

An empathy lens into peer service providers: Personal versus commercial hosts

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AN EMPATHY LENS INTO PEER SERVICE PROVIDERS: PERSONAL VERSUS COMMERCIAL HOSTS

ABSTRACT

The focus of the peer-to-peer in tourism (Airbnb) has shifted recently from personal peer providers (i.e., individuals that rent a room) to commercial peer providers (i.e., companies that manage several Airbnb lodgings). While prior research encourages peer service providers (Airbnb hosts) to focus on social interactions, there is scant research on how consumers respond to the social dimension across the two peer provider types (personal vs. commercial provider). Two experimental studies ($N=600$) reveal that consumers exhibit higher loyalty towards personal (vs. commercial) providers when they focus on communal norms, and this effect is driven via empathy. Study 2 examines the moderating effect of perceived warmth and demonstrates that low perceived warmth has a detrimental effect on loyalty among personal (vs. commercial) peer providers.

Keywords: empathy, communal norms, norm violation, perceived warmth, loyalty.

1.0 Introduction

Peer-to-peer services have grown across various service sectors (Eckhardt et al., 2019), changing entire industries, such as tourism and hospitality (e.g., Airbnb). Today, several hospitality services are delivered by individuals (e.g., Airbnb hosts) rather than companies (e.g., Costello & Recze, 2020; Del Chiappa et al., 2021; Eckhardt et al., 2019; Li, Hudson, & So, 2021; Sainaghi, 2020; Sainaghi, 2020a; Sainaghi & Baggio, 2021). However, the emergence of peer-to-peer accommodation has attracted a high number of investors to work as commercial providers (i.e., own several Airbnb listings). For example, 81% of Airbnb's revenue in the US market was generated by commercially oriented peer providers (AHLA, 2017). In New York City, commercial Airbnb represents about 61% of the listings (Gunter, Önder, & Zekan, 2020).” Additionally, the CEO of Airbnb recently announced that travel is never going back to the way it was before the pandemic (Reuters, 2021) and recently launched an advertising campaign that supports domestic travel and local communities (Airbnb News, 2020). With the impact of the global pandemic, it is expected that more travelers will opt to book Airbnb homes instead of choosing large hotels and travel to smaller communities instead of large cities (Reuters, 2021). However, post-pandemic consumers will be looking for authentic tourism and closer social relationships in hospitality providers, usually found in personal (vs. commercial) hosts. Thus, to this end, this research aims at understanding how consumers respond to the social dimension across the two peer provider types (personal vs. commercial providers).

Past research has shed substantial light on the benefits of social value in peer-to-peer accommodation (e.g., Lin, Miao, Wei, & Moon, 2019; Lu, Cai, & King, 2020;

Nieto-Garcia et al., 2019; Tussyadiah, 2016; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016; Shuqair, Pinto, & Mattila, 2019; Shuqair et al., 2021). However, the emergence of commercial investors has not only changed the hospitality landscape but also impacted relational authenticity or the “social proximity” of the host (Ye, Xi, & Zhou, 2018). Today, several Airbnb properties are managed by exchange-oriented commercial investors rather than personal hosts (Farmaki & Kaniadakis, 2020; Wang & Nicola, 2017). Nevertheless, prior research has not examined the importance of social value across these two types of providers.

We rely on insights from the relationship norms framework of communal vs. exchange relationships (Aggarwal, 2004; Li, Kim, & Chan, 2019; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). The relationship norms theory suggests that consumers differ in how they respond to service providers or brands, considering them as either close friends and family or as an anonymous firm (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Larrick, 2012; Heyman & Ariely, 2004; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019).

This paper postulates that consumers expect a higher level of “social benefits” from personal peer providers due to communal norms. As long as personal peer providers fulfill such expectations, they will be judged positively, leading to higher positive outcomes, such as loyalty. This effect is explained via empathy. Conversely, weak social elements are considered a norm violation with personal providers because consumers feel that the provider’s actions are inconsistent with communal relationship norms (“less social,” e.g., Clark & Waddell, 1985; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). Thus, we suggest that when personal (vs. commercial) peer providers fail to exhibit friendly and warm behaviors, consumers will judge such providers more negatively compared to typical Airbnb reviews that tend to be positive in valence

(e.g., Pera et al., 2019; Zervas et al., 2021). Our proposition is consistent with prior research on relationship norms, suggesting that consumers expect personal (vs. commercial) providers to be more communal. Thus, when a personal provider exhibits unfriendly or unsocial behaviors, consumers will react negatively to such norm violations (Aggarwal, 2004; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019).

By doing so, we provide important contributions to the emerging literature on the importance of social dimensions within a peer-to-peer context (e.g., Guttentag, Smith, Potwarka, & Havitz, 2018; Lee, Yang, & Koo, 2019; Moon, Miao, Hanks, & Line, 2019; Nieto-Garcia et al., 2019; Pera, Viglia, Grazzini, & Dalli, 2019; Perren & Kozinets, 2018; Tussyadiah, 2016). This research adds to prior studies on sharing economy by demonstrating how relationship norms affect consumers' reactions to service providers (Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). In two experimental studies (N = 600), using online samples from the U.S., we reveal that consumers rely on relationship norms when evaluating personal (vs. commercial) peer providers.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Commercial vs. Personal Peer Provider

The peer-to-peer type of exchange falls under the umbrella of the sharing economy. The peer-to-peer business model is defined as a “two- or more-sided peer-to-peer online platforms through which people collaboratively provide and use capacity-constrained assets and resources” (Wirtz et al., 2019, p. 458). This type of exchange consists of three key players: (1) platforms that mediate the transaction, (2) the consumer, and (3) the peer service provider (Benoit et al., 2017).

