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Who is the host? Online identity construction on Airbnb

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WHO IS THE HOST? ONLINE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ON AIRBNB

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Abstract

Online identity is a dynamic, multi-faceted and socially constructed concept that. On a peer-to-peer sharing accommodation platform such as Airbnb, markers and forms of identity conveyed on self-descriptions made by hosts only provide a partial impression of the individual's identity. Peers contribute to the construction of online identity validating, denying or complementing this concept on their reviews after face-to-face or direct communication with hosts. However, no previous study has approached the concept of identity on Airbnb considering both sources of information: self-descriptions and peer reviews. The main objective of this research was to explore how host online identity was constructed on Airbnb. For this purpose, 1,590 self-descriptions of hosts in Mallorca, Spain and 41,499 corresponding peer reviews were subjected to a qualitative thematic analysis with the aid of NVivo 11 software. Four global themes were identified: *The social person, the outstanding service provider, the active individual* and *the multi-cultural self.* These themes illustrate defining personal and social characteristics communicated about Airbnb host and shed light on the interactivity of identity on P2P platforms.

Keywords

Airbnb, hosts, online identity, self-description, peer reviews, thematic analysis.

1. Introduction

In the sharing or peer-to-peer (P2P) economy individuals use online platforms to rent, lend, trade, barter or swap a wide range of goods and services that span from rooms to parking spaces (Heo, 2016). Participants are in the center of this business model. They are ordinary people with the desire to transform idle resources in additional income. As value is not only created by companies but is co-created by users, local residents are acting as business entities and those used to be consumers are also becoming service providers (Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016; Heo, 2016).

In the field of tourism, the accommodation sector is one of the most transformed by the sharing economy (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2015). The boom of P2P accommodation platforms began in the last decade with the growth and popularization of sites such as the pioneer Homeexchage.com - founded in 1992, and the more recent Couchsurfing.org and Airbnb.com (Huber, 2017). Airbnb can be considered the most successful platform in the field of P2P accommodation (Gutierrez, Garcia-

Palomares, Romanillos & Salas-Olmedo, 2016). It was founded in 2008 as a platform for people to advertise and rent their spare rooms or second residences as tourist accommodation. The rapid success of the website has been attributed to its disruptive, internet-intensive business model and its unique value proposition which includes reduced costs, household amenities and opportunities for genuine interactions with the local culture (Guttentag, 2015). Airbnb provides access to 4 million listings in 65,000 cities, reaching more than 191 countries and over 200 million stays have been booked through the platform since its beginnings (Airbnb, 2017).

Being a P2P platform, information about users is a fundamental factor in Airbnb transactions: they involve individuals from different parts of the world with no previous experience with one another and result in face-to-face encounters. As in other accommodation P2P websites (Ronzhyn, 2013), profile information forms user identity on Airbnb. Personal profiles usually include a profile picture, a brief personal self-description and peer reviews (See Appendix 1). On the self-description section of the profile, members of the network use self-presentation to build their online identity. Self-presentation is a method that consists on the strategic selection of self-related textual information and images to communicate a message to others about who the person is (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013). Hosts use self-presentation both to represent their own personal identity (Tussyadiah, 2016) and to put across their identity as service providers able to offer a safe, clean and satisfactory place to stay (Guttentag, 2015). However, authenticity is not assured in personal self-presentation. When evaluating self-presentation on personal web-pages Döring (2002) found that users can hide certain aspects about themselves since they have more time to craft their ideal personas and less pressure to conform to social codes. Likewise, asynchronous communication and the lack of physical cues might impact host online identity creation on Airbnb.

Based on the previous arguments, computer-mediated theories related to the channel-reduction model sustain that web-based self-presentation by itself "conveys at best a pale and incomplete impression of real people" (Döring, 2002, p. 7). Therefore additional sources of information could be valuable to shape host online identity. On Airbnb, personal profiles display public peer reviews posted by either previous guest or previous hosts to allow potential customers to learn more about the other party before completing an online transaction (Guttentag, 2015). Ert, Fleischer, & Magen (2016) found that on online reviews guests refer to hosts on a first-name basis, which could reflect a perception of close personal contact. Since identity is developed through social exchanges (Harter, 1998), online and offline interactions would indeed provide guests with multiple opportunities to perceive defining characteristics of their hosts. Hence host-guest exchange related on peer reviews could offer a complementing vision on the host's real self.

