

# Sharing begins at home: A social licence framework for home sharing practices

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, home sharing has gone from a “disruptive innovation” to a major industry, with platforms such as Airbnb creating a range of impacts for users, competitors and members of affected communities. The social licence to operate concept offers a way to understand these impacts and design strategies to enhance social acceptability. This article presents a home-sharing social licence framework co-created through a participatory research process in New South Wales, Australia. Insights from the mining sector are relevant to home-sharing, such as a focus on local communities and the role of distributional fairness, procedural fairness and confidence in governance in building trust. Modifications are also required to account for contextual and proxy factors in home sharing.

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## Introduction

The emergence of home sharing via online platforms such as Airbnb represents a form of “disruptive innovation” with diverse impacts for communities in different contexts (Guttentag, 2015). Research into home sharing has demonstrated its potential to create new tourism employment opportunities (Fang, Ye, & Law, 2016), enhance community cohesion (Cherry & Pidgeon, 2018) and improve utilisation of available housing (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017). However, home sharing has also been linked to negative impacts in some locations, including reduced housing affordability (Chang, 2020; Lee, 2016), disruption to neighbouring residents (Gurran, Zhang, & Shrestha, 2020) and unfair competition for traditional accommodation providers (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020). The diverse nature of affected communities and the relative immaturity of the home sharing sector makes it difficult to generalise about impacts, and the uncertainties resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and changing technological and economic conditions make future pathways difficult to predict.

Research into the potential negative impacts of home sharing platforms sits within a broader body of academic literature focusing on the “dark side” of the sharing economy (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017), which includes other activities that employ the language of “sharing”, such as ride-sharing (e.g. Cohen & Kietzmann, 2014), bike-sharing (Liu & Yang, 2018) and so-called “gig work” platforms based on the sharing of skills and equipment (e.g. Stanford, 2017). Questions of social acceptance may be framed in terms of whether or not a sharing economy activity has obtained a “social licence to operate” from an affected community (Baumber, Scerri, & Schweinsberg, 2019), drawing on previous research into the social licence concept in sectors such as mining,

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forestry and renewable energy (e.g. Edwards, Lacey, Wyatt, & Williams, 2016; Hall, Lacey, Carr-Cornish, & Dowd, 2015; Joyce & Thomson, 2000).

In this article, we add to this growing literature by exploring the factors that influence whether a social licence is able to be obtained for home sharing practices in the state of New South Wales, Australia. Through a process of transdisciplinary co-production involving diverse stakeholders (Polk, 2015), we seek to answer key questions posed by previous researchers, including which mechanisms are effective for generating trust in sharing economy platforms (Frenken & Schor, 2017), what roles are played by local, online and other communities in determining social licence (Baumber et al., 2019), and what guidance can be provided to home sharing platforms and policy-makers to maximise community well-being and access to resources (Breibach & Brodie, 2017).

## Conceptual frameworks

### *Home sharing and the sharing economy*

Home sharing, also known as “short-term rental” (Breibach & Brodie, 2017), “informal tourism accommodation” (Guttentag, 2015) and “peer-to-peer accommodation” (Kuhzady, Seyfi, & Béal, 2020), sits within a broader collection of “sharing economy” practices that are predicted to have a combined global economic value of USD 335 billion by 2025 (Yaraghi & Ravi, 2017). The sharing economy is a contested term, with most definitions allowing for monetary exchange (e.g. Breibach & Brodie, 2017; Cannon & Summers, 2014; Cusumano, 2015) and others (e.g. Belk, 2014) considering such exchanges to “pseudo” rather than “true” sharing. Acquier, Daudigeos, and Pinkse (2017) avoid a restrictive definition by arguing that the sharing economy is made up of three key elements that feature to a greater or lesser degree in specific examples: access rather than ownership, on-line platforms that facilitate exchange and a “community-based” element involving goals other than profit.

Recent research into home sharing has unearthed a range of impacts and perspectives. Much of this has been focused on Airbnb, which is credited with popularising the online trading of informal tourism accommodation from 2007 (Guttentag, 2015). Potential benefits include lower accommodation costs for guests (Cherry & Pidgeon, 2018), an increase in tourism-related employment (Dogru, Mody, Suess, McGinley, & Line, 2020; Fang et al., 2016), more authentic destination experiences (Shuqair, Pinto, & Mattila, 2019), greater social interaction (Xu, 2020), enhanced sustainability through waste minimisation (Heo, 2016) and better matching of housing demand to available supply (Breibach & Brodie, 2017). However, a range of negative externalities have also been observed in different contexts, including “unfair competition” that reduces income for traditional hotels and hotel workers (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020), increased housing costs for renters (Chang, 2020; Lee, 2016) and negative impacts for neighbours, including noise, parking, rubbish dumping and anti-social behaviour (Gurran et al., 2020).