The focus of this article is on peer service providers or “individuals who grant access to other consumers via a mediating platform” (Benoit et al., 2017). Peer

providers have different motives, such as supplementing their income, entrepreneurial freedom, or social motives (Benoit et al., 2017; Farmaki & Kaniadakis, 2020).

Recent research has classified Airbnb hosts into different types of professionals managing multiple listings and co-habiting hosts that are either more economically focused or socially oriented peer providers (Dolnicar & Zare, 2020; Farmaki & Kaniadakis, 2020; Farmaki et al., 2019; Kwok & Xie, 2019). The key difference between professional and personal hosts is their motivation (Farmaki & Kaniadakis, 2020). Economic benefits might not motivate individuals who want to host for the “social benefits” of meeting new people (e.g., Farmaki et al., 2019). While personal and commercial hosts are both driven by financial benefits, commercial hosts are more “profit-oriented,” as they own a large number of properties (Jung et al., 2016) and work full time to manage multiple listings (Sainaghi, 2020a). For instance, a report by ALHA indicates that the multi-unit entire-home hosts “commercial oriented” were amongst the fastest growing segment in terms of the number of hosts, units, and revenue generated in 2016, additionally, the report further suggests that the revenue of multi-unit hosts also increased in previous years (ALHA, 2017).

Personal (vs. commercial) hosts may also vary in terms of hosting practices. For example, commercial hosts manage a high number of listings and interact with a large number of requests; therefore, their interactions with guests are more standard or formal. Conversely, personal hosts tend to be less standard in their hosting practices, as they interact on a smaller scale.

The distinction between personal and commercial hosts is not only limited to hosting motives or interactional styles; they also vary in terms of pricing strategies. For instance, recent studies demonstrate that professional hosts are more successful because they devote more time and experience in managing their listings, (Gibbs et al., 2018), leading to higher revenues compared to a single-unit host (Kowk & Xie, 2019; Xie et al., 2021). Research further shows that personal (vs. professional) hosts vary in performance; for example, professional hosts have more resources and power (e.g., number of available listings, longer period of time; see Xie et al., 2021).

The distinction between personal and commercial hosts is not only limited to hosting motives or interactional style but also varies in terms of pricing strategies. For instance, recent studies have demonstrated that professional hosts are more successful in maximizing their revenue, because they devoted more time and experience in managing their listings (Gibbs et al., 2018), leading to higher revenues compared to single-unit hosts (Kowk & Xie, 2019; Xie et al., 2021). Research further shows that personal (vs. professional) hosts vary in performance; for example, professional hosts have more resources and power (e.g., number of available listings, a longer period; see Xie et al., 2021). Commercial Airbnb peers are more likely to gain a superhost status (Gunter, 2018) because they are more experienced (e.g., higher response rates and lower cancelation rates) (Airbnb, 2021).

Prior research has emphasized the importance of social value in peer-to-peer accommodation (Habibi, Davidson, & Laroche, 2016; Hamari et al., 2016). Social value is not only beneficial during service encounters or hosts' initial communication with prospective guests but also serves as a powerful tool in enhancing online social presence, fostering social connection and reducing psychological distance (e.g., Nieto-Garcia et al., 2019; Pera et al., 2019; Roos & Hahn, 2019; Ye, Ying, Zhou, &

Wang, 2019). The importance of social value might reflect consumers' motivation to use peer-to-peer accommodation. For instance, prior studies show that economic benefits (Guttentag et al., 2018; Tran & Filimonau, 2020), "authenticity" (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2018; Liang et al., 2018; Makkar & Yap, 2020; Paulauskaite et al., 2017), uniqueness (Stors & Kagermeier, 2015; Tussyadiah & Zach, 2017), or physical characteristics (Gibbs et al., 2017) affect consumers' decisions to choose peer-to-peer providers. However, it is not clear whether the desire for human connection or social motives are magnified in the context of personal (vs. commercial) peer providers." By relying on relationship and communal and exchange norms (Aggarwal, 2004; Clark & Mils, 1993), we provide a sound theoretical grounding explaining consumers' reactions to personal or commercial peer-to-peer providers (Clark & Mils, 1993; Li et al., 2019; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). We predict that the importance of social value varies across the personal peer provider type (vs. commercial).

2.2 Responses to Personal (vs. Commercial) Providers

We argue that consumers exhibit more favorable purchase decisions with personal peer providers due to communal norms. This assumption is grounded in social psychology (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019) and power literature (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996).

We assume that "personal hosts" will be perceived as lower in power than their commercial counterparts. Commercial peer-to-peer providers are able to offer higher levels of service quality due to higher resources (Paharia, Keinan, Avery, & Schor, 2011; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). Prior research suggests that consumers expect higher levels of communal norms from small vs. large providers due to their

differences in marketplace power (e.g., Farmaki, & Stergiou, 2020; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019).

We assume that personal providers offer higher opportunities for social interaction (e.g., Bucher et al., 2019; Nieto-Garcia et al., 2019; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016; So & Min, 2018) and focus on warmth (Ranson & Guttentag, 2019). Thus, we argue that consumers view interactions with personal peers as more communal than commercial providers. This proposition is consistent with recent studies on the sharing economy that view the relationship between the personal host and the consumer as more communal and social (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020; Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017; Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). Accordingly, we expect that when personal providers focus on communal norms, they will be judged more positively than a commercial provider. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H₁. Consumers will exhibit higher levels of loyalty with personal (vs. commercial) peer providers.

