a intersectional matrix between individual variables. The idea is centered around understanding if responses to online cues, which are standard digital representation in the SE (and Airbnb specifically) is in any way influenced by specific character traits depicting bandwagon and affinity biases accordingly. The detailed summary of the hypotheses testing outcomes are represented in table 23.

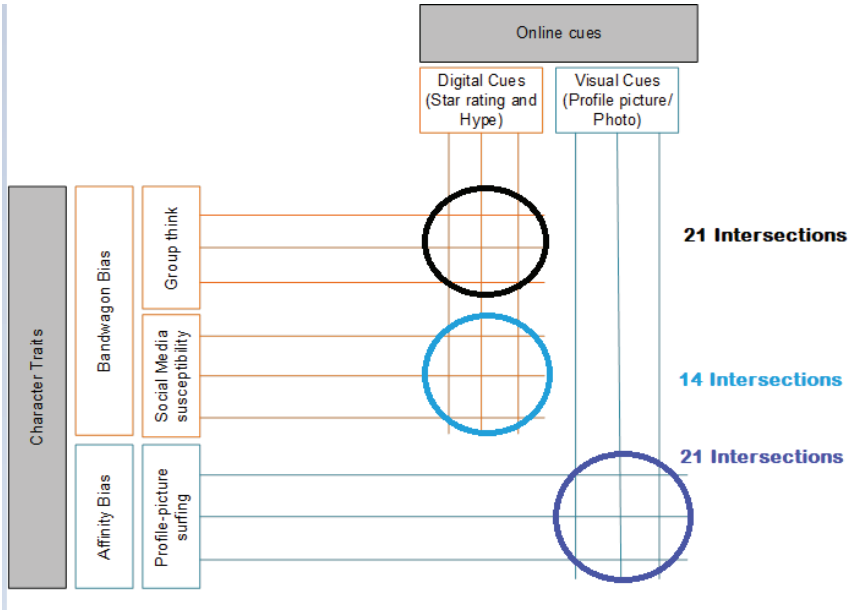


Figure 25: Intersection Kruskal- Wallis test matrixes between character traits and online cues
Source: Author

Table 23: Summary of hypotheses and test outcomes: Bandwagon and affinity bias

Summary of Hypothesis and test outcomes				
Cognitive bias	**Hypothesis**	**Description**	**Result**	**Commentary**
Bandwagon bias	*$H1_0$: Social media susceptibility does not influence the response to digital cues* *$H1_a$: Social media susceptibility influences the response to digital cues*	This hypothesis tests whether the response to digital cues (star ratings and/or online hype) is due to an individual having a bandwagon bias trait (Susceptibility to social media). It was found that there is no overall correlation between susceptibility to social media influence and response to digital cues	The null hypothesis is accepted	Nuanced instances of individual correlations noted and will be elaborated in the hypothesis discussion section of this chapter
Bandwagon bias	*$H2_0$: Susceptibility to 'group-think' does not influence the response to digital cues* *$H2_a$: Susceptibility to 'group-think' influences the response to digital cues*	This hypothesis tests whether the response to digital cues (star ratings and/or online hype) is due to an individual having a bandwagon bias trait (Groupthink). It was found that there is no overall correlation between Groupthink and response to digital cues	The null hypothesis is accepted	Nuanced instances of individual correlations noted and will be elaborated in the hypothesis discussion section of this chapter
Affinity bias	*$H3_0$: Online profile-picture affiliation does not influence the response to visual Cues* *$H3_a$: Online profile-picture affiliation influences the response to visual Cues*	This hypothesis tests whether the response to visual cues (Airbnb profile pictures) is due to an individual having an affinity bias trait (assigning a high importance of the presence of online profile pictures of strangers when site-surfing). It was found that there is a strong correlation between 'online profile picture affiliation' and response to visual cues	The null hypothesis is rejected	-

Source: Author

5.4 Hypotheses discussion

5.4.1 Hypothesis 1 discussion: Susceptibility to social media influence vs response to digital cues

Hypothesis 1:

$H1_a$: Social media susceptibility influences the response to digital cues (Fig. 25 below)

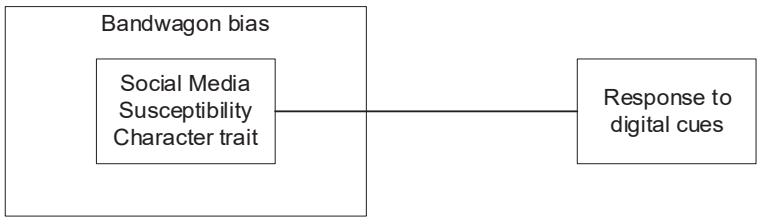


Figure 25: The original conceptual model representing hypothesis 1
Source: Author

In today's age of social media as well as the ubiquitous nature of the internet, a new brand of celebrity has emerged, in the form of social media influencers. These influencers, some of which have more followers than traditional celebrities, have the power to recommend various brands and this has been extremely well utilised in the travel and tourism industry (Gretzel, 2018).

Micro-celebrity influencers make lifestyle content and have accumulated a large on-line following, which is why many companies (including Airbnb) pay influencers to promote their product or listing (Jin et al, 2019). The bandwagon effect is a form of cognitive bias where an individual's actions (and decision-making) are motivated or influenced by the actions of others and is generally to gain a level of conformity with the greater group (Bindra et al., 2022). Influencer followship works in a similar way, where more people lock on to an influencer as the number of followers increase, as more people conform to be part of a greater group.

Thus, it stands to reason that a character trait of bandwagon bias is the susceptibility to social media influence, as both psychologies are based on the same psychological foundational element of mass thinking. Generic measures of susceptibility to social media influence, is when someone follows at least one social media influencer and/or subscribe to social media hype as a primary information tool, both which have been used as a variable in this study. Gertzel (2018)

further articulates the role of influencer to influencer-marketing as these influencers "have managed to amass a dedicated following that is eager to receive their recommendations"

Online recommendations take various forms, some of which are overtly demonstrated by others, including influencers, via blogs or vlogs and some are more covertly done. Airbnb, which have current active listings of over 6 million in August 2022, cannot actively manage recommendations on a listing-to-listing basis, centrally through its platform. However, star - ratings and host reviews are allowed on the site to alert other potential guests about which listings (and hosts) are recommended by the greater guest society. Based on this, star-ratings, and 'hype' (based on reviews, likes, and shares from the greater 'social-mediaverse') were chosen as the digital cues to cross-test the bandwagon character trait (viz. susceptibility to social media influence).

