

Word Count: 602

Airbnb is one of the most popular internet services in 2017. Airbnb operates an online marketplace and hospitality service for people to lease or rent short-term lodging including holiday cottages, apartments, homestays, hostel beds, or hotel rooms, to participate in or facilitate experiences related to tourism such as walking tours, and to make reservations at restaurants. [1] However, the way of privacy or expectation and reality is rather different from one service of Airbnb, since it is fundamentally a p2p service.

One aspect of the privacy invasion that occurs in Airbnb is during the registration process. Even though an online service, Airbnb asks the users (renters) to provide passport, phone number, a video containing them briefly introducing themselves, which is rare to appear in any other online services. As a company, holding vital identity information to individuals could possibly lead to numerous privacy issues. For example, if the company got hacked, millions of users could possibly lose so much more than what normal hacking could expose (mostly passwords). They would lose their identity files, sound, and physical characteristics, which makes them very vulnerable to identity theft. From the utilitarian point of view, providing the identities to Airbnb benefits millions of home renters, making them safe from renters with malicious intent at their own risk of the company being hacked and possibly lose their identities. Since the possibility of a company such as Airbnb being hacked is really low, we could say that the expected values of losing identities are low as well. Making the action of providing identities information way more valuable. So, from the utilitarian point of view, it is ethical for Airbnb to ask the user for such information.

Another aspect concerning privacy issues in Airbnb is the leaser's disregard for the privacy of the renter. Multiple users of Airbnb have reported the leasers secretly record their actions in their room. [2] I will rule out in my analysis leasers who do so with bad initiative and leave those who record their renters for other reasons. For instance, leasers could be recording the renters for legal purposes because Airbnb does not have a very systematic procedure for checking items in the rented place. Leasers need a way to prove what damage has the renters done to their home and what damage is done by themselves and real-time recording is a perfect way for that. From Kantianism point of view, the leasers are using the renters as mere means instead of treating them as ends in themselves. From utilitarian's point of view, the renter suffers from no loss at all since we assume the leasers will not view it unless something went wrong. The leaser gets the benefits and it's a win-win situation. So, it is ethical this way.

Airbnb is one of the first internet services that require real identities for both kinds of customers. This has not been brought up to any of the services before and its success will encourage and is encouraging more p2p internet services. The method is secure so long as the company requiring it is secure with its data and technology. However, if the pattern is to spread to most of the internet services, bad things can and most likely will occur since the failure of hardware and software is still very common in our time. We should not stay too positive on it until the security of data can be impenetrable.

References:

[1] Morgan Brennan, 'The Most Amazing And Absurd Places For Rent', <https://www.forbes.com/sites/morganbrennan/2011/09/16/the-most-amazing-and-absurd-places-for-rent/#567028bf5a61>, online, accessible.

[2] Summer Meza, 'Airbnb Hosts are recoding their guests with hidden cameras', <http://www.newsweek.com/airbnb-hidden-cameras-recording-guests-739709>, online, accessible.