2.3 The Mediating Role of Empathy

Our theorization of the underlying process is guided by recent work that explored empathy in peer-to-peer relationships (Costello & Recze, 2020; Giesler, Veresiu, & Humphreys, 2019) and communal and exchange relationships (Aggarwal, 2004). Empathy can be defined as “a vicarious emotion that is congruent with but not necessarily identical to the emotion of another person” (Batson & Shaw, 1991, p. 113). It reflects affective and cognitive processes that play a role in consumer decisions, such as forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). Empathy is showing concern for others (Fehr et al., 2010; Levenson & Ruef, 1992) or

“putting myself in their boots” (Hoffman, 1984). However, it remains unclear why consumers are more empathic toward personal (vs. commercial) providers.

Recent work shows that empathy toward peer providers can increase consumers’ likelihood of purchasing from peer-to-peer platforms (Costello & Recze, 2020). Pera et al. (2019) further noted that while empathy prevents negative online reviews, it does not prevent consumers from leaving a negative review for an exchange provider on booking.com.” Similar findings were also observed by Wei et al. (2020). Thus, we expect consumers’ empathy for personal peer providers to be driven by how they view the peer provider on a communal vs. exchange continuum (Costello & Recze, 2020; Fitzmaurice et al., 2020; Giesler et al., 2019).

Furthermore, previous research on service interactions shows that empathy is an important mechanism in consumer–employee interactions (Wieseke, Geigenmüller, & Kraus, 2012). Prior work suggests that the more communal the relationship is, the more attention and empathy should be directed toward the partner (Clark, Armentano, Boothby, & Hirsch, 2017). Individuals under communal relationships expect to help or provide benefits without expecting to receive benefits (Clark & Mils, 1993; Johnson & Grimm, 2010), whereas individuals under exchange relationships expect to receive benefits in exchange or “quid pro quo” (Clark & Mils, 1993; Johnson & Grimm, 2010). The prosocial behavior with communal partners is motivated by reciprocity (e.g., Clark & Mils, 1993).

Prior research shows that consumers have higher reciprocity expectations in close social contexts (e.g., Nowak & Sigmund, 2005), as individuals in a communal relationship are more concerned about each other (Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Clark & Mils, 1979). Communal relationships are characterized by altruistic concerns and

reciprocity (Park, Troisi, & Maner, 2011). On the other hand, exchange relationships are impersonal or “transactional” and normally governed by the expectation of receiving a comparable benefit (Clark & Mills, 1993; Wan, Hui, & Wyer, 2011). Thus, we argue that relationships with commercial peer providers are more transactional, which is similar to money market relationships (Heyman & Ariely, 2004). Conversely, relationships with personal peer providers are governed by communal norms, which leads to enhanced empathy. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₂. Empathy mediates the relationship between provider type (personal vs. commercial) and loyalty.

2.4 The Moderating Role of Perceived Warmth

We draw on the social dimension of warmth (Fiske et al., 2007). Our underlying theoretical argument is that customers typically consider provider warmth or competence when they choose service providers (Kirmani, Hamilton, Thompson, & Lantzy, 2017). The distinction between communal and exchange relationships (Clark & Mills, 1993) suggests that people expect communal relationship partners to be kind and responsive to each other’s needs (Scott et al., 2013; Wan et al., 2011; Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). For instance, Shuqair et al. (2021) indicated that consumers are more forgiving towards peer versus exchange providers, and this effect is driven via communal norms. In contrast, exchange relationships are quid pro quo or reciprocal in nature (Clark & Mills 1979). Prior research further indicates that when people make inferences about others, they rely on relationship norms to decide what is appropriate behavior for a certain situation (Bolton & Mattila, 2015; Scott et al., 2013).

Given the social nature of personal peer providers (high in communal norms), we posit that high levels of warmth will be beneficial for personal (vs. commercial) peers, whereas low levels of warmth might be harmful. We draw on the stereotypes involving interpersonal relationships and perceived warmth to support this argument (Fiske et al., 2002). We expect that personal providers will be higher in perceived warmth than commercial providers. Since communal norms are intrinsically associated with personal providers, consumers are likely to expect high perceived warmth from providers focusing on communal (vs. exchange) norms. Consequently, we propose that low levels of perceived warmth are more harmful to personal (vs. commercial) peers. Therefore, we expect that people rely on “perceived warmth” when evaluating personal (vs. commercial) providers. Our argument is consistent with prior research suggesting that perceived warmth depends on relationship norms (Li et al., 2019).

The present work examines the role of warmth in the context of a peer-to-peer relationship. It is unknown whether perceived warmth influences consumers’ evaluations of the two types of providers. Prior studies show that consumers with a communal relationship orientation expect a higher level of warmth (Huang & Ha, 2020). Thus, we assume that focusing on warmth cues is more effective for personal hosts for the following reasons. First, warmth attributes are used to judge the service’s social and moral behavior (Güntürkün, Haumann, & Mikolon, 2020; Kervyn et al., 2012). Second, warmth is dominant in driving outcomes that capture relational aspects such as attachment, emotional, and social bonds (Güntürkün et al., 2020). Moreover, focusing on warmth helps establish strong emotional bonds with consumers, as it captures traits of being caring or helpful (i.e., positive or negative intent). Since lack of warmth is considered a norm violation in communal

relationships, we expect that low levels of perceived warmth will have a negative impact on loyalty in the context of personal (vs. commercial) providers. Thus, we put forth the following prediction:

H₃. Low (vs. high) perceived warmth will result in lower levels of loyalty with personal (vs. commercial) peer providers.