While increased Airbnb listings have been linked to decreased hotel revenues and increased vacancy rates in some US states (Henten & Windekilde, 2016; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017), these impacts are not necessarily uniform across the US (Dogru et al., 2020). Airbnb and hotels have been shown to service different market segments rather than competing directly in places as diverse as Paris (Heo, Blal, & Choi, 2019) and Swaziland (Ginindza & Tichaawa, 2019). Similarly for local residents and neighbours, perspectives on home sharing can range from an “invasion” to a beneficial “pop-up” accommodation that boosts the local economy (Gurran et al., 2020). While Stergiou and Farmaki (2020) found that most research into this topic has identified negative impacts for neighbours of Airbnb properties, a study by Mody, Suess, and Dogru (2019) found that perceptions of Airbnb amongst neighbourhood residents in the US were more positive than negative. Impacts on housing costs are also varied, with Breibach and Brodie (2017) acknowledging the potential for short-term rentals to both increase housing costs through competition for properties in desirable areas, and to reduce housing costs by providing access to underutilised housing.

Many jurisdictions around the world have sought to capitalise on the benefits of sharing platforms while minimising negative externalities (Gurran & Phibbs, 2017). Policy measures include zoning ordinances to protect affordable housing, limits on the number of nights a property may be offered per year, limiting short-term rentals to spare rooms rather than whole apartments and licensing requirements to create a level playing field with traditional hotels around safety and other standards (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020). Many of these measures have been in response to a trend towards professional hosts who purchase and manage multiple properties specifically for short-term rentals (Kwok & Xie, 2019; Schor, 2016), which is at odds with many definitions of the sharing economy that require resources to be “underutilised” (e.g. Acquier et al., 2017; Cusumano, 2015; Frenken & Schor, 2017) and for exchanges to be between “peers” (e.g. Cannon & Summers, 2014; Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2015).

The emergence of professional multi-unit hosts raises questions around what should be considered “sharing”, who should be considered part of a “local” community and how such ownership patterns affect trust. Trust has been explored in relation to Airbnb by Ert, Fleischer, and Magen (2016) and Phua (2019), but only in relation to trust between hosts and guests. Trust amongst other affected community members, such as neighbours and other tourism operators, has not been explored to the same degree. Our aim in this article is to address this knowledge gap by better understanding how trust between hosts, guests, neighbours, regulators and other stakeholders can contribute to the creation or otherwise of a “social licence to operate” for home sharing activities.

### *Social licence to operate*

In recent years the growing prevalence of “overtourism” has focussed scholarly attention on the interplay between tourism growth its acceptability to host populations (Mihalic, 2020). Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) has argued that a sustainable future for

tourism post COVID-19 will require that the industry be placed “in the context of the society in which it occurs and ... [harnessed] for the empowerment and well being of local communities” (p. 618). The idea that society should evaluate the social acceptability of tourism development is not new and the relationship between tourism and host populations can evolve along a destination's life cycle (Butler, 1980). In recent decades, a number of conceptual framings including social exchange theory and Doxey's Irridex model have been used by scholars to conceptualise the evolution of societal perspectives on tourism. However, as Chien and Ritchie (2018) have recently noted in this journal, one of the principal problems with Irridex and other similar frameworks is that attitude is seen to shift along a unidirectional continuum.

In the present paper we apply social licence theories to the study of resident perceptions. Unlike a formal regulatory licence, a social licence is intangible and lacks formal processes by which it may be obtained, maintained, denied or lost (Moffat, Lacey, Zhang, & Leipold, 2016). Measuring and monitoring social licence can be challenging and stakeholders within a destination community may hold differing views on whether a social licence is held (Owen & Kemp, 2012; Parsons & Lacey, 2012). The heterogeneous and evolving nature of society in tourism destinations (see Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2020) means that failure to obtain a social licence can carry real risks, including higher operating costs for industry (Franks et al., 2014) and the imposition of increased regulatory restrictions on future developments (Hall, Ashworth, & Devine-Wright, 2013).