The results indicated a definitive non-correlation between susceptibility to social media influence and digital cues.

Table 24: Excerpt from Hypothesis 1 testing

Response to digital cues	*Social Media 1	**Social Media 2
	P-Value	P-Value
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would not buy it	0.062	0.108
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	0.819	0.553
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would go ahead and buy it	0.278	0.494
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	0.813	0.017
I generally use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions	0.132	0.155
I heard about Airbnb only because there was a hype about it on social media	0.863	0.047
Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it	0.046	<.001

Source: Author's compilation

* I follow at least one social media influencer
** If there is a large social media hype about a product, I am more likely to buy it

However, respondents affirmed that they do indeed use star-ratings when making purchasing decisions (84% agreeable), with additional affirmation for purchasing intent on high star-ratings (e.g., star rating of 4 at an agreeable rate of ~88%), as well as affirming non-purchase intent with items rated on low-star ratings (such as star rating = 1 at an agreeable rate of 86% to that statement). The only exception, is that respondents who are susceptible to online hype in purchasing decision-making, would still consider other factors prior to purchasing a 4-star rated item. The conclusion is that although people do respond to star ratings as described above when making decisions about using Airbnb, generally, those responses are not due to susceptibility to social media influence. This contradicts Kim and Gambino's (2016) notion when discussing the impact of platform star-ratings, as an indicator of popularity and when tested, indicated strong correlations of star ratings to psychological behaviour and intentions. In fact, they dub online or platform star-ratings as 'bandwagon cues', because star-ratings convey the notion of popularity, which is a strong driving factor in bandwagon behaviour.

Contrasted to star-rating responses, susceptibility to social media influence is indeed correlated to hype (specifically wanting to try Airbnb due to others raving about their Airbnb experiences). Hype is a different form of digital signal or cue. It's an online 'buzz' about a specific online topic or item and this is usually about comments, reviews, shares and likes. Bindra et al. (2022), postulates about signaling theory and its role in bandwagon behaviour whereby it's purported that "individuals utilize a prompt or indicator to determine whether or not they should involve themselves with the market interaction" (pg. 309). Bindra et al (2022) further states that these cues are especially used in low-information situations to mitigate wrong decision-making whilst conducting an evaluation of "impalpable factors". This would prove especially true for individuals who are susceptible to social media influence. Indeed, the correlation results in this study reflect Bindra et al.'s (2022) supposition in support of the nuanced correlation finding that social media susceptibility positively correlates to hype (as a digital cue).

5.4.2 Hypothesis 2 discussion: Susceptibility to Groupthink vs response to digital cues

Hypothesis 2:

$H2_a$: Groupthink influences the response to digital cues (Fig. 25 below)

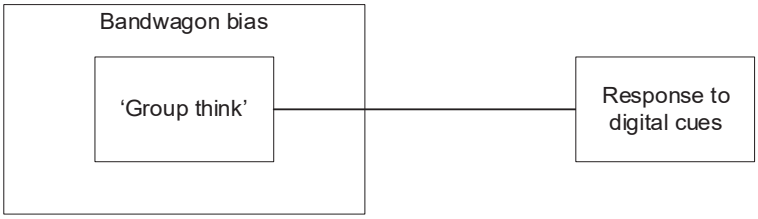


Figure 25: The original conceptual model representing hypothesis 2
Source: Author

Rose's (2011) work is a culmination of his extensive contribution to the Groupthink theory. Originally propositioned as a cognitive bias applied in intimate situations, can easily be adapted to mass scale when dealing with social media, as the symptom of Groupthink closely mirrors the symptoms of bandwagon behaviour bias. There are a few overlapping symptoms such as over-valuing the group and their opinion, a sense of collectivism and group rationalisation, making the distinction between what represents 'out-group' vs 'in-group' and stereotypically assessing 'out-group' members, the notion of uniformity and behaviour that is skewed toward unanimity (Rose, 2011).

Rose integrates his earlier work by outlining flawed decision-making regarding individuals who are susceptible to Groupthink. It reaffirms the position that Groupthink happens in situations of low information, as with many other cognitive biases and is a result of the failure of individuals to seek out more objective information, failing to accurately evaluate risk or outcomes, failure to revisit previous rejected choices and failure to engage in full and objective information-processing (Rose, 2011).
The SE, including Airbnb, is indeed an environment that represents limited or credible information and would force users to potentially engage it using cognitive biases, thus increasing the viability of Eckhardt et al.'s (2019) original inquiry regarding the "types of judgments, heuristics and biases [which] affect the consumption of shared (as opposed to owned) resources" (pg. 9)

As with hypothesis one, the same digital cues were cross referenced with people who displayed Groupthink traits. Similar to the findings and discussion highlighted in the preceding section, is

that people do indeed respond to star-ratings (whereby high star ratings invokes positive indications to purchasing decisions whilst low star-ratings decreases purchasing intent), however, that response is not correlated to Groupthink.
Thus, results indicate a definitive non-correlation between Groupthink and digital cues.

Table 25: Excerpt from Hypothesis 2 testing

Response to digital cues	*Group Think 1	**Group Think 2
	P-Value	P-Value
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would not buy it	0.632	0.841
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	0.548	0.661
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would go ahead and buy it	0.989	0.378
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision	0.217	0.005
I generally use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions	0.054	0.581
I heard about Airbnb only because there was a hype about it on social media	0.152	0.144
Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it	<0.001	<0.001

Source: Author's compilation

Consistent with hypothesis one's nuanced findings, Groupthink is correlated to hype whereby respondents want to have an Airbnb experience based on other's experience with it. Both hypotheses (one and two), highlight that their initial learning of Airbnb wasn't through social media hype.

It is worthwhile to delve further regarding the findings about star-ratings in both hypotheses one and two. It is evident that respondents use star-ratings in purchasing decisions, however, this is not due to either of the bandwagon bias characters traits tested (viz. susceptibility to social media influence and Groupthink).