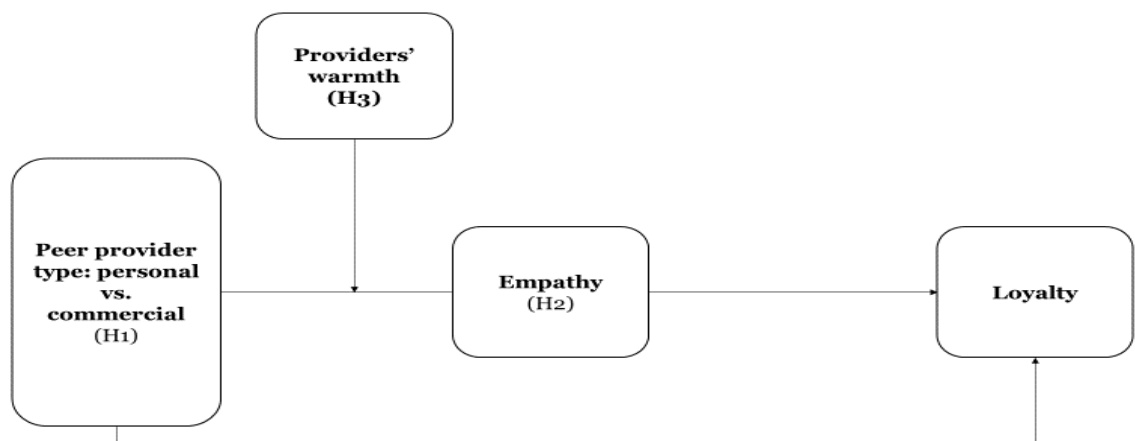


Figure 1. Conceptual model

3.0 Overview of the Experimental studies

In two studies, we aim to obtain evidence pertaining to our prediction that consumer perceptions of personal (vs. commercial) providers reflect communal norms, which in turn enhance loyalty. Study 1 further shows that this effect is mediated via empathy. Study 2 extends our findings by investigating whether perceived warmth – expected in communal norms – is more beneficial for personal peer (vs. commercial) providers. In other words, low perceived warmth may violate communal norms associated with personal peer service providers, thus harming loyalty. Taken together, our findings provide converging evidence for our proposed "communal norms" effect in peer-to-peer relationships.

3.1 Study 1. Personal vs. commercial providers

Study 1 uses a mediation approach to test the hypotheses that consumers' loyalty towards a personal (vs. commercial) provider is driven by communal norms and empathy.

Procedures

“One hundred and-ninety-nine US Airbnb users were recruited from an online platform Amazon Mechanical Turk “MTurk” (50.8% females, Mage = 35.74, SD = 10.64) in exchange for \$0.50. Prior research widely recognizes the use of online survey platforms by tourism and hospitality researchers (e.g., Errmann et al., 2021; Mody et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2020).”

Using a single factor design, we randomly assigned participants to imagine being a consumer searching for an Airbnb room in NYC. Participants were randomly assigned to the personal (vs. professional) peer provider condition. Participants in the personal provider ($n = 99$ vs. commercial peer provider [$n = 100$]) condition read a scenario adapted from Suri et al. (2019), and modified it to fit our context: "*Please imagine that you were traveling to New York City and after comparing several housing options on a home-sharing app for several days, you wanted to book a suitable accommodation with a host on Airbnb. [You find an apartment listed by John's Airbnb company]*".

To manipulate personal vs. commercial provider type, participants read, "*John owns a single apartment in New York City. John relies on this apartment to supplement his income; he makes some money from Airbnb [John's has several apartment rentals across New York City and other states. For John it is a good investment, John makes high profits from Airbnb]*".

"You sent an Airbnb booking request. John accepted your early check-in. John later sent you this message: " Hi, thanks for booking with me, welcome to my apartment, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, looking forward to getting to know you 😊 ". [Thank you for booking with me, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, let's keep in touch].

Next, participants responded to our measures on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). We used Yim, Tse, and Chan's (2008) measures of loyalty (i.e., *"I may still use the host again* ($\alpha = .81$), four items on empathy by (i.e., *I feel empathetic towards the provider* ($\alpha = .97$) adapted from Niezink et al. (2012), communal norms (i.e., *I perceive the provider as a friend, as a family member* ($r = .753$ $p < .001$). For realism checks, we asked participants, "if this scenario is realistic." Participants perceived the scenario as realistic ($M_{Personal} = 6.97$ vs. $M_{Commercial} = 6.55$; $t_{(197)} = 1.506$, $p = .134$). All items were measured on a nine-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree) (see Appendix A for all the measures).

Results

Participants reported significantly higher levels of loyalty in the personal provider condition ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 2.24$) as opposed to the commercial condition ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 2.08$; $t_{(197)} = 7.674$, $p < .001$). Participants perceived the personal provider to be higher in communal norms ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 2.42$) compared to the commercial provider ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.98$; $t_{(197)} = 6.054$, $p < .001$), and reported higher empathy towards personal ($M = 6.52$, $SD = 1.72$) as opposed to commercial host ($M = 2.96$ $SD = 2.08$; $t_{(197)} = 14.094$, $p < .001$).