Under this perspective, it is proposed that as in the case of other online communities (Delahunty, 2012), in accommodation sharing platforms what hosts and guests write

offers important insight into the multidimensional and dynamic nature of identity. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how host online identity is constructed on Airbnb, by analyzing the themes on host self-descriptions and peer reviews. In order to achieve this objective, 1,590 self-descriptions of Airbnb hosts in Mallorca and 41,499 peer reviews were subjected to a qualitative thematic analysis using the aid of Nvivo11 software. Four major themes were identified and defined to provide a vision on who the Airbnb host is said to be. The results of this study have practical implications on identity management for users of accommodation rental P2P platforms.

Understanding host online identity is important since guests on Airbnb use not only listing's information, but also host's information as cues to make their purchase decision (Ert, et al., 2016). Previous research has described the impacts of host characteristics such as race (Edelman & Luca, 2014; Wang, Xi & Gilheany, 2015) and physical appearance (Ert, et al., 2016) on accommodation prices, hosts' earnings and guest willingness to purchase. In addition, the dynamic role of guest reviews on shaping host online identity has also been illustrated by Liang, Schuckert, Law and Chen (2017) who found that good reviews granted Airbnb host a "Superhost" badge, which in turn acted as a cue for guest to be willing to pay more for those hosts' listings.

Despite the documented impacts of host identity on purchasing behavior, only one previous research study has dealt with its creation. Tussyadiah (2016) studied hosts' self-presentation efforts to communicate personal and commercial brand on Airbnb. As a result, she identified 5 clusters of host descriptions based on the words used for self-presentations. Although providing evidence of the use of self-description to articulate host online identity on Airbnb, this research overlooked the role of guests on assessing, validating and complementing that identity crafted by the host. In fact, the author recognizes such shortcomings and suggests the analysis of peer reviews to look for identity consistency. The present study pretends to fill this research gap and approach online identity as a multidimensional dynamic concept forged on host and guest interactions. It will also contribute to the understanding of the actors that participate on the sharing economy.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: the next section introduces the concepts of identity, online identity and social identity theory, which forms the theoretical framework for this study. Then the research methodology including data and analysis method is explained. In the following section, the four themes resulting from of the thematic analysis of host self-presentations and guest reviews are presented. Finally, conclusions and implications for strategic identity management on online P2P platforms are presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Identity

Identity seems to be the answer to the apparently simple question of 'Who am I?'. But in reality, is one of the most complex concepts in personal communication as the myriad of theoretical approaches to understand it demonstrate (Cover & Doak, 2015). The complexity of the notion of identity is recognized by Bucholtz & Hall (2005) who attributes it to three factors: its dynamism, its multi-faceted nature and its origin in interactivity. Other authors have also described identity as a dynamic concept. For example, Wynn & Katz (1997) consider the self a product of changing social contexts managed to adapt itself to them. Thus, it defies a fixed, static or rigid definition since it is capable to evolve determined by the situation and be subjected to continuous re-creation over time and space.

Cover and Doak (2015) provide further insight on the multi-faceted nature of the self. For them, identity is a product of multiple cultural, linguistic, legal and political constructions, 'discrete facets' comprehensible through common differentiations such as gender, race, nationality and sexual orientation, and other facets related to day-to-day life including religion, political affiliation, occupation and profession, class and status and preferences in taste and fashion. Alongside these aspects, identification with other individuals also play a defining part on identity. Therefore, identities represent the different roles a person have in society and the meanings and behaviors associated with them.

By referring to the identification with other individuals to understand oneself, Cover and Doak (2015) also introduce the idea that identity is socially formed and driven. Such argument is supported by Delahunty (2012), who affirms that identity is socially constructed in dialogue and is shaped not only by self-perception but by the perceptions of others, and the interpersonal power relations at play during the process of expressing to others who one is and what one does.

In attention to the previous considerations, in this research identity is conceived as 'a dynamic and socially constructed configuration of a person's defining characteristics'. This definition draws the phrase 'defining characteristics' from the conceptualization proposed by Ruyter and Conroy (2002) in which they considered as defining exclusively the aspects that one or others regarded as the most representative of a person's character from his multiple facets.