This indicates that a different underlying psychological factor is at play. Based on literature on the SE, one of the underlying psychological constructs at play in the SE, is trust. Trust is based on the reputational trust of an establishment or brand. For example, star-ratings in the short-term accommodation sector in the traditional economy is unilaterally (third-party) rated by national councils, who determine the star ratings based on the level of services the establishment has to offer. Thus, any consumer or guest would understand what 3 or 5 star means from a service-offering perspective and their expectations are benchmarked against this.

The SE, however, works differently, as it works as a peer-rating system: guests review their accommodation and host of the respective listing they have used on Airbnb, and hosts review guests that have used their listing. Newlands et al (2019) purport that such ratings systems are received well by consumers as it builds trust. Furthermore, the enablement by SE platforms to accommodate ratings by peer experiences using their platform, builds trust in the SE platform and subsequently, fosters trust in the ratings received (Yang et al. 2019). In fact, Yang describes the trust mechanisms that consumers have, based on the reputational element of the platform itself as well as rating system because inter-person familiarity has been found to have no impact. The reason behind this dynamic, is because “actual (offline) experience can be substituted with indirect experience such as reviews, comments, and star-ratings” when actual in-person experience between guest and host has not happened, which is underpinned by trust in the SE provider and the ratings published on their platforms (Yang et al., 2019, pg. 207).

Thus, from the findings of this study, influences of the digital star-rating cue, is not due to either of the two bandwagon bias traits tested, but rather a potentially different psychological mechanism, such as trust.

5.4.3 Hypothesis 3 discussion: Profile-picture affiliation vs response to visual cues

Hypothesis 3:

$H3_a$: 'Profile-picture affiliation' influences the response to visual cues (Fig. 26 below)

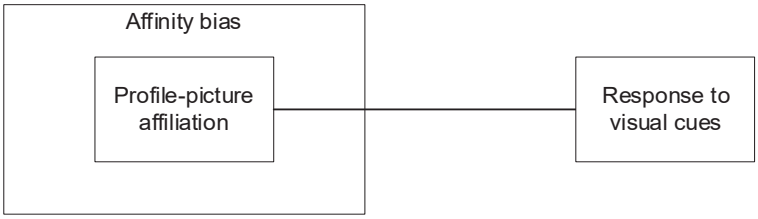


Figure 26: The original conceptual model representing hypothesis 3
Source: Author

Affinity bias, like any other cognitive bias, is experienced during in-person interactions, so it stands to reason that with the advent of the internet and diverse online communities, such biases will invariably become an element of online engagement. This might be exacerbated with online interactions where even less information is available. Affinity or similarity bias is a bias where people assess others based on demographic information and decide as to whether that individual is part of the in-group (like self in appearance) or out-group (unlike self in appearance) (Nødtvedt et al., 2021). Affinity bias may be triggered by various demographic elements (such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic standing, gender and religion to name a common few).

Nødtvedt et al. (2021) investigated the concept of self-congruence in sharing economy from a racial bias perspective, with their findings suggesting that people use Airbnb host profile pictures as a visual signal or cue to formulate an opinion about whether the host is favourable or not (by assessing their in-group/out-group status) and thus, whether the listing would suffice, and thus decide how and when they would participate in the short-term accommodation sharing economy.

Airbnb has no other published demographic information about the host or guest on their platform, except for profile pictures. Thus, profile pictures were used as the test signal in this study (named: visual cues). The results from this study support the hypothesis that affinity bias does exist when individuals.

The result of this study is indicative of a definitive correlation between affinity bias and visual cues.

Table 26: Excerpt from Hypothesis 3 testing

Response to visual cues	*Profile Picture affiliation 1	**Profile Picture affiliation 2	***Profile Picture affiliation 3
	P-Value	P-Value	P-Value
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would bother me	<.001	<.001	<.001
If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation	<.001	<.001	<.001
*If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all	0.012	<.001	<.001
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded	0.070	<.001	<.001
If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret	0.005	<.001	<.001
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would never ask for the guest to upload their profile picture because I do not see the need	0.189	0.006	<.001
If I were an Airbnb host, I would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes me feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy	0.107	<.001	<.001

Source: Author's compilation
*If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture
**Someone's profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort
*** I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort
*Reverse coded

This finding is supported by Ert et al. (2016) who purport that guests use host profile pictures as a trust signal without knowing any other information about them, and subsequently “make purchase decisions based on these impressions” (p.69). From a host perspective, Airbnb has reported to have removed 1.3 million hosts since 2016 from their platform “for declining to treat others without judgment or bias” (Airbnb, 2020). As a result, Airbnb has removed the mandatory requirement for guests to upload profile pictures before booking confirmation, in an attempt to thwart discriminatory host behaviour.

5.5 Conclusion

Even though survey respondents use online star-ratings in their purchase decision-making when considering participating in Airbnb transactions, that response is not due to bandwagon character traits, but due to other psychological factor(s), potentially the psychological construct of trust.

Converse to the above finding regarding bandwagon bias character traits, affinity bias traits show definitive correlation to online visual cues. This means that people who gain a sense of comfort or discomfort when looking at others online profile pictures (affinity bias character traits), do indeed respond to visual cues, such as host or guest profile pictures, and subsequently use that visual cue when making decisions about (potentially) participating in the sharing economy.