Social licence has been applied most extensively to the mining sector, where it first emerged in the late 1990s (Cooney, 2017) and was further developed through a series of definitions and frameworks (e.g. Joyce & Thomson, 2000; Thomson & Boutillier, 2011; Zhang et al., 2015). Social licence has subsequently been applied to forestry (Edwards et al., 2016), wind farms (Hall, 2014), energy cropping (Baumber, 2018), banking (O'Brien, Gilligan, Roberts, & McCormick, 2015) and the blue economy (Voyer & van Leeuwen, 2019). With regards to the sharing economy, social licence has been applied specifically to ridesharing by Cohen and Kietzmann (2014) and gig work by Stanford (2017), with a broader conceptual analysis undertaken by Baumber et al. (2019). Schweinsberg, Darcy, and Beirman (2020) have recently argued that tourism, which often exists in the same physical space as mining, must also consider how best to maintain its own social licence and how it might strategically position itself as an agent of positive social and environmental change.

While the informal and intangible nature of social licence makes measurement challenging, large-scale surveys have been used in the mining sector to measure community attitudes in relation to identified “drivers” of social licence (Moffat et al., 2016). The social licence framework shown in Fig. 1 (hereafter referred to as the Zhang framework) was developed using case study research on mining in Australia, China and Chile (Zhang et al., 2015). It features trust as a central determinant of social licence, which is in turn influenced by stakeholders' perceptions of whether the costs and benefits of an activity are shared equitably (distributional fairness), the fairness of the decision-making processes implemented by those carrying out the activity (procedural fairness) and confidence in governance arrangements for the activity.

The factors shown in Fig. 1 have also been highlighted in other social licence frameworks applied to forestry (Dare, Schirmer, & Vanclay, 2014) and renewable energy (Baumber, 2018; Hall et al., 2013). Research across these sectors has identified a range of sub-factors that can feed into these broader factors, including impacts on aesthetics, infrastructure and pollution levels in relation to distributional fairness (Baumber, 2018), levels of honesty, transparency and participatory decision-making in relation to procedural fairness (Hall et al., 2013) and the importance of aligning codes of practice and other regulatory instruments with changing community expectations to ensure confidence in governance (Dare et al., 2014).

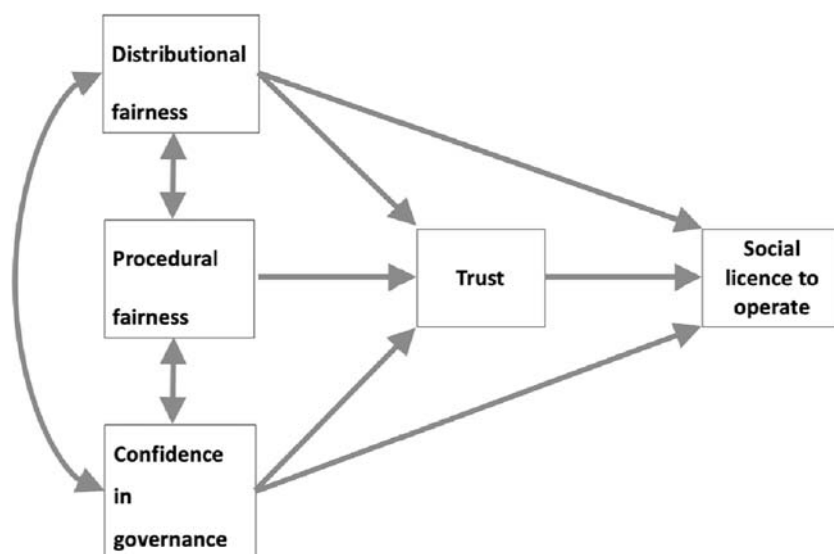


Fig. 1. Factors influencing social licence and their relationships to one another. Adapted from Zhang et al. (2015).

Key limitations of the Zhang framework are its lack of a temporal dimension, its assumption that the social licence is issued by a single community and the exclusion of other factors that may influence trust, such as pre-existing relationships and shared identity. The temporal dimension of social licence has been discussed by Dare et al. (2014) and Baumber (2018), who emphasise the need to adapt to changing social values, and Thomson and Boutilier (2011), who argue that social licence can progress over time past thresholds of “credibility”, “legitimacy” and, finally, “full trust”. Dare et al. (2014), Ford and Williams (2016) and Baumber et al. (2019) all contend that social licence should be viewed as multiple overlapping social licences with different affected communities, rather than a single licence awarded by a united community. Hall et al. (2013) discusses the importance of aligning a new activity with the “identity” held by affected stakeholders and how the use of “local champions” can engender a sense of trust before actual impacts or processes have been experienced by local communities.