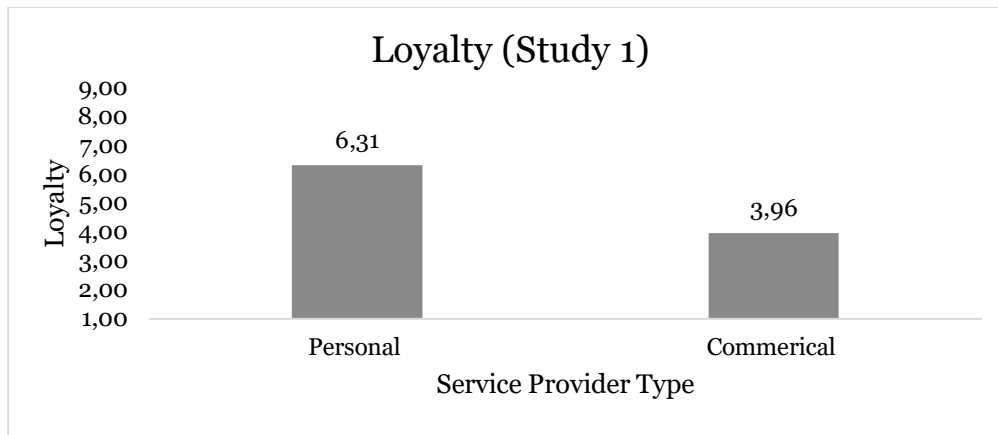


Figure 2. Loyalty towards the provider type

Mediation Analysis

Next, we examined whether the personal vs. commercial distinction can be explained by empathy mediation, using PROCESS model 4 with 5,000 samples (Hayes, 2017). We conducted service provider type (personal vs. commercial) (IV) → empathy (Mediator - M1) → loyalty (DV). The results show that service provider type (personal vs. professional) significantly influenced empathy ($b = 3.82$, $SE = 0.27$; $p < .01$), and empathy had a positive effect on loyalty ($b = 0.51$, $SE = 0.07$; $p < .01$). The total effect ($b = 2.35$, $SE = .38$; $p < .01$) and the indirect effect were both significant ($b = 1.9777$, $BootSE = .1047$, $BootLCCI = .6123$, $BootULCI = 1.0227$; $p < .01$).

Discussion

The results from Study 1 support our predictions that consumers react differently to personal (vs. commercial) providers. Our mediation analysis shows that empathy is the underlying mechanism explaining these differences. To broaden the conclusions, Study 2 tests the moderating effect of perceived warmth.

Study 2 The moderating role of warmth

Study 2 extends our findings by testing the moderating role of warmth. We posit that high levels of warmth will be beneficial for the personal provider, whereas low perceived warmth is likely to be harmful to personal but not exchange providers.

Procedures

A total of 390 American Airbnb users were recruited via an online platform (46.4% females, $M_{age} = 37.71$, $SD = 11.89$). This study employs a 2 (personal vs. commercial provider) X 2 perceived warmth (high vs. low) between-subjects design. Seventeen participants were dropped from the analysis as they failed the attention checks. The final sample size was ($N=373$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: personal & high warmth ($n=103$), personal & low warmth ($n= 92$), commercial & high warmth ($n= 96$), and commercial & low warmth ($n=83$). Participants were exposed to the same scenario as in Study 1.

We adapted two conditions of warmth (low vs. high) from Judd et al. (2005) and modified it to our context: We asked participants to imagine, "*That evening you wanted to go out for dinner, but you had no idea where to go. You asked John about dining options around. John was very helpful in suggesting several nearby restaurants. Indeed, he was extremely happy to talk to you and give you information. He seemed to be the kind of person who genuinely enjoys helping others. [Indeed, he didn't seem very happy to talk to you and to give you information. He seemed to be the kind of person who does not enjoy helping others]. He recommended several restaurants around. such as; a BQQ restaurant right downstairs. [instead, he told you that you could find information about dining on the internet].* Appendix B provides further details of the experimental conditions in Study 2.

Measures

We measured loyalty to the peer provider using three items adapted from Yim et al. (2008) (*i.e.*, "I may still use this Airbnb host again ($\alpha = .72$). We measured perceived warmth by five items adapted from Fiske et al. (2002), "I think that the service provider is "tolerant," "warm," "sincere," "good-natured" and "a friend" ($\alpha = .95$). (See Appendix A for all the measures).

Five items were used to measure communal and exchange norms "I perceive this service provider as a close friend," "a family member" ($r = .101$, $p = .05$) and exchange norms "as a businessperson," "a company," and "as a merchant" ($\alpha = .75$). These items were adapted from Aggarwal (2004).

Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks worked as intended, as respondents under the commercial provider perceived the provider as more business-oriented compared to the personal provider ($M_{commercial} = 6.20$ vs. $M_{personal} = 5.52$; $t_{(371)} = 2.762$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, participants in the high perceived warmth condition perceived the provider higher in warmth ($M = 7.09$, $SD = 1.54$) than their counterparts in the low warmth condition ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 2.43$; $t_{(371)} = 11.42$, $p < .001$). Further, the respondents believed that the scenario was realistic ($M_{personal} = 7.04$, $SD = 1.63$ vs. $M_{commercial} = 7.11$; $t_{(371)} = .433$, $p = .665$) and could happen in real life ($M_{personal} = 7.09$, $SD = 1.59$ vs. $M_{commercial} = 7.08$, $SD = 1.55$; $t_{(371)} = 0.29$, $p = .977$).

Results

We conducted a 2x2 ANOVA to investigate the joint impact of relationship type and perceived warmth on loyalty. The main effect of provider type was

insignificant ($F_{(2, 368)} = .386, p = .535, \eta^2 = .001$ $M_{personal} = 5.87, SD = 1.48$ vs. $M_{commercial} = 5.96, SD = 1.36$) while the main effect of perceived warmth was significant ($F_{(2, 368)} = 40.704, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$; $M_{high\ warm} = 6.34, SD = 1.14$ vs. $M_{low\ warm} = 5.44, SD = 1.55$). More importantly, there was a significant two-way interaction between perceived warmth and relationship type on loyalty ($F_{(2, 365)} = 4.165; p < .042, \eta^2 = .011$).

Pairwise comparisons revealed that loyalty in the personal provider condition was higher in the high warmth condition ($M = 6.45, SD = 1.24$) than in the low warmth condition ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.49; F_{(2, 368)} = 40.704, p < .01$). Conversely, there was no difference in loyalty in the commercial provider condition ($M_{high\ warmth} = 6.44, SD = 1.30$ and $M_{low\ warmth} = 5.63, SD = 1.48; F_{(2, 368)} = .386, p = .535$).