Based on the findings, the original conceptual model regarding two types of cognitive biases and their role in participation in the SE, has been updated accordingly (fig. 27)

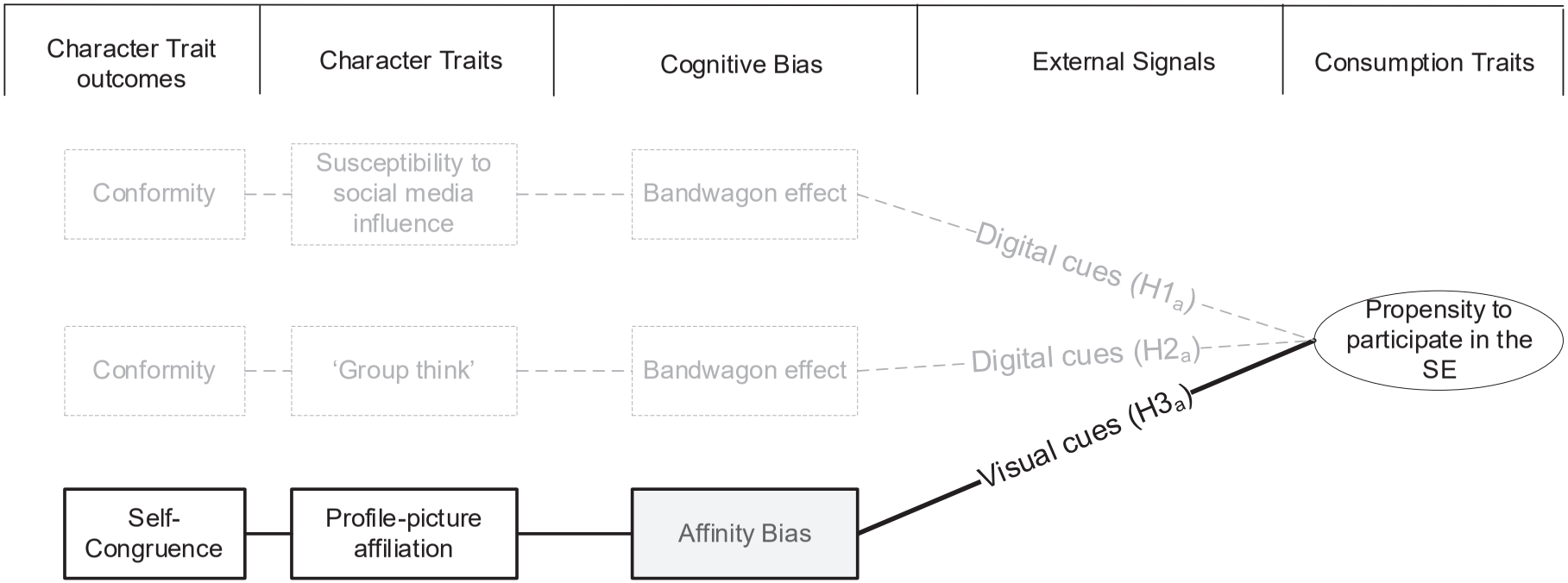


Figure 27: Revised conceptual model based on research outcomes
Source: Author

6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of this study as it pertains to two cognitive biases tested in the SE: Bandwagon bias and Affinity bias and the responses of survey respondents to digital and visual cues respectively. This sections also addresses:

- 6.2- Recommendations
- 6.3- Research contribution
- 6.4- Research limitations
- 6.5- Future research

6.2 Recommendations

Airbnb has highlighted some key issues pertaining to behaviour and factors which impede consumption behaviour on their platform. Because Airbnb represents an archetype of the SE, the issues that plague Airbnb could very well be common issues in the SE as an industry. Because the short-term accommodation industry is, for all intents and purposes, an unregulated industry, platforms such as Airbnb have enabled various digital and visual cues on their platform to foster openness and trust. This is a direct mitigating action to try and promote transparency in environments perceived to be high-risk, seeing that in-person interaction would be amongst individual strangers as opposed to consumers interacting with reputable traditional firms (like hotel chains). In environments of low information and higher risk, digital and visual cues become the information people make purchasing decisions on, such as using star-ratings as a gauge to determine product quality, reviews to ascertain product popularity, and profile pictures to see who they are transacting with.

Key problematic elements have emerged in the SE, in that even though star ratings are generally used in online purchasing decisions, the rating mechanism on Airbnb is a bilateral system, where both guest and host are able to rate each other. This is perceived to create a rating environment that is coerced, and could explain why star rating on the platform, are generally very high in many instances. However, contrasted to the latter issue, is another element of concern where the star rating mechanism is conflated with the star-rating system of

the traditional short-term accommodation sector, where star ratings are used to define the level of luxury as opposed to Airbnb, where star ratings are meant to determine the level of met-expectations. Thus, some hosts may provide the guest with the what was expected 100% (which should render a 5-star rating), yet their rating may be a 3 or 4 because the guest has based that on the modest nature of the accommodation (Porges, 2016). Similarly, novice Airbnb travellers may choose a 5-star rated listing only to be disappointed because their expectations of what 5-star means, is aligned to the traditional hotel sector star-ratings. Another misrepresentation is when average high star-ratings are misperceived as cues of popularity instead of 'expectations met', which is why Kim and Gambino's (2016) specifically refer to star-rating systems as 'bandwagon cues'. This is why Ert el al. (2016), affirm that "sharing economy platforms must understand what consumers infer from both visual and the non-visual information posted on their sites and should design their sites accordingly to attempt to reduce potential biases." (p. 72)

Thus, star-ratings may not represent what it was intended to, nor could it be perceived as what it should, but this study has definitively indicated that people use digital cues such as star-ratings before transacting or considering transacting in the SE. It is recommended that Airbnb review their star-rating system and address any misrepresentation to ensure that both host and guest maintain trust in the platform as well as to preserve brand reputation.

When assessing the role of bandwagon bias in response to digital cues, this study confirmed that overall, response to digital cues had no correlation to bandwagon bias traits. It was only in nuanced findings that bandwagon behaviour traits were correlated to specific digital cues, that being social media hype. Based on this, it is recommended that Airbnb implement additional social media marketing strategies or expand current influence marketing strategies to promote further use of their platform.

'Visual cues' was a theme specifically used to test how people respond to online profile pictures of guests or hosts should they participate in the SE as hosts or guests respectively. There is a clear indication from this study that survey respondents do indeed use someone profile pictures when deciding to transact in the SE as it gives them a sense of comfort or discomfort. This speaks directly to the issues Airbnb currently face, regarding discriminatory behaviour witnessed on their platform, where they have a specific program (called 'Project lighthouse') to gain understanding of this issue, and together with American civil society groups, implement policy changes. It is worthwhile to note that this program was conceived, primarily to address discriminatory *host* behaviour. Based on the finding of this study, the affinity bias character trait (which is part of a greater discriminatory behaviour spectrum), affects guests and hosts alike and it can be inferred that guests or potential guests who display this cognitive bias will carry that through if they would one day become hosts. It is recommended that Airbnb address the

issue holistically (guests and hosts) and make it global policy (adapting for region-specific policies by working with regional civil societies). Hosts and guests should remain anonymous to each other and upon booking confirmation, can request profile picture uploads and personal identification (such as First and Last names), with cancellations thereafter managed through Airbnb. This invariably means that Airbnb will need to play a more comprehensive role in their business and take accountability for their platform and the associated reputational systems engrained therein.