Baumber et al. (2019) contend that the key social licence factors identified in the mining sector (trust, distributional fairness, procedural fairness and confidence in governance) are also relevant to the sharing economy, citing examples from home sharing, ride-sharing and bike-sharing. However, they also note key differences between the sharing economy and mining, such as the focus on service delivery rather than resource extraction and the potential for online communities to challenge the dominant framing of social licence in the mining sector as primarily a “local” issue (e.g. Cooney, 2017; Moffat & Zhang, 2014). Baumber et al. (2019) also call for further research, including to identify opportunities and risks from applying the social licence concept to the sharing economy, to better understand the different stakeholders involved in, to identify and measure key determining factors and to develop strategies for building social licence. In this article, we respond to this call by seeking to identify key determining factors for social licence around home sharing and seeking to revise frameworks developed around mining to take account of the specific characteristics of a service-oriented practice like home sharing.

## Materials and methods

### *Selection of methodologies and research questions*

A transdisciplinary co-production approach was employed to identify the factors influencing the social licence of home sharing practices and to co-construct a social licence framework for home sharing in the state of New South Wales, Australia. Transdisciplinary co-production is an exploratory research method that enables diverse stakeholders to produce new knowledge, shared understandings and new competencies through the application of key principles around inclusion, collaboration, integration, usability and reflexivity (Polk, 2015). The intent of this research is to explore the potential validity of the constructs offered by existing social licence frameworks, including that of Zhang et al. (2015), in the context of home sharing. A key aim is to lay the groundwork for future studies, rather than to offer a final or definitive model for social licence in relation to home sharing.

The case study was explored through a combination of workshops and interviews. Case studies can be used to build theories from exploratory research (Eisenhardt, 1989) and are well-suited to complex phenomena with a large number of relationships and variables (Gummesson, Thorpe, & Holt, 2019). Collaborative workshops are common tools used in transdisciplinary co-production (Howarth & Monasterolo, 2016; Polk, 2015) and may be combined with interviews to allow for participatory appraisal of key issues and the co-creation of new knowledge (Baumber, Metternicht, Ampt, Cross, & Berry, 2018).

The case study research involved three stages:

1. An initial stakeholder workshop in November 2018 (in Sydney)
2. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders between August and October 2019
3. A follow-up co-creation workshop with interviewees in November 2019

The Stage 1 workshop was used to identify key stakeholder groups, issues and research questions for Stages 2 and 3. The 23 participants in the Stage 1 workshop represented home sharing platforms, traditional accommodation businesses, accommodation booking platforms, tourism industry peak bodies, government representatives (state and local), residents' groups and university researchers. Background information was provided on the social licence concept, followed by participants being divided into four mixed discussion groups where they identified the major stakeholder groups involved in home-sharing and the key issues affecting social licence for each group. This data was used to select the participants for Stages 2 and 3 and to confirm whether data saturation had been reached in the Stage 2 interviews.

Six Stage 1 participants representing the different stakeholder groups identified were invited to follow-up interviews (Stage 2) and a second co-creation workshop (Stage 3). The Stage 2 interviews were conducted using a modified repertory grid approach (Fransella, Bell, & Bannister, 2004). Repertory grid methods have been typically applied in psychotherapy settings to sample sizes of five and over (Winter, 2003). While some tourism applications of repertory grid methods have employed larger sample sizes to ensure statistical validity of the data generated, it has recently been observed that one of the benefits of the method is that large sample sizes are often not required in order to achieve data saturation (see Chen & Hsu, 2021). In this case the collated repertory grid constructs were not intended to be an end in themselves but rather to provide factors for consideration and discussion by focus group participants in Stage 3 of the study. Pike (2003) has previously noted that often the majority of data (constructs) elicited through repertory grids are provided by the first few respondents.

## Data collection and analysis

The stakeholder groups and issues identified in Stage 1 were shared with all participants and the Stage 2 interviewees were reminded of these outcomes before being asked which factors or issues they felt may be relevant for the social licence of home sharing. Following a modified repertory grid approach, interviewees were shown five accommodation options in different combinations of three at a time and asked to identify a way in which two of the three were similar in relation to social licence and the other was different. The five options included a well-known home sharing platform (Airbnb), a well-known traditional accommodation provider (Accor) and three online booking systems that cover different types of accommodation and tourism services (Hotels.com, Expedia and Trivago). Different combinations were applied until saturation had been reached (i.e. no new factors were able to be identified). Interviewees were asked at the end whether there were any additional factors or issues they would like to raise that had not yet emerged.

The interview transcripts were analysed in NVivo 12 software using a combination of in vitro coding, whereby codes are selected from literature prior to analysis, and in vivo coding, whereby codes emerge from the data (King, 2008). Transcripts were analysed to identify where the four factors from the Zhang framework (distributional fairness, procedural fairness, confidence in governance and trust) were raised by participants (i.e. in vitro coding). New codes were created for any emergent factors that did not clearly fit under the four factors (i.e. in vivo coding) and codes were also created for sub-categories of the four factors.