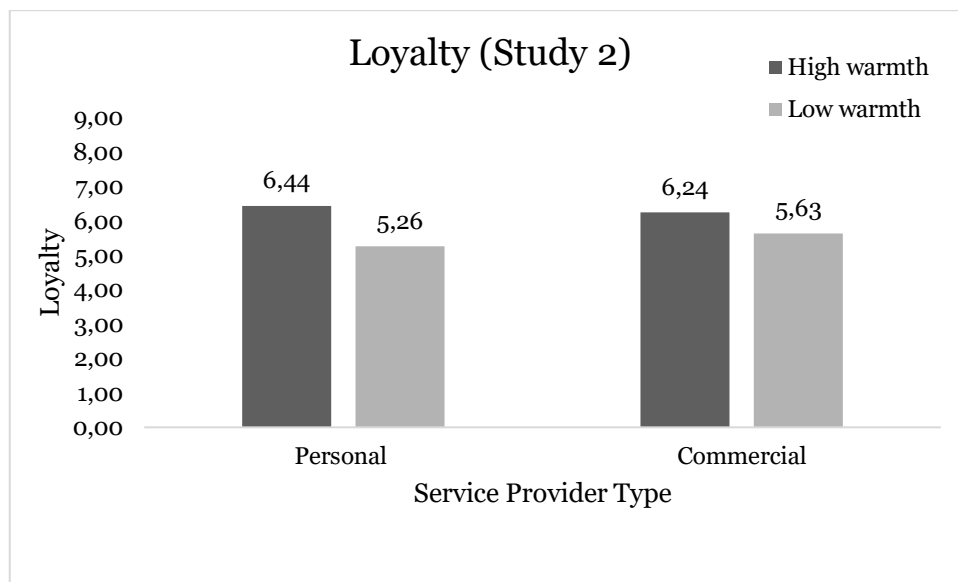


Figure 3. Warmth perceptions under personal (vs. commercial orientation)

Discussion

The findings from Study 2 indicate that low perceived warmth as a norm violation has a detrimental effect on loyalty in the context of personal service providers. Conversely, consumers tend to be indifferent to low levels of warmth with commercial peer service providers.

4.0 General discussion

While there is extensive research demonstrating the importance of social elements in peer-to-peer accommodations (e.g., Hamari et al., 2016; Habibi et al., 2016; Nieto-Garcia et al., 2019; Lin, Fan, Zhang, & Lau, 2019; Lu et al., 2020; Tussyadiah, 2016; Perren & Kozinets, 2018; Ye et al., 2019), the hospitality literature falls short in understanding consumer responses to personal (vs. commercial) peer providers. As our findings indicate, the social dimensions in peer-to-peer accommodations vary across the two peer provider types (personal vs. commercial). Study 1 shows that consumers exhibit higher levels of loyalty with personal (vs. commercial) peer providers, and this effect is driven by empathy. Study 2 demonstrates that lack of warmth has a harmful effect on personal peer providers. Taken together, the findings contribute to the ongoing discussion on the importance of social value in sharing economy.

4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study's findings provide important theoretical implications suggesting that social stereotypes and relationship norms can be beneficial for peer providers in the sharing economy. To date, prior research has mainly focused on contrasting consumer loyalty between peer-to-peer platforms and conventional hotels (e.g., Akhmedova, Marimon, & Mas-Machuca, 2020; Jia et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2020;

Shuqair et al., 2019). Our research instead focuses on how consumers react to personal (vs. commercial) peer providers based on social value.

Our research extends prior research on the sharing economy that addresses social value. Past studies highlight the importance of social elements on the sellers' revenues (e.g., Nieto-García et al., 2019), consumer' prosocial behavior (e.g., Ranson & Guttentag, 2019), trust (e.g., Arvanitidis, Economou, Grigoriou, & Kollia, 2020; Ert et al., 2016; Ert, & Fleischer, 2020), consumers' forgiveness (Shuqair et al., 2021) and purchase intention (Lu et al., 2020). Indeed, previous research suggests that social elements foster the host-guest relationships (e.g., Bucher et al., 2019; Nieto-García et al., 2019; Pera et al., 2019).

We extend this line of research by demonstrating that the importance of social value is contingent on the peer provider type (personal or commercial). Our findings indicate that consumers expect the personal provider to signal communal norms (Study 1). Focusing on communal norms can induce feelings of empathy, thus enhancing loyalty. While recent research shows that social interaction in peer-to-peer relationships boosts empathy (e.g., Pera et al., 2019; Suri et al., 2019; Costello & Recze, 2020), our findings reveal that feelings of empathy are stronger with personal (vs. commercial) peer providers. We argue that consumers dealing with personal (vs. commercial) peer providers might view their purchase decisions through an empathy lens because such relationships tend to be closer and stronger compared to more transactional exchanges (Aggarwal, 2004; Wei, Liu, & Keh, 2020).

Further, prior work on communal and exchange relationships shows that consumers react more negatively to communal (vs. exchange) service providers when they signal low-perceived warmth (Yang & Aggarwal, 2019; Wan et al., 2011). We extend the communal and exchange relationships framework to the sharing economy

context and demonstrate that consumers respond more negatively to personal peer providers when they felt that their actions are not consistent with closer relationship norms requiring warmth. One possible explanation is that consumers expect communal providers to be warm and friendly. However, they do not expect large companies to be particularly warm and friendly, and consequently, lack of perceived warmth does not necessarily result in negative responses with commercial peer providers (e.g., Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). Notably, our mediating results in Study 1 support this prediction. That is, participants felt more empathic towards the personal provider when their actions signaled communal norms and warmth. Conversely, low levels of warmth in Study 2 had a negative impact on the personal (vs. commercial) provider as such actions violate such relationship norms.