2.2 What's Host Online Identity?

While the intrinsic characteristics of the concept of identity hold true in the online world, internet is considered a different domain where people can explore and communicate their 'self'. The channel of communication is determinant to identity for two reasons: First the channel mediates the cultural, discursive and linguistic means through which

the markers and forms of identity (also known as personal defining characteristics) are made sensible (Cover & Doak, 2015). In the case of P2P accommodation platforms, discourse, culture and language are accessed, received and interpreted through the internet. Hence the use of the term 'Computer-mediated communication' to describe the field of study that deals with online-based human interactions, such as those that take place on the Airbnb website. Second, the relations and forms of mutual identification and recognition that occur among a group of individuals depend also on the channel (Cover & Doak, 2015). For example, exchanges between hosts and guests on Airbnb, at first, cannot be embodied or rely in physical non-linguistic communication cues because they are hinged on the internet.

Due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, in computer-mediated communications individuals need to create and convey their identities through software-enabled visual or textual representations (Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011). On personal profiles, hosts use pictures as visual representations of their physical characteristics. Ert et al. (2016) performed a controlled experiment based on hosts profile pictures and found that a more trustworthy photo leaded to a higher price and increased chance to purchase on Airbnb. Meanwhile, Wang, Xi and Gilheany (2015) determined Airbnb hosts' ethnicity through their pictures and discovered that Asian hosts in California earned on average 20% less than white hosts for similar rentals. Edelman and Luca (2014), also investigated possible racial discrimination from host pictures and concluded that black hosts on Airbnb charged about 12% less than non-black hosts for similar properties. Results from the latter researches suggest that host online identity self-presented through visual means can have negative impacts on listings performance.

Markers and forms of identity can also be expressed through discursive means such textual self-descriptions. Textual self-descriptions are usually crafted by the hosts through self-presentation, a method that comprises the strategic activities carried out by an individual with the purpose to convey to others the exact impression he is interested on conveying (Goffman, 1959). For hosts, self-presentation supports the communication of his positive self defining characteristics such as friendliness and closeness while avoiding disclosing detrimental images that might cause conflicts or rejection. As Goffman (1959) points out this does not mean that self-presentation is based on deception but that it facilitates the definition of the self in an viable way when negotiating normal social life in a social context. Self presentation also allows the host to manage the boundaries of his different facets. In her study about the implications of strategic self-presentation for host branding on Airbnb, Tussyadiah (2016) identified 5 clusters of hosts according to the words and self-presentation performances used to introduce themselves on the platform, these were: The Global Citizen, The Local Expert, The Personable, The Established, and The Creative. It was determined that most host relied on honest and positive self-presentation performances as well. This research demonstrated that hosts engage on self presentation activities to portray their defining characteristics on their Airbnb profiles and to manage how their personal and commercial roles form their identities. However, it failed to provide an integral

understanding of host online identity creation as it overlooked the role of peer participation on a socially constructed concept.

As it was mentioned previously, identity has an interactive origin and is formed in dialogue. Goffman (1959) explains that the self-presentational performances used to create a person's identity always need to be validated or discredit by interested parties in relation to the context of their interactions. In Airbnb, the interested parties are represented by 'peers', meaning host and guests. Therefore, host self-descriptions crafted by host through self-presentation would be subjected to confirmation or challenged by peers. The process is explained by Tussyadiah (2016), who takes into consideration that online transactions on Airbnb are followed by direct or face-to-face exchanges and proposes that host online identity shapes and is shaped by guest experience. First, identity expressed by hosts through self-presentation influences guest expectations. These online-formed expectations about the host are contrasted with personality cues 'given' and 'given off' by the host during service provision. The new online-offline built image defines guest experience, which is communicated to others through online reviews. Peer perceptions of the host expressed through customer reviews help then to form hosts identity on the website.

Ronzhyn (2013), presents evidence of the role of peers on online identity construction in her analysis of users' profiles on the P2P platform CouchSurfing.com. The author affirms that CouchSurfers are "allowed to construct their online identity only partially. The rest of the work is done by other members of a community through the references they leave" (p. 52). Reference are the equivalent of peer reviews on Airbnb. Another interesting finding of her study is that 3 main characteristic traits of CouchSurfers, namely the openness, readiness to share ideas and experiences and trustworthiness were communicated through the references but not necessarily through the self-presentation section of users' online profiles.

On the other side, for being constructed on a social context by peers, host online identity can be further be described from a social identity theory perspective. Social identity theory was proposed mainly by the European psychologist Tajfel and Turner. They argued that a person's identity consists of a personal and a social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). Personal identity comes from individual personality traits and comprises specific attributes of the person such as skills and beliefs. Likewise, personal identity relates to the individual as a unique entity. Accordingly, the host online 'personal identity' would be the array of idiosyncratic traits and personal characteristics used to define the host on his profile (Kim et al., 2011). For example, personal identity might be expressed via the use of adjectives that reflect personality traits such as easy-going, free-spirited, entertaining, or skills as flexible, efficient or innovative.