At the Stage 3 co-creation workshop, the participants were each given 17 cards listing factors identified from the interview data (i.e. the 4 Zhang factors plus 13 emergent factors). They were asked to arrange them based on how they felt the factors related to one another, including creating categories, prioritising some over others, adding new factors and leaving some out altogether. The different approaches were then discussed as a group in an attempt to reach consensus on the key elements of a social licence framework for home sharing.

## Results

### Stage 1 workshop results

Table 1 shows the four main stakeholder groups identified in the Stage 1 workshop and the perspectives seen to be associated with each group. The research questions for Stages 2 and 3 generated through the Stage 1 workshop were:

- What are the key factors that determine social licence for home sharing?
- To what extent are existing frameworks developed around extractive industries relevant to home sharing? and
- What role do local communities play in determining social licence for globalised online home sharing platforms?

### Stage 2 interview results

#### Prevalence of factors from previous research in interview transcripts

The interviewees were selected to represent the four stakeholder categories shown in Table 1, including a state government agency representative (G), a consultant who worked with emerging industry platforms (EI), two representatives of a community association of home-owners (C1 and C2), and two representatives of peak bodies representing the traditional accommodation and hospitality industries (T1 and T2). Each of the four factors from the Zhang framework were referred to in some form in each of the interviews, with sub-categories identified for each (Fig. 2). Distributional fairness was the most frequently-cited factor,

**Table 1**

Key stakeholder groups and perspectives on the social licence concept.

<p>For <b>government</b>, social licence could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an insight into people's thoughts</li> <li>• Reduce need for regulation</li> <li>• Be a policy making too</li> <li>• Reduce political riskBut...</li> <li>• They are accountable if a social licence approach doesn't work</li> </ul> <p>For <b>community</b> (homeowners, residents), social licence could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give voice to the community</li> <li>• Enable input into local business decisions</li> <li>• Protect rightsBut...</li> <li>• Convenience/cost may be prioritised over protecting neighbours' rights</li> <li>• Power imbalances may affect social licenceA participatory approach is required</li> </ul>	<p>For the <b>traditional accommodation industry</b>, social licence could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance community engagement</li> <li>• Assist advocacy of industry</li> <li>• Drive innovation and enhances available offeringsBut...</li> <li>• Lack of trust between traditional and emerging accommodation providers</li> <li>• Playing field not level</li> </ul> <p>For the <b>emerging industry</b> of home sharing businesses, social licence could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable them to operate</li> <li>• Reduce risks and costs</li> <li>• Avoid regulationBut...</li> <li>• Power imbalance between big established industry and small players</li> <li>• Tendency to rely on government to solve problemsCould be used to shut down innovation</li> </ul>
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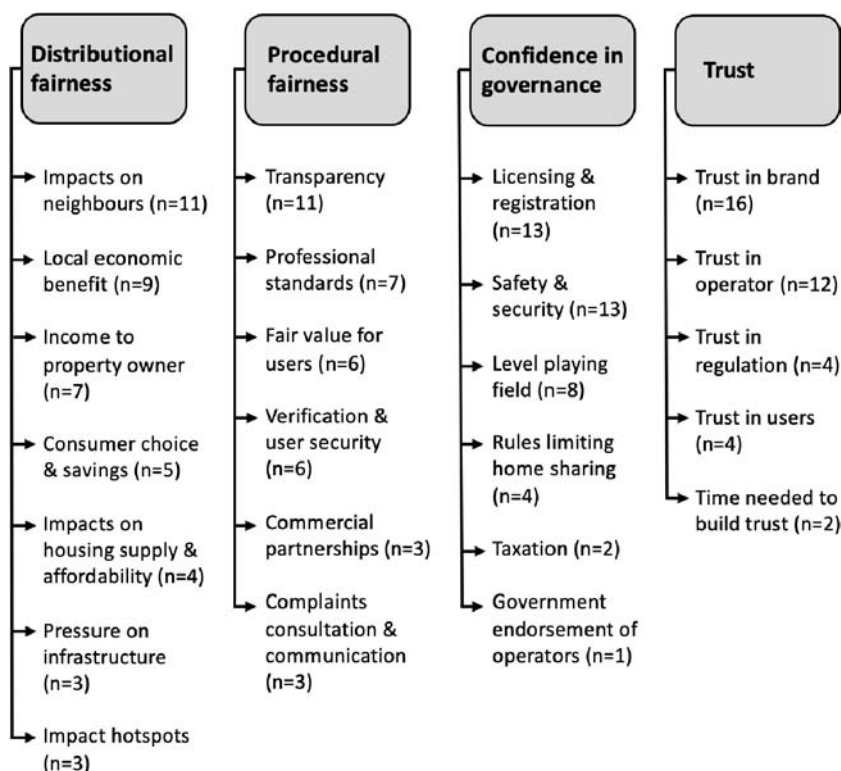