6.3 Research contribution

The research gap that was identified by Eckhardt et al. (2019), formed the basis of this study to understand the cognitive biases at play in the SE: “To date, this literature has focused on decision-making strategies and biases that drive the consumption of goods that are owned… Thus, an important question is, what types of judgments, heuristics and biases affect the consumption of shared (as opposed to owned) resources?” (pg. 9).

To address this research gap, the following areas were studied and is summarised in table 27, indicating the research contribution this study has made to addresses part of the research gap identified by Eckhardt et al. (2019), as the literature review in chapter 2 did not reveal any empirical studies as it pertains to the two cognitive biases addressed in this research paper. As such, this research explores new ground in consumption psychology in the SE.

Table 27: Research contribution

Research Question (Related hypotheses)	Excerpt from the literature review	Research findings and research contribution
How does bandwagon bias character traits impact consumption in the SE? (Hypotheses 1 and 2)	Based on Eckhardt et al.'s (2019) enquiry, heuristics and biases are not well understood in the SE. Furthermore, Ert et al. (2016) urges more research into how information (visual or not) is presented platforms to lower the potential of unintended bias consequences.	The two areas of research-need highlighted by both Eckhardt et al (2019) and Ert et al. (2016) were overlaid to formulate the test scenarios presented in this study, by determining how bandwagon bias (measured across 2 character traits), influenced the response to digital cues (measured across two dimensions viz. Response to star-ratings and response to social media hype). The findings are as follows: • As an overall assessment, bandwagon bias character traits do not influence the response to SE digital cues. • However, respondents do use star ratings to make choices to participate transactionally in the SE, however, there is no correlation to suggest that these responses are due to any bandwagon character traits • Furthermore, respondents do respond to social media hype to become potential transactional participants in the SE, and nuanced findings suggest that these responses are correlated to bandwagon character traits. This study provides a small research contribution to the consumption psychology literature by studying the existence of bandwagon bias character traits in the SE and how various digital signals elicit various and nuanced bandwagon responses as a determinant of SE participation.
How does affinity bias character traits impact consumption in the SE? (Hypotheses 3)	The lines of enquiry of both Eckhardt et al. (2019) and Ert et al. (2016) studies highlighted above, combined with Cheng and Foley (2018) enquiry regarding the call more research into digital discrimination, given the rapid growth of the SE, has culminated into the third hypothesis of this study	The three areas of research-need highlighted Eckhardt et al (2019), Ert et al. (2016) and Cheng and Foley (2018), were overlaid to formulate the test scenario presented in this study, by determining how Affinity bias (as a sub-construct of discrimination and measured through respondents affiliation to strangers profile pictures online), influenced the response to visual cues (measured by prompting questions about how they would react if they were to see guest or host profile pictures in the context of Airbnb participation). The findings are as follows: As an overall assessment, affinity bias character traits do influence the response to SE visual cues as correlation across the majority of intersected items. This study provides a small research contribution to the consumption psychology literature by studying the existence of Affinity bias character traits in the SE and how visual cues elicit affinity bias responses and how that affects the propensity for SE participation.

6.4 Research limitations

Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted, that inherent in all research studies, there are limitations. This section addresses the research limitations, from research methodology, application to generalisability of research findings.

Research methodology: Research instrument and analysis limitations:

- The survey used researcher-developed survey questions around psychology themes of bias as it pertains to the SE. Validated pilot studies to extensively test the research methodology (Bell et al., 2019) would have been optimal to ensure that all tested psychological constructs and dimensions are inter-correlated
- Extensive and multi-item survey questions (>10) are required to accurately probe a construct to yield higher Cronbach alpha's, which would allow the researcher to run confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)
- It may be more viable to test less hypotheses so that less constructs can be tested more extensively, as too many questions would result in survey fatigue, yielding lower response rates (Bell et al., 2019)
- Even though non-parametric tests, such as Kruskal-Wallis, are used to analyse data that do not meet assumptions for parametric tests, as was applied in this study, it is noted that these tests "tend to be not as powerful; that is, they may be less sensitive in detecting a relationship or a difference among groups" (Pallant, , pg. 133)

Research application limitations and generalisability:

- Because the commercial application of the SE was selected for this research, it does not apply to any other forms of non-monetary forms of the SE
- The generalisability of the visual and digital cues may be operationalised differently to that employed in the context of Airbnb, and as such would require its own research to draw credible conclusions. For example, Uber driver profile pictures may be for the sole purpose of identification of the driver during pick-up whereas the Airbnb's visual cue's may be to elicit a different social dynamic.

- Based on the non-probability sampling techniques used in this study, the findings can only be applied to the population surveyed with very tethered application to the Airbnb community as a whole.
- The use of Airbnb is something that requires a lot more planning and is of a much more intimate nature (sleeping in a stranger's residence), which might require a different set of social or psychological responses to participate, as opposed to a 20-minute car ride using Uber. Thus, the nature of the survey, its questions and findings would not necessarily be applicable to any other SE platform outside of Airbnb.

6.5 Future research

Based on the expansive array of biases that could possibly exist, future research opportunities are ample.

Based on the research conducted for this study, numerous survey refinements could be made to test bandwagon bias constructs more accurately and comprehensively.

With regard to affinity bias, there are multiple focus areas that could be tested, which has current application in terms of race politics, gender identity and many other areas of contention between different political ideologies. This would prove particularly beneficial for marginalised groups that may be more at risk of being discriminated against.

Research into other SE platforms and their visual and digital cues could be studied to understand how consumption in that particular SE industry works and the associated biases that could arise and drive or impede consumption, which would help service providers improve their platforms and guide their respective marketing strategies. It may also aid in shaping platform policy to promote equitable experiences for all participants.