In contrast, social identity comes from the belonging to a particular group. It is defined by the affiliation of the individual to a group based on the perceive meaning of what that membership says of himself (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). Social identity is then a

person's classification within certain group that differentiates himself and the members of the group from members of other groups. Therefore, the host online 'social identity' would consist on the knowledge of his membership in a social group and the underlying sense of distinction and belonging. For instance, social identity could be articulated through the process of categorization into groups such as professionals, parents, home-owners or other that convey tacit meaning about the group to which the person belongs.

Based on the arguments presented above, in this research host online identity is considered as a 'dynamic configuration of the hosts defining personal and social characteristics in online space constructed through the social interaction between host and peers'. Unfortunately, no previous studies about host online identity construction considering the contribution of peer reviews were found. So far research about Airbnb hosts has dealt only with their motivations and deterrents to participate in the sharing economy and the impact of host experience on revenues (Guttentag, 2015) which is understandable due to the recent foundation of the platform and rapid popularity

Given the dynamic, multifaceted and socially rooted conceptualization of identity, an interpretivist research paradigm was adopted on this research. In the following section, the data utilized to derive conclusions about host online identity construction on Airbnb will be described, as well as the analysis method that allow to identify meaning from host self-descriptions and peer reviews.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

For the study, data about listings in the island of Mallorca compiled in January 2016 were analyzed. Mallorca is one of the main tourist destinations in Spain, receiving 9.713.311 international tourist in 2016 (IBESTAT, 2017). Due to the increasing popularity of sharing accommodation sites, the impacts of Airbnb on the island's tourist activity and local residents' quality of life have been recently an important focus of attention for tourism lawmakers (Edwards, 2017). The recognized importance that this P2P platform has in Mallorca makes it a relevant target destination for the present research.

Textual data containing hosts descriptions and customer reviews were obtained from the Inside Airbnb website. Inside Airbnb is an independent project with publicly sourced data and is not associated with or endorsed by Airbnb or its competitors (Inside Airbnb, 2017). This site compiles information published on Airbnb's official website about listings in more than 30 cities, including their location, availability calendar, room type, activity and host.

The listing database for Mallorca included 11,271 listings rented by 5,072 different hosts. Following Li, Moreno & Zhang (2015) arguments, hosts were classified

according to their number of listings on the platform and distinguished between inexperienced 'non-professional' individuals who offered one spare room or property for rent and 'professional' agents who managed two or more properties simultaneously. 70.3% hosts in Mallorca were non-professionals, while 29.7% were professionals who had from 2 to 533 properties listed. Professional hosts included 'Coldwell Banker Previews Binimarina', 'Priority Villas' 'Spain Rentals Properties' and other rental firms or individuals.

In this study, attention was restricted to 3,568 listings posted by non-professional hosts to exclude any professional organization conducting business on the platform. Assuming that accommodation rental companies could have a number of staff members dealing with guests so customer reviews about listing managed by professionals would express impressions about different individuals and not the same host.

To explore how hosts articulated their online identity trough self-presentation, textual data from the 'Host About' section were extracted. In this section hosts described themselves to the community. It is important to note that some listings did not include this information, as filling this field is not mandatory to list a property on the Airbnb website. Only data in Spanish and English were extracted for analysis. The total sample included self-descriptions by 1,590 hosts, who represent 44.6% non-professional hosts in Mallorca. A sample of 41,499 guest reviews of listings belonging to those hosts were selected to analyze peer contributions to hosts online identity creation.

3.2 Data analysis

Hosts self-presentations were compiled into two source files according to language (EN or SP). The same procedure took place with guest reviews. Source files were subjected to qualitative analysis for commonly recurring themes. Thematic analysis is considered "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It minimally organizes and describes your data in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6). Although thematic analysis in the field of tourism research remains relatively infrequent, its suitability has been demonstrated in conditions where a concept is subject to social, cultural, and temporal variation (Walters, 2016) such as the study of identity. However, the main reason for selecting thematic analysis as qualitative method of analysis was the subjective and multi-faceted nature of online identity, which was believed would not be sufficiently captured from the rich body of descriptive data by quantitative techniques.

Because research about host online identity is so scarce, the analysis was conducted starting from an inductive approach to derive themes closely linked to the data on hosts' self-descriptions. This provided an idea about the characteristics that form host's online identity from the host perspective. Subsequently, a deductive process was adopted to know how the topics found in self-presentation were comparable to

the themes on online reviews. In addition, within this study a graphic representation of themes that described host online identity was produced.