Fig. 2. Sub-categories identified for each of the four factors from the Zhang framework (n = number of interviewee references relating to sub-category).

followed by confidence in governance, trust and procedural fairness. Sample quotes are provided for each sub-category in Table S1 (Supplementary Data).

For distributional fairness, negative impacts were more commonly discussed than positive impacts. Potential benefits included providing income to “regular people” (G), enabling property owners “to get a little bit of money back on their exorbitant rental mortgage they’re paying” (T2) and to create local economic benefits by enabling “new, different types of visitors to go to places that they wouldn’t otherwise go to” (G). Negative comments about the distributional fairness of home sharing included:

- **Lack of economic benefit:** “they are not actually contributors to the local tourism or accommodation market” (T1)
- **Impacts on neighbours:** “Why should the apartment block across the road or around the corner suffer from drunken, drug-taking teenagers breaching security and terrifying people?” (C1)
- **Impacts on housing affordability:** “those people who’ve lived there a very long time now all of a sudden can’t afford to live in their own community because of all these tourists coming in, and using the accommodation stock that would otherwise have been in long-term rental accommodation” (G)

With regards to procedural fairness, transparency was the most widely-discussed sub-category, often overlapping with other sub-categories such as fair value for customers (i.e. transparency of search algorithms and business relationships) and effective verification processes (i.e. transparency of user information and experiences). Hotels were seen to have a clear advantage over home sharing operations in relation to the sub-category of professional standards, which included “professional staff” (T1), “ownership responsibility” (C1) and “all those services that come with a hotel” (G). Conversely, home sharing platforms were seen to offer superior user-vetting and ratings processes, e.g. “the person coming to stay in your place - we know who they are, they’re safe, they haven’t screwed up anyone else’s house last time they were there.” (T2).

Confidence in governance was discussed most frequently in relation to the potential for government licensing and registration systems to bestow legitimacy, as well as related factors such as safety and security resulting from government regulations and differences in regulatory requirements across accommodation providers (e.g. fire exits and smoke detectors). There was a general consensus that the lack of such requirements for home sharing meant that there was not a “level playing field” for traditional operators. Other governance issues discussed by interviewees included rules limiting home sharing and tourism accommodation (e.g. zoning, by-laws) and taxation issues (i.e. companies paying tax in Australia). The potential for governments to endorse accommodation operators through regional tourism websites was raised by one participant (EI).

Trust was most commonly cited in relation to brands and operators, which were classed as separate but related sub-categories. Brand trust was linked to the age of a brand, e.g. “people know of them, that history”(G) and companies with multiple brands

were seen as potentially having multiple social licences. Trust in operators was generally linked to whether or not they were seen to be taking responsibility for what happens at their properties, e.g. “the reputation is the person delivering the experience, or the offer, on the ground, not the company that sold the product in the market” (G). Other important sub-factors were trust in other users, which was linked to procedural fairness (i.e. verification processes), and trust in regulations (linked to confidence in governance).

#### *Emergent social licence factors*

A number of issues were raised in the interviews that did not neatly fit into the four factors covered by the Zhang framework. These emergent factors were divided into thirteen categories (Table 2), of which ownership of local properties and regulatory compliance were most frequently cited. While some of these emergent factors appeared related to the four factors from the Zhang framework (Fig. 3), it was decided to present separately at the subsequent workshop so participants could determine how they might relate to one another. Sample quotes are provided for each sub-category in Table S2 (Supplementary Data).

Several emergent factors raised by interviewees related to an accommodation provider's business structure, including owning and operating local properties, size/scale of operations, range of services offered and number of brands. While these factors were often linked to costs and benefits (distributional fairness), as well as to the procedural fairness of a platform's processes, there was also element of community connection that cut across these categories. For example, owning local properties was seen as being “part of the community” (C1) and “responsible for what happens to you when you're at their property” (T2).

A number of other emergent categories appeared to transcend the distributional fairness and procedural fairness categories, especially those relating to stakeholder relationships, such as customer civility, community engagement and employee relations. Customer civility was linked to impacts on neighbours (distributional fairness) as well as community consultation and verification processes (procedural fairness). Community engagement was sometimes expressed in terms of cost/benefit or communication processes, but was also framed in more general terms like “community feel” (G) and “respecting the local community” (C1).