Even though affinity bias was shown to exist in (potential) SE participants, more focused studies are needed to understand what affinity bias were prevalent, as in-group and out-group status could range from affinity based on one or more factors, including but not limited to: gender, race, ethnicity, religion and even sexual orientation, all of which people feel they can surmise from a profile picture, demonstrating the powerful impact one visual cue can have on SE participation decision-making.

6.6 Conclusion

An online survey was conducted, with 165 viable responses documented and used for descriptive analysis, reliability tests and inferential statics to test hypotheses. Three hypotheses were tested to determine if bandwagon bias character traits influenced the response to Airbnb digital cues such as star ratings and general hype. The findings overwhelmingly negated any correlation between bandwagon bias traits and response to digital cues, with more nuanced findings of some correlation between the bias and hype. No correlated behaviour of response to star ratings were noted for bandwagon bias traits.

Conversely to the above findings on bandwagon bias, affinity bias showed overwhelming correlations to visual cues (that being online profile picture of guest/host). Thus, it can be concluded that affinity bias exists and determines how people engage or participate in the SE or how they would if they consider Airbnb as an option in their short-term accommodation plans.

Several study limitations were highlighted, the most notable around study generalisability and application to other SE platforms.

Future research need to refine the constructs tested in this study and/or delve into many other potential biases that could exist, with more focus on specific types of biases that could impact marginalised communities as they would be at a higher risk when engaging in the SE short - term accommodation industry, Potential viability can also relate to adapting these bias studies to other SE types outside of the short-term accommodation industry, such as Airbnb.

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8 Appendix 1: GIBS ethical clearance application

Complete ALL sections relevant to your research. ALL researchers must complete Sections E and F.

SECTION A

PRE-EXISTING PERSONAL RECORDS OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Specify the nature of records and how they will be used: _____

2. Confirm that permission has been obtained to study and report on these records. *Remember to attach permission letter(s).* ☐ I confirm

3. Provide the name and job title of the person in the organisation who has authorised the use of the records:
   Name: _____ Job title: _____

4. In the event that individual data is to be reported, how will confidentiality and/or anonymity be assured? *Mark all that apply – ensure this is included in your methodology.*
   - ☐ No names will be requested
   - ☐ No names will be reported
   - ☐ Data will be stored without identifiers
   - ☐ Only aggregated information will be provided
   - ☐ Other. Please specify: _____

SECTION B

NEW DATA OBTAINED FROM HUMAN SUBJECTS

5. Does the nature of your research require you to collect data from respondents who constitute a 'vulnerable population', defined as those who are particularly susceptible to coercion or undue influence or who have difficulty giving free and informed consent to being the subjects of research.
   - ☑ No
   - ☐ Yes: explain the nature of the population and what measures will be put in place done to reduce or minimise this vulnerability – *ensure this is included in your methodology.* _____

6. Please confirm that no incentive is to be offered to respondents to participate in the study. ☑ I confirm

7. Mark the applicable box(es) to identify the proposed procedure(s) to be carried out to obtain data:
   - ☐ Interview guide *(Attach if applicable)*
   - ☑ Survey questionnaire *(Attach if applicable)*
   - ☐ Pre-existing proprietary test instrument, e.g. MBTI *(Attach if applicable)*
     Confirm that permission has been obtained to use it. *Remember to attach letter(s) of permission to use proprietary test instrument(s) from an appropriately authorised person.* ☐ I confirm
   - ☐ Intervention, e.g. training *(Describe):* _____

8. Confirm that the data gathering is accompanied by a consent statement. ☑ I confirm

9. Where is the consent statement found?

   ☑ As part of the survey questionnaire
   If quantitative data collection, in the introduction section of the questionnaire.

   ☐ As a separate document *If qualitative data collection, remember to attach.*

10. Is there a risk that the respondents may not fully understand the nature of the study, or instructions or questions, or their rights as a result of language barriers between themselves and the researcher?

    ☑ No, there is not a risk

    ☐ Yes, there is a risk: how will the subjects' full comprehension of the content of the research, including giving consent, be ensured? Please specify *Include in methodology.*

    _____
    _____
    _____

11. Do any respondents risk possible harm or disadvantage (e.g. financial, legal, reputational, or social) by participating in the research?

    ☑ No

    ☐ Yes: explain what types of risk and what is done to minimise and mitigate those risks *Include in methodology.* _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

12. Are there any aspects of the research about which subjects are not to be informed?

    ☑ No

    ☐ Yes: explain why, and how subjects will be debriefed *Include in methodology.* _____
    _____
    _____

13. Will audio or video recorded data be transcribed and/or translated by an independent transcriber and/or translator?

    ☑ No

    ☐ Yes: confirm that the transcriber and/or translator will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement to protect the respondent's confidentiality
    Remember to attach a pro-forma non-disclosure agreement ☐ I confirm

14. How will **confidentiality** (when the identity of the respondent is known to the researcher e.g. when data collection is via interviews) and/or **anonymity** (when the identity of the interviewer is not known to the researcher e.g. when data collection is via surveys) of the respondents and their data be assured? *Include in methodology.*

    ☑ No names will be requested
    (when the identity of the respondent is not known to the researcher)

    ☐ No names of individuals or organisations will be reported
    (when the identity of the respondent is known to the researcher)

    ☑ Only aggregated information will be reported

    ☑ Data will be stored without identifiers

    ☐ Other. Please specify _____
    _____
    _____

15. Is the topic of your research and the nature of the interview or survey questions about one or more particular organisations or to be conducted within one or more particular organisations?

- [x] No
- [ ] Yes: confirm that appropriately authorised person/s have provided written permission for you to conduct this research *Remember to attach signed permission letter/s* ☐ I confirm

SECTION C

PUBLIC NON-HUMAN DATA

16. Specify the nature of records to be used: Explain how they will be selected, where the data will be sourced and how the data will be used *Include in methodology:*

17. Confirm that this pre-existing non-human data is in the public domain, is legally accessible and is free of any copyright. ☐ I confirm

SECTION D

PRIVATE ORGANISATION-SPECIFIC NON-HUMAN DATA

18. Specify the nature of records (e.g. financial reports, marketing reports or safety records) and how they will be used: _____

19. Confirm that permission has been obtained to study and report on these records.
Remember to attach permission letter(s). ☐ I confirm

20. Provide the name and job title of the person in the organisation who has authorised the use of the records:
Name: _____ Job title: _____

21. Do companies risk possible harm or disadvantage (e.g. financial, legal, reputational or social) by participating in the research?