The thematic analysis followed the six steps suggested by Walters (2016). Phase 1 involved familiarization with the data by reading each one of the hosts self-descriptions. As the volume of peer reviews was considerably large, organization and exploration of the content was performed with the aid of the qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) NVivo 11. Despite early criticism about the appropriateness of using computers for textual analysis, QDAS has proven to be of great assistance to qualitative researchers in the management of large amount of unstructured data, information coding, retrieval and storage of emerging ideas and research records (Kelle, 1995). Case nodes for each host were created at this stage.

In phase 2 the author used text search queries, word frequency queries (See Annex 2 for Word Cloud example) and auto-coding commands to generate initial codes from the sources containing host self-descriptions (e.g. hobbies, family, places…) which reflected hosts' self-presentation performances, this constituted the inductive approach. To guarantee the interpretability of future results, additional stop-words such as 'day', 'with', 'hour' were configurated as suggested by Camprubía and Corominab (2016). Over 400 codes in total were identified from the texts of the self-descriptions. Sources containing peer reviews received the same treatment.

In phase 3, the researcher tried to identify themes on self-presentations that allowed to relate the codes generated in phase 2. Themes were derived from peer reviews as well separately. Afterwards with the use of search queries, themes generated for self-descriptions were compared to themes on peer reviews (deductive approach). This procedure represented a form of triangulation that enhances the credibility of the thematic analysis (Walters, 2016).

Then basic themes from all sources were condensed according to their similarities to create broader themes such as personality, social groups, perceptions, in Phase 4. During this step, internal coherence and consistency of themes were verified retrieving codified references from the sources. Overall coherence was also checked across the entire data set to make sure themes expressed by hosts did not have different connotations were articulated by guests.

In phase 5, global themes were formed after a deeper analysis and re-configuration of previously aggregated themes to preserve internal homogeneity and avoid overlapping concepts. Global themes are considered major pillars of the host online identity. From this point, the thematic network or visual representation of themes started to be developed. It is important to mention that as suggested by Walters (2016), this phase was iterative and involved continuously revisiting and reevaluating codes and themes, re-configuring them, expanding them and even deleting them until each global theme expressed a solid and single argument.

Finally, the four resulting global themes regarding hosts online identity, namely: 1. The social person, 2. The outstanding service provider, 3. The active individual and 4. The multi-cultural self were described, explored and analyzed by providing examples directly extracted from the content of the guest reviews and the host self-descriptions to illustrate the identities tried to be conveyed in each case. The thematic network was also completed to culminate this phase.

As a final remark on this section, considerations about objectivity, generalizability, and criteria for judging rigor and validity would be briefly discussed. The present research closely followed the methodology proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Walters (2016) which included detailed instructions to avoid research pitfalls while using thematic analysis and ensure its rigor. For the authors, such conditions should largely address any issues related to the credibility, applicability, dependability and confirmability, concepts considered equivalents to validity criteria used in the positivist researches.