4.2 Practical Implications

Advances in technology and regulations will enable more individuals to be involved in hosting practices (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). Thus, our findings provide a managerial perspective for various hospitality players. Since our findings show that consumers' responses to personal (vs. commercial) peer providers are based on communal relationship norms. Therefore, social elements may not be as crucial in commercial (vs. personal) peer provider relationships with their customers.

Sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb have been hit hard by COVID-19. With the impact of the global pandemic, Airbnb launched a strategy that supports local communities. This initiative includes a series of partnerships with tourism organizations to support local economic development and small businesses, including individual Airbnb hosts (News Airbnb, 2020). Since our findings indicate that consumers have higher levels of empathy towards personal providers, marketing campaigns should highlight how travel can support local communities. Both peers

and platforms could benefit from emphasizing "empathy towards personal peers" in their marketing communications. Such messaging highlights the value of helping hosts supplement their income or survive the economic consequences of Covid-19.

Furthermore, peer-to-peer platforms are encouraged to clearly identify and distinguish between personal and commercial providers on the websites/Apps. This would be helpful for individual peer providers in generating bookings. Additionally, one of the key issues influencing the reputation of Airbnb hosts is low ratings (e.g., Zervas et al., 2021). Recent research suggests that consumers tend to give lower online ratings to communal (vs. exchange) providers when they are less social or warm (Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). Thus, we expect that consumers would also provide lower ratings to personal (vs. commercial) peers when they do not focus on social ties and perceived warmth.

Furthermore, although being social is a key element for both personal and commercial hosts, our findings indicate that consumers expect personal providers to be more communal. Thus, when a personal provider exhibits low levels of perceived warmth, consumers see it as a norm violation and are likely to punish the personal provider. Thus, personal providers would benefit from focusing on the social aspects of the experience. For example, sending personalized messages (at the pre-arrival or post-purchase stage) can enhance consumer perceptions (e.g., Pera et al., 2019).

This research also provides important guidelines for peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb. For instance, we demonstrate that customers react more negatively to personal (vs. commercial) service providers in the context of unpleasant experiences. Thus, platforms might want to introduce training programs for personal hosts that highlight the importance of social interaction when dealing with customers.

For instance, our study indicates that a closer social relationship of personal providers might foster stronger loyalty. Personal providers can use social cues like “welcome to my apartment”, “looking forward to getting to know you”. Another suggestion is to present some local favorites like nearby restaurants and touristic attractions that the host likes. Indeed, personal hosts need to be perceived as the kind of person who genuinely enjoys helping others and recommend several local deals that would not be identified in touristic guides or in massive hospitality providers (hotels, commercial providers).

Changes in the hospitality landscape are expected to change the hotels' orientation and attention. As predicted by Oskam and Boswijk (2016); "hotels will no longer only focus on providing accommodations" but rather facilitating interpersonal and social interaction between guests and local communities. Therefore, smaller hotels need to focus more on the social aspect. We expect that consumers perceive exchange-oriented hotels (e.g., "Hilton") as less warm and friendly than their smaller competitors “hostels or small hotels”.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research has important limitations offering promising areas for future research. Our study focused on perceived warmth, but perceived competence might also influence peer service providers' consumer choices. Future research should investigate consumer responses to providers' competence. We expect that perceived competence is critical for commercial providers. Furthermore, future research should examine the effect of perceived warmth across different stages of the service delivery process (pre-purchase or post-purchase). For example, does the hosts' smile in the profile picture increase perceptions of warmth, thus leading to a higher booking intention (Wang, Mao, Li, & Liu, 2017).

Although our studies indicate that consumers may react differently to personal (vs. commercial) peers, however, in reality, consumers might not be able to detect whether the host is personal or commercial, therefore, future research should rely on other methods (e.g., text mining of online reviews) to further investigate this phenomenon”.

Additionally, we did not explore the status of “superhosts” (e.g., Gunter, 2018). Hence, future research should explore consumers' responses to personal (vs. superhosts) and whether they expect superhosts to be friendly and warm”.

Prior research suggests that empathy prevents negative online review behavior (Pera et al., 2019). We recommend additional inquiries into how empathy might affect review behavior towards personal (vs. commercial) peers.

Prior research suggests that consumers differ in their motivation to use peer-to-peer sharing (e.g., Guttentag et al., 2018). We assume that consumers' motivation to use peer-to-peer accommodations (e.g., economic benefits, social interaction or authenticity) influence their responses to personal (vs. commercial) peers. Therefore, future research on the topic is warranted.

The focus of this paper was to explore consumers loyalty towards personal (vs. commercial) provider, although the matching algorithms between consumers and peer providers on sharing platform make it unlikely that a consumers would consider having repeated interactions with the same provider (Eckhardt et al., 2019). We expect future studies to how the distinction between personal (vs. commercial) would impact their loyalty towards the peer-to-peer platform.

One of the key limitations in our studies is the sample was drawn from online panels US. However, in reality consumers perceptions of peer providers are subtle

and highly subjective, it might also vary between cultures. Thus, future research replicate our findings considering consumers and travelers from different countries and to make cross comparison.

Finally, our studies were online experiments where participants were exposed to hypothetical consumption situations. Future research examining real consumer data is needed to corroborate our findings. To that end, advanced methods such as extracting online reviews using text mining or Automated Machine Learning would be beneficial.