☐ No

☐ Yes: explain what types of risk and what is done to minimise and mitigate those risks: _____

22. How will **confidentiality** (when the identity of the respondent is known to the researcher e.g. when data collection is via interviews) and/or **anonymity** (when the identity of the interviewer is not known to the researcher e.g. when data collection is via surveys) of the respondents and their data be assured? *Include in methodology.*

☐ No names will be requested
(when the identity of the respondent is not known to the researcher)

☐ No names of individuals or organisations will be reported
(when the identity of the respondent is known to the researcher)

☐ Only aggregated information will be reported

☐ Data will be stored without identifiers

☐ Other. Please specify: _____

ALL researchers must complete Sections E and F.

SECTION E

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED FOR EXAMINATION

23. Please select the relevant option relating to the confidentiality of the research report you will submit for examination:

- [x] Free access, i.e. report not embargoed
- [ ] No access for a period of two years after research report is submitted for examination
  Note that in exceptional circumstances, GIBS, being the copyright holder of the published research, may consent to an embargo of the report submitted for examination for a period of no more than two years. If you wish to apply for such an embargo, please provide reasons for this in a separate attachment.
- [ ] No access under any circumstance for an undetermined period.
  A letter of permission from the Vice- principal: Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Pretoria must be obtained prior to making this application – and attached to this application for ethical clearance.

SECTION F

DATA STORAGE AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED FOR EXAMINATION

24. Please conform that you will use appropriate methods to ensure your data is safely stored in an accessible format for a minimum period of 10 years — [x] I confirm

25. Confirm that the details of your data storage method are set out in your attached methodology chapter — [x] I confirm

26. It is a goal of GIBS to make research available as broadly as possible. Mark the boxes below for the medium/media in which you do **NOT** wish results to be made available.

Academic dissemination	**Popular dissemination**
[■] Research report	[ ] TV
[ ] Scientific article	[ ] Radio
[ ] Conference paper	[ ] Lay article
[ ] Book	[ ] Podcast
	[ ] Book

Provide reasons for any limitation on publication marked above: _____

_____

_____

27. Confirm that the consent obtained is aligned with the extent of dissemination. E.g. consent if you are planning to use the research to launch a consulting career will be more comprehensive than in the case of research that is intended only for a scientific audience. — [x] I confirm

28. Do you wish to describe any other information which may be of value to the committee in reviewing your application?

- [x] No
- [ ] Yes
  (provide details in a separate sheet attached to this application)

APPROVALS

The applicant must please ensure that the supervisor and co-supervisor (where relevant) has signed the form before submission.

RESEARCHER/APPLICANT:

I affirm that all relevant information has been provided in this form and its attachments and that all statements made are correct.

Student/ Researcher's Name in capital letters: SHAMEEMA BHYAT

Signature: _____ Date: 05/07/2022

Supervisor Name in capital letters: DR DANEEL VAN ECK

Signature: _____ Date: 11/07/2022

Co-supervisor Name in capital letters: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: GIBS shall do everything in its power to protect the personal information supplied herein, in accordance to its company privacy policies as well the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013. Access to all of the above provided personal information is restricted, only employees who need the information to perform a specific job are granted access to this information.

FOR DOCTORAL AND FACULTY / RESEARCH ASSOCIATE / STAFF MEMBER RESEARCH ONLY

- [3] Approved
- [2] Conditionally approved, minor errors require correction
- [1] Resubmission as per Ethics Committee comments
- [0] Rejected in entirety, resubmit as per Ethics Committee comments

COMMENTS

REC Signature: _____ Date: _____

9 Appendix 2: Ethical clearance approval

From: **Masters Research** <MastersResearch@gibs.co.za>
Date: Mon, 18 Jul 2022 at 11:07
Subject: Ethical Clearance Approved
To: 17328642 <17328642@mygibs.co.za>
Cc: Masters Research <MastersResearch@gibs.co.za>

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance Approved

Dear Shameema Bhyat,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

Masters Research

Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria

Main Tel: +27 11 771 4000
Direct Tel:

Email: mastersresearch@gibs.co.za

10 Appendix 3: Survey Questionnaire

Bias in the sharing economy

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 2

Good day
Thank you for considering participating in this research about the short-term accommodation industry in the sharing economy (such as Airbnb). The information you input will remain anonymous as no personal identifiers will be captured or stored. Only generic demographics information will be collected.

The survey will take approximately 8 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you can withdraw from the survey process at any time. By consenting below, you acknowledge that your participation is voluntary and that you are 18 years of age or older.

Should you require further information about this research, kindly contact my supervisor, Dr Danéel van Eck (Daneel@prosoft.dev) or myself at 17328642@mygibs.co.za

Thank you
Shameema Bhyat
Master of Philosophy (Corporate Strategy) candidate
Gordon Institute of Business Science (University of Pretoria)
2022

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 1

Q1 Do you consent to completing this survey?

- ○ No (1)
- ○ Yes (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you consent to completing this survey? = No

Q2 Do you know what Airbnb is or have you stayed at one?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you know what Airbnb is or have you stayed at one? = No

Q3 Have you stayed in a hotel, motel, B&B, self-catering unit, Airbnb or in timeshare accommodation before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4 Are you planning to stay at an Airbnb, hotel, motel, B&B, self-catering unit or in timeshare accommodation in the future?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 Are you currently or have you previously been an Airbnb host?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6 Are you planning on becoming an Airbnb host?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Q7 What Gender do you identify as?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q8 What is your ethnicity?

- ○ Asian or Middle Eastern (1)
- ○ Black (2)
- ○ Hispanic or Latino/a (3)
- ○ Multi-ethnic or mixed race (4)
- ○ Native American (5)
- ○ Polynesian (6)
- ○ White (7)
- ○ Other (8)
- ○ Prefer not to say (9)

Q9 What is your age?