4. Results

Based on a thematic analysis of hosts self-descriptions and peer reviews, four meaningful themes of host online identity were identified, which reflect different dimensions of the personal and social identity of hosts articulated online. The thematic network is represented on figure 1.
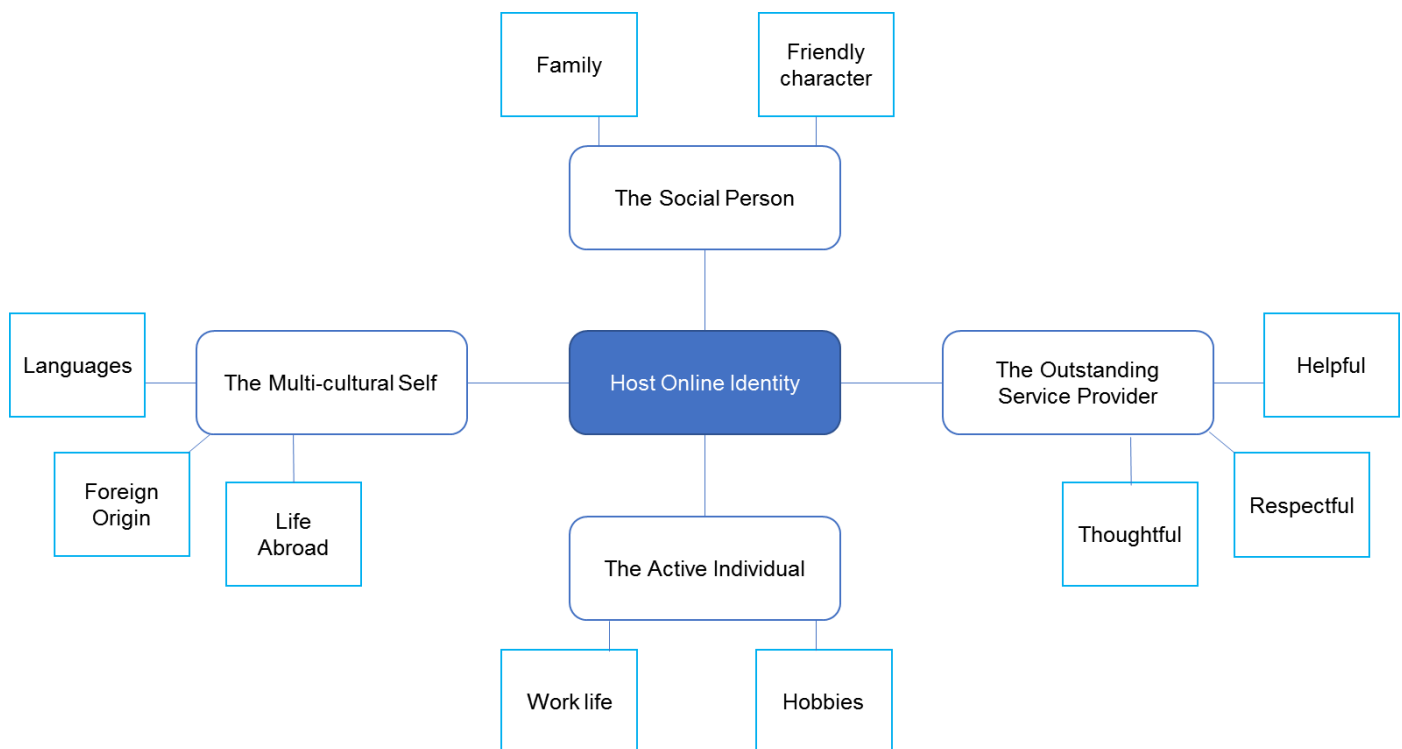

Figure 1. Thematic Network. Source: Own elaboration, 2017.

Theme 1: The Social Person

The global theme titled 'The Social Person' was equally significant in hosts' self descriptions and peer reviews. It defined the host as both a family member and a person with an open and friendly character eager to meet new people and discover different cultures. It was composed by two main organizing themes: Family relationships and Friendly character.

Family relationships were identified through the frequent use of words such as 'couple', 'children' and 'married'. Individuals on Airbnb provide details about their family members to introduce their peers to the other people that resides in the property being listed on the website. Information about family members includes names, occupation, age and personal interests. This seemed to be a way to provide cultural cues previous to a possible face-to-face encounter.

> *Hi, my wife & I are pleased to satisfy our guests and love to make them happy. New here but have been successfully renting for several years through other websites and many happy customers, some come back every year. Best wishes…*

Hosts sometimes shared the responsibilities of catering for the needs of guests with their family members, resulting on a direct contact with more than one person. On these cases, guests referred to their interactions with the family as a group of hosts when commenting about their stay.

> *… We love ur family Maria, you guys are really warm and welcoming and made us feel like family the moment we stepped in.. Thank u very much for the Binnasalem Vino.. And how can we forget the Tortillas Patata... Super delicious Espanyol Omlette…*

Considering friendliness, this is a personality trait that reflects amicability and a personable nature. Assertive techniques of impression management include the use of emotive adjectives like 'easy-going', 'open-minded', and 'nice' to describe character. The word 'friendly' itself was the most common adjective used by hosts to describe themselves. Social interaction was one of the main three reasons for host to share their dwellings found by Karlsson and Dolnicar (2016). In fact, meeting people and the love of sharing seemed to be the arguments behind this driver.

> *Open and tolerant person. Always willing to meet new people and exchange life experiences and interests. I love learning languages and as well, music and sport. The most important thing for me is to enjoy and learn from what life can teach you.*

Being a service provided by peers to peers, the nature of the guest rapport with the host is an important factor in their evaluation of the accommodation service (Heo, 2016). Service marketing literature establishes that customers express strong preferences for the level of friendliness they want from every particular service encounter, which is subjective and varies from person to person (Goodwin & Smith, 1990). According to peer reviews, guests find high levels of friendliness from hosts which is translated on positive feedback.