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Appendixes

Appendix A- Measures

Constructs	Measurement items	References
Loyalty	I may still use this Airbnb host I would probably use this Airbnb host in the future (reversed). I would never use this Airbnb host in the future (reversed).	Yim et al. (2008)
Empathy	I feel that this Airbnb host is sympathetic Tender Warm Compassionate Soft-hearted	Niezink et al. (2012)
Communal Norms	I perceive this Airbnb host as: A close friend As a family member	Aggarwal (2004)
Exchange Norms	I perceive this Airbnb host as: A businessperson As a company	Aggarwal (2004)
Warmth	I think that the Airbnb host is tolerant Warm Sincere Good-natured Friendly	Fiske et al. (2002)

Appendix B- Scenarios

Conditions of Study 1	The scenarios
<p>Personal provider (communal)</p>	<p>Please imagine that you were traveling to New York City, and after comparing several housing options on a home-sharing app for several days, you wanted to book a suitable accommodation with a host on Airbnb.</p> <p>John owns a single apartment in New York City. John relies on this apartment to supplement his income; he makes some money from Airbnb. You sent an Airbnb booking request to John, and he accepted your early check-in.</p> <p>John later sent you this message: "Hi, Thanks for booking with me, welcome to my apartment, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, looking forward to getting to know you 😊".</p>
<p>Commercial provider (exchange)</p>	<p>Please imagine that you were traveling to New York City, and after comparing several housing options on a home-sharing app for several days, you wanted to book a suitable accommodation with a host on Airbnb. You find an apartment listed by John'.</p> <p>John's has several apartment rentals across New York City and other states. For John, it is a good investment; John makes high profits from Airbnb. You sent an Airbnb booking request to John, and he accepted your early check-in.</p> <p>John later sent you this message: "Thank you for booking with us, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, see you".</p>
Conditions of Study 2	The scenarios
<p>High warmth (commercial provider)</p>	<p>Please imagine that you were traveling to New York City, and after comparing several housing options on a home-sharing app for several days, you wanted to book suitable accommodation with a host on Airbnb. You find an apartment listed by John's Airbnb company.</p> <p>John's has several apartment rentals across New York City and other states. For John, it is a good investment; John makes high profits from Airbnb.</p> <p>You sent an Airbnb booking request to John, and he accepted your early check-in.</p> <p>John later sent you this message: "Hi, Thanks for booking with me, welcome to my apartment, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, looking forward to getting to know you 😊".</p> <p>That evening you wanted to go out for dinner, but you had no idea where to go. You asked John about dining options around. John was very helpful in suggesting several nearby restaurants. Indeed, he was extremely happy to talk to you and give you advice. He seemed to be the kind of person who genuinely enjoys helping others. He recommended several restaurants, including a BQQ restaurant right downstairs.</p>
<p>Low warmth (communal provider)</p>	<p>Please imagine that you were traveling to New York City, and after comparing several housing options on a home-sharing app for several days, you wanted to book suitable accommodation with a host on Airbnb. You find an apartment listed by John'.</p>

	<p>John owns one apartment in New York City. John relies on this apartment to supplement his income; he makes some money from Airbnb. You sent an Airbnb booking request John accepted your early check-in. John later sent you this message: "Thank you for booking with us, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, see you".</p> <p>That evening you wanted to go out for dinner, but you had no idea where to go. You asked John about dining options around, but John was not very helpful in suggesting any dining options. Indeed, he didn't seem very happy to talk to you and give you advice. He seemed to be a kind of person who does not enjoy helping others. Instead, he told you that you could find dining information on the internet.</p>
<p>High warm (<i>communal provider</i>)</p>	<p>Please imagine that you were traveling to New York City, and after comparing several housing options on a home-sharing app for several days, you wanted to book a suitable accommodation with a host on Airbnb. You find an apartment listed by John'.</p> <p>John owns one apartment in New York City. John relies on this apartment to supplement his income; he makes some money from Airbnb.</p> <p>You sent an Airbnb booking request John accepted your early check-in. John later sent you this message: "Hi, thanks for booking with me, welcome to my apartment, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, looking forward to getting to know you 😊".</p> <p>That evening you wanted to go out for dinner, but you had no idea where to go. You asked John about dining options around. John was very helpful in suggesting several nearby restaurants. Indeed, he was extremely happy to talk to you and give you information. He seemed to be the kind of person who genuinely enjoys helping others. He recommended several restaurants around, such as a BQQ restaurant right downstairs.</p>
<p>Low warm (<i>exchange provider</i>)</p>	<p>Please imagine that you were traveling to New York City, and after comparing all housing options on a home-sharing app for several days, you wanted to book suitable accommodation with a host on Airbnb. You find an apartment listed by John's Airbnb company. John's has several apartment rentals across New York City and other states. For John it is a good investment. John makes high profits from Airbnb.</p> <p>You sent an Airbnb booking request John accepted your early check-in.</p> <p>John later sent you this message: "Thank you for booking with me, the check-in is at 14:00, please send me a message upon arrival, let's keep in touch".</p> <p>That evening you wanted to go out for dinner, but you had no idea where to go. You asked John about dining options around. John was not very helpful in suggesting any dining options. Indeed, he didn't seem very happy to talk to you and give you information. He seemed to be the kind of person who does not enjoy helping others. Instead, he told you that you could find information about dining on the internet.</p>

Appendix C- Mean scores (Study 2)

Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable: Loyalty				
Provider	Warmth	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Personal peer provider	Low	5.26	1.49	92
	High	6.44	1.24	99
	Total	5.87	1.48	191
Commercial peer provider	Low	5.63	1.61	83
	High	6.24	1.04	98
	Total	5.96	1.36	181
Total	Low	5.44	1.55	175
	High	6.34	1.14	197
	Total	5.92	1.42	372