- 18-25 (1)
- 26-35 (2)
- 36-45 (3)
- 46-55 (4)
- 55+ (5)
- Prefer not to say (6)

Q10 What is your relationship status currently?

- Married or in a relationship (1)
- Unmarried and single (2)
- Prefer not to say (3)

Q11 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some school (1)
- High School (2)
- Technical qualification or trade school (3)
- Bachelor's degree (4)
- Honor's degree (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- PhD or higher (7)
- Prefer not to say (8)

Q12 Please respond to each of the following statements without overthinking it. Think about your responses in terms of Airbnb only:

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Don't know/ have no opinion (6)
If something had an average 1-star rating, I wouldn't buy it (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would go ahead and buy it (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I generally use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I follow at least one social media influencer (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○

If there is a large social media hype about a product, I'm more likely to buy it (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it's worth trying it out for myself (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I'm more sceptical about it (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I heard about Airbnb only because there was a hype about it on social media (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○

If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures it would bother me (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation (15)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Someone's profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all (17)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded (18)	○	○	○	○	○	○

I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort (19)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret (20)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would ask for someone's profile picture for the sole purpose of knowing how they look so I would know them when I see them (21)	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would never ask for the guest to upload their profile picture because I don't see the need (22)	○	○	○	○	○	○

11 Appendix 4 : Certification of additional support

CERTIFICATION OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

(Additional support retained or not - to be **completed by all students)**

Please note that failure to comply and report on this honestly will result in disciplinary action

I hereby certify that (please indicate which statement applies):

- *I DID NOT RECEIVE any additional/outside assistance (i.e. statistical, transcriptional, and/or editorial services) on my research report:*

  .....

✓ • *I RECEIVED additional/outside assistance (i.e. statistical, transcriptional, and/or editorial services) on my research report*

  .....

If any additional services were retained– ***please indicate below which:***

☑ ***Statistician***

☐ ***Transcriber***

☐ ***Editor***

☐ ***Other (please specify) .....***

Please provide the name(s) and contact details of all retained:

NAME: Gerry Mphego .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: Gerry@curious-crew.co.za .....

CONTACT NUMBER: +27 79 886 9655 .....

TYPE OF SERVICE: Statistics

NAME: .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: .....

CONTACT NUMBER: .....

TYPE OF SERVICE: .....

NAME: .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: .....

CONTACT NUMBER: .....

TYPE OF SERVICE: .....

I hereby declare that all *statistical write-ups and thematic interpretations of the results for* **my study were completed by myself without outside assistance**

NAME OF STUDENT: Shameema Bhyat

SIGNATURE: 

STUDENT NUMBER:

17328642

STUDENT EMAIL ADDRESS:

17328642@mygibs.co.za

12 Appendix 5: LinkedIn post

Appendix : LinkedIn post

Shameema Bhyat • You
Senior Leader & CDO: Data, Decision Science, Automation, Strategy & Business E...
2mo • Edited •

Good day LinkedIn Community
Thank you to all that have completed the survey...Truly appreciated.

I implore my connections to please complete the survey. I need your help to get this right.

Kindly complete the below survey, as it is part of my Masters Research. It goes pretty quick and I would love for you to participate please. Your responses are completely anonymous. Please also share this with your LinkedIn network. The more the merrier! I have recreated the post so that you are able to share it with others
Thanks in advance for your support :-)

Bias in the (short-term accommodation) Sharing Economy

pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com • 1 min read

Good day Thank you for considering participating in this research about the short-term accom...

13 Appendix 6: Variables and constructs

Group Think	GroupThink1	Q12_8	I generally believe that if most people like doing something, I will probably like it too
	GroupThink2	Q12_9	I generally believe that if something is very popular, then it is worth trying it out for myself
	*GroupThink3	Q12_10	I generally feel that if something is very popular, then I am more sceptical about it
Online Profile Picture Affiliation	PPA1	Q12_13	If a website allows its members to upload profile pictures, I gravitate to only viewing the profiles that have a picture
	PPA2	Q12_16	Someone's profile picture might give me a sense of familiarity or discomfort
	PPA3	Q12_19	I need to see someone's profile picture because it gives me a sense of comfort or discomfort
Response to Digital Cues	RTDQ 1	Q12_1	If something had an average 1-star rating, I would not buy it
	RTDQ 2	Q12_2	If something had an average 1-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision
	RTDQ 3	Q12_3	If something has an average 4-star rating, I would go ahead and buy it
	RTDQ 4	Q12_4	If something has an average 4-star rating, I would still consider other factors before making a final decision
	RTDQ 5	Q12_5	I generally use online star ratings and/or online reviews to make purchasing decisions
	RTDQ 6	Q12_11	I heard about Airbnb only because there was a hype about it on social media
	RTDQ 7	Q12_12	Hearing about others rave about the Airbnb experience really made/makes me want to try it
Response to Visual Cues	RTVQ 1	Q12_14	If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would bother me
	RTVQ 2	Q12_15	If I consider booking Airbnb accommodation, I would use the host profile picture as one of the deciding factors as to whether I want that particular accommodation
	*RTVQ 3	Q12_17	If Airbnb does away with host profile pictures, it would not bother me at all
	RTVQ 4	Q12_18	If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would always ask for the guest profile picture to be uploaded

	RTVQ 5	Q12_20	If I were to be an Airbnb host and I ask for someone's profile picture (after the booking is confirmed), I may feel a sense of comfort or a sense of regret
	RTVQ 6	Q12_21	If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would ask for someone's profile picture for the sole purpose of knowing how they look so I would know them when I see them
	RTVQ 7	Q12_22	If I were to be an Airbnb host, I would never ask for the guest to upload their profile picture because I do not see the need
	RTVQ 8	Q12_23	If I were an Airbnb host, I would cancel or consider cancelling if the guest profile picture makes me feel uneasy or as though they are untrustworthy
Social media susceptibility construct	SocialM 1	Q12_6	I follow at least one social media influencer
	SocialM 2	Q12_7	If there is a large social media hype about a product, I am more likely to buy it

Source: Author

*Reverse -coded entities