> *…Anna is even more lovely as I imagined her to be: very welcoming, open, sunny - I would have loved to spend more time with her. I can highly recommend her place and would have liked to take her and her friends back with me to Barcelona, thanks for everything!*

The image of the host as a social member was configurated through hosts and gests impressions with the same frequency. Hosts classified themselves in social groups as married people or parents to put across their familiar status while they used unique attributes to describe their affable personality, guests also recurred to adjectives to validate the hosts' open disposition.

Theme 2: The Outstanding Service Provider

Previous studies about host reviews have found them to be extremely positive when comparing them with those on traditional accommodation rental websites such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com (Zervas et al., 2015, Ert et al., 2016), expressing high levels of satisfaction with the properties and the hosts. The thematic analysis on guest reviews allowed to identify three main characteristics of hosts particularly appreciated by guests: helpfulness, respectfulness and thoughtfulness. It was detected that the use of self-promotion strategies of self-presentation is infrequent among hosts, although they occasionally identified themselves as 'responsible' or 'organized'.

'Helpful' was the most used word by peers to describe hosts. It was usually followed by references to the host abilities provide great amounts of useful information, to solve problems quickly and accommodate any kind of special request. The efficiency with which hosts answered questions or organized things was also expressed to construct this dimension of host identity.

> *Margarita was a great host. The apartment was as described. Nice thing was that it was full of all kind of brochures. Margarita gave us great tips and lot of small details as how to get to the apartment, where to eat, which are the best beaches, where to buy stuff and which are the local traditions (as small markets in the villages around). She sent it to us even before we have arrived there. Very very helpful if you are curious to visit new place and to find out what is typical there. Thank you again, if we come back to Mallorca we will be happy to stay there again.*

Respectfulness referred to the host's capacity to understand when guests needed their own space and respected privacy. Considering the varied personal, economic and psychological risks involved on P2P transactions the validation and reassurance of the host as a mannerly and polite individual result significant for a positive perception.

> *David, the host goes above and beyond what is expected. He respects your privacy but at the same time is very easy talk to and relax with in the main lounge. He has exceptional local knowledge, this includes; things to do, places to visit, restaurants and bus routes.*

Regarding thoughtfulness, the disposition of hosts to go 'above and beyond' to make their stay memorable was often praised. Phrases such as 'extra details', 'unexpected', 'pleasant surprised' acted as pointers of this unique host skill.

> *Anibal is a very hospitable, considerate, and respectful host. He was very helpful, and even did things that were beyond expectation like make me a traditional Spanish dinner for one of the World Cup soccer matches. While friendly and inviting, Anibal also provided an atmosphere of privacy as well.*

Brochado et al. (2017) found evidence of convergence on guests' experiences that could explain the high levels of satisfaction for host with different cultures and with different expectations. Guest reviews also demonstrated that the host service was at many times being judged against traditional accommodation establishments. Fact that complements the commercial facet of host identity. A typical example is provided by the following review:

> *Very nice quarters in an old, very nicely renovated house at the central square. But most important Hector XXX* and his family is an exceptional host making the guests feel immediately as part of the family. He offers much more than normally expected from a bed & breakfast establishment.*
>
> **Last name removed to protect privacy*

Theme 3: The Active Individual

The host as 'active individual' was understood from the reference to the hosts work life and hobbies as being in contact with nature and participating in sports. Host engage on classification with social groups to relate to hosts interested in the same kind of activities and differentiate themselves from people that don't share their same characteristics.

By mentioning occupation and professions hosts let others know social groups that identify them, e.g. 'nurse', 'actor' and 'property manager' and their specific roles on society.

I am an artist (singer, dancer actress) my husband is a photographer. We have two children and have resided in Brooklyn NY for nearly 20 years together. We love to travel and have been to Europe, Asia, and Central America.

Hobbies among hosts were diverse but congruency was found around words such as 'outdoors', 'mountains', 'sport' and 'cooking'. Providing cues on topics of interest facilitates the communication on the online world and the offline world.

*I love nature, the sun, the beaches and the forest. I'm loving the sport, bike, run and swim, I like sailing kayak, do windsurf when there are wind.
I have traveled to different parts of Europe and I would like to know the other continents, cultures, people and their habits of life.*

Theme 4: The Multi-Cultural Self

The multi-cultural self was a prominent theme among host self descriptions and guest reviews. It might easily to be related to a self-presentation cluster previously described on Tussyadiah (2016) study: "The Global Citizen". Three organizing themes were discovered: The foreign origins of the host, language proficiency and life abroad.