While regulatory compliance showed a strong overlap with confidence in governance (Fig. 3), it was given its own card for the workshop because non-compliance with regulations (e.g. illegal subletting) threatens the social licence of an individual operator, while inadequate regulations threatens the social licence of the entire home sharing sector. Participants also noted that there was a difference between complying with regulations and those regulations being fair and adequate, e.g. “you can make things that are detrimental to the community lawful” (C1). Similarly, user ratings systems were linked to both procedural fairness and confidence in governance.

Adaptability and susceptibility to changing circumstances were treated as emergent factors that can affect how the four factors from the Zhang framework change over time. Interviewees framed Airbnb as a “disrupter” that had adapted successfully to industry trends, while traditional accommodation providers were seen as vulnerable to changing conditions. In terms of social licence, this adaptability was seen as both a liability, e.g. “there's nothing innovating about trashing something, disruption is not in itself an inherently good thing (C1) and an asset, e.g. “there's also communities that have embraced the disruptive model because it's provided them access to prosperity that they otherwise wouldn't have been able to get access to” (EI). Two other factors that also

**Table 2**  
Emergent factors identified by interviewees.

Emergent Factor (wording used on workshop cards)	Issues raised in relation to factor in interviews	No. of references
Extent to which they own and operate local properties	Platform takes responsibility for safety, greater benefit to local community (less cut taken by intermediaries)	11
Regulatory compliance	Large traditional providers more likely to comply with regulations, home-share platforms involved in illegal subletting	11
Level of engagement with local community	Community has influence over operations, creates “community feel”, greater economic benefit to local community	9
Level of customer civility	Poor customer behaviour can erode social licence for home sharing	9
Size of the operating platform	Smaller operators may pay more attention to customers and generate greater local benefits. Larger operators may have more consistent standards.	8
Adaptability to new markets and jurisdictions	Factors such as low barriers to entry, lower regulatory requirements and ability to diversify offerings may enhance adaptability	9
Susceptibility to external shocks	Vulnerability to reputational damage, disruption by new business models, changes in regulation etc.	8
Level of political engagement	Lobbying of government by disruptors, traditional providers and local communities can influence perceptions of social licence	8
Range of services provided	Greater range of services benefits customers and communities	7
Role of the user community in governing the platform	Ability to rate hosts and customers can increase trust in platform	6
Number of associated brands	Different brands under the same owner can have different social licences	5
Level of awareness of a platform, its impacts & how it operates	Lack of awareness of impacts, ownership (e.g. multiple brands under one owner) and the social licence concept. Media plays an important role in changing awareness.	4
Employee/ employer relationship	Fair wages and conditions	3

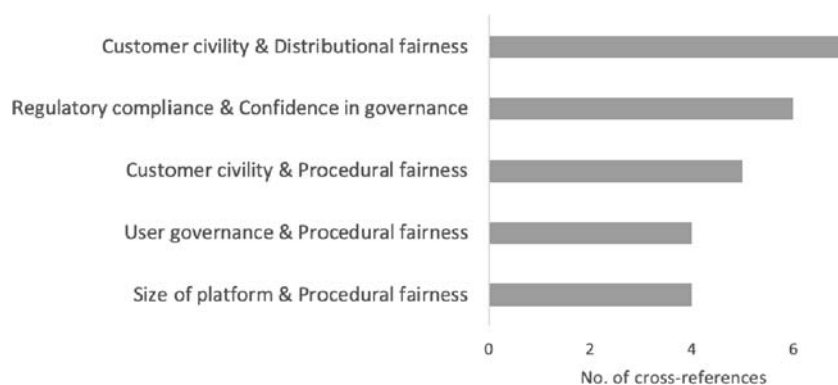


Fig. 3. Cross-references between emergent factors and Zhang framework factors (i.e. participant statements coded as both).

appeared to have an indirect impact on social licence and could not easily be restricted to the distributional fairness, procedural fairness or governance categories were level of awareness within the community and level of political engagement.

### Stage 3 workshop results

The workshop participants produced a range of different clusters, hierarchies and priorities when asked to sort the 17 cards (i.e. the four factors from the Zhang framework plus the 13 emergent factors). Some common features are shown in Fig. 4, including the three main groupings that were most commonly created by participants. One common cluster was described using terms such as regulation, legitimacy and government, while another involved terms such as community and respect, and a third was based around terms such as responsibility and accountability.