In relation with the foreign origins of the hosts, an important number of users admit having been born outside of Spain or having parents that come from different lands. This fact is congruent with the adoption of P2P of accommodation platforms as a global phenomenon. Also provides is used to present themselves as foreigners well adapted to a new culture and prepared to introduce it to others.

"I am half german half french and was born in Mallorca. My parents have been living here for the past 43 years. I used to live in our casita when I was single, now things have changed since my husband Ben and I got three children (5, 3 and 1 year old) and needed more space. Now we live outside a little town close to Port of Andratx, in the countryside. We do not get to travel much this days...but we love to spend time in our garden and go for walks in the mountain with the kids."

Guest and host also make reference to the ability of the hosts to dominate multiple languages, which can result very helpful in exchanges between people of different cultures as related in the following review:

Jaume speaks English, French and Spanish very well so it is easy to communicate with him, he will show you around, tell you about Mallorcan culture and lifestyle, give you the best advice on what to do or where to eat and is ultimately incredibly helpful and kind. He will do his best to make sure your visit is everything you hoped it would be. I was happy to play tennis on clay courts for the first time, eat paella, cook traditional food and

drink homemade liquors, visit a nearby small town, go hiking, see the museum, go to the movies, and eat tapas with the locals.

Finally, as Airbnb is allowing individuals to commercialize their spare spaces from everywhere in the world, many hosts explain that they live outside Spain. Others referred to their previous experiences living in other countries to put forth an image of classification within the 'travelers' group, with comes attached with different social meanings.

"Hello I am Nick and I was born and raised in Mallorca though I am a mix of German and Australian. I have lived in the UK and Australia and love to travel and meet people from all over the world. I work in the building trade and have lived in the pretty village of S'Arraco for over 10 years with my wife and daughter (10 years) and our 3 cats. We look forward to welcoming you into our home."

5. Conclusions

This study attempted to explored the construction of host identities by considering the hosts and peer contributions made sensible through the discursive means of self-descriptions and online reviews. The analysis method was selected due to the nature of the object of study, meaning the multi-faceted and dynamic online identity, and the nature of the data that contained rich, evocative and emotive accounts of self-presentation and host-guest interactions.

It was found that host online identity is socially formed in the context of P2P accommodation platforms. The communication of hosts defining characteristics on personal profiles by hosts themselves and by peers provided a more complete, accurate and positive image of the service provider on his different facets that ranged from the most private to the most commercial. Self-descriptions and reviews made the host personal and social online identities evident.

Among the limitations of the study was the exclusion of descriptions and comments on languages different that Spanish and English, which might have restricted the findings to the impressions of individuals of certain cultures. It would be interesting to compared this results with the analysis of textual representations on other languages to identify the impacts of linguistic constructions on the communication of identity.

In addition, it is considered that the method of thematic analysis although useful to derive knowledge from textual data and identify dimensions of subjective concepts proves to be considerably difficult to apply to large amounts of data. Even if the assistance of a QDAS as NVivo 11 proved to facilitate the manipulation of data,

familiarizing with the body of text resulted in a time intensive task. It is suggested to consider the use of smaller samples when conducting a similar study.

The practical implications of this research for the strategic management of identity for participants in P2P accommodation platforms consists in the evidence that the control of online identity is very limited on the interactive online world. Therefore, online self-presentation strategies need to be congruent with physical personality cues given during offline interactions. Updating the self-presentation on P2P platforms often could help to convey the evolving nature of a person identity and to address any negative image expressed on peer comments or references.

Additionally, it was evident that P2P networks require appropriate identity creation mechanisms as people need information about other users to gain trust and facilitate online communication. In this sense, Airbnb offers descriptions conventions to help information disclosure, which prompt users to share their favorite things such as "travel destinations, books, movies, shows, music, food" with the network, their style of traveling or hosting and personal information like a life motto on their self descriptions. Although there are useful to express common characteristics, this format could limit the communication of hosts idiosyncracy. It is suggested that future researches considered the recently launched trust-building mechanism of 'peer references' on the studies of host online identity on Airbnb.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Airbnb profile.

Source: Airbnb.com, 2017.

Appendix 2. Word cloud: Host Self-description

Source: NVivo 11, Word frequency query results, 2017.