Regulation was seen to be related to legitimacy and was associated with the cards covering confidence in government regulations, compliance with regulations, political engagement and fairness of processes. The community/respect cluster was related to community engagement, community awareness, customer civility and distribution of costs and benefits. Responsibility and accountability were terms most commonly associated with transparency, fairness of processes, political engagement, customer civility and employee relations. Trust did not tend to align with a single cluster, but rather was associated with a wide range of other factors at the workshop, including transparency, fairness of processes, community engagement, community awareness, customer civility and the role of users in governing a platform.

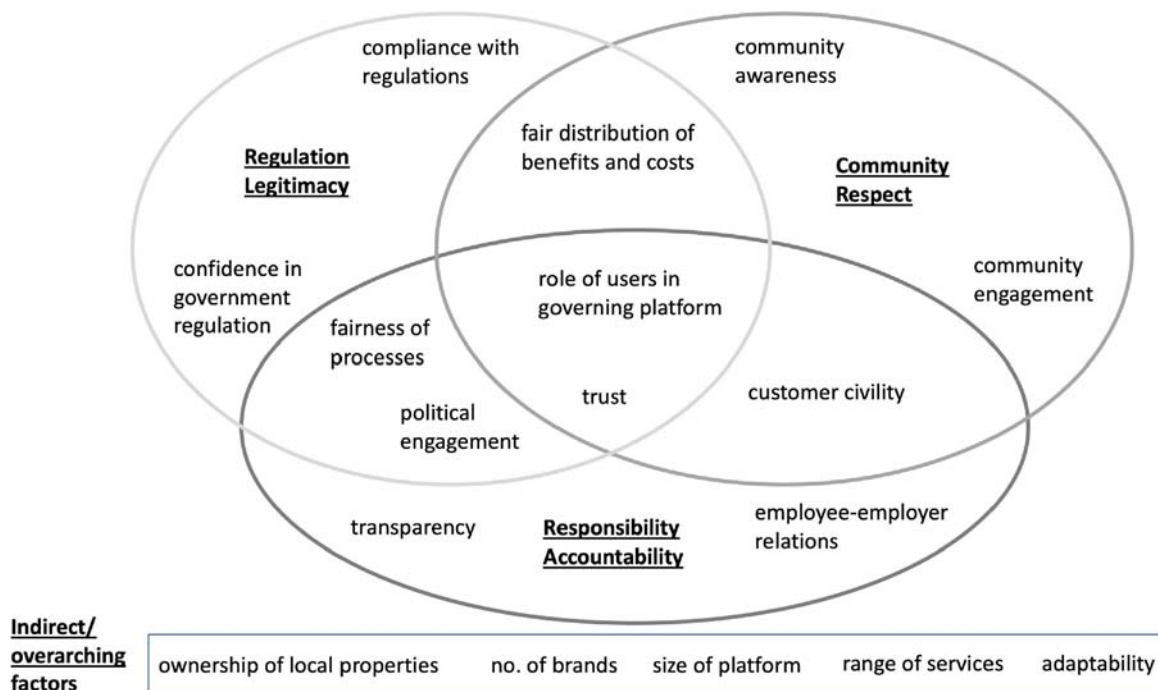


Fig. 4. Clusters of social licence factors emerging from workshop.



Workshop participants found some factors difficult to incorporate into their clusters and hierarchies. The number of associated brands, range of services, size of operating platform and ownership of local properties were often left out or placed in overarching categories, using labels such as “initial stage”, “industry” or “sharing economy”. Similarly, adaptability was generally considered to be an overarching factor and susceptibility to external shocks was excluded by most participants altogether. Other overarching or contextual factors that came up in discussions at the workshop were the maturity of the home sharing sector (and industry participants), community characteristics (e.g. a desire to increase or decrease tourism in a local area) and which stakeholder group is being considered (e.g. users of the platform, the broader accommodation and tourism industry or surrounding community living nearby to home sharing activities).

## Discussion

### Contribution to social licence theory

The interviews and workshop affirmed that procedural fairness, distributional fairness, confidence in governance and trust are relevant to the social licence of home sharing. The clustering exercise undertaken at the co-creation workshop (Fig. 4) was closely aligned to the Zhang framework, with confidence in governance corresponding to the regulation/legitimacy cluster, distributional fairness corresponding to the community/respect cluster and procedural fairness corresponding to the transparency/responsibility cluster. The fact that trust was associated with a range of factors at the workshop aligns with its status as a higher order determinant of social licence, which is consistent with the frameworks of Zhang et al. (2015), Thomson and Boutilier (2011) and Hall et al. (2013).

The importance placed on local scale impacts by participants (e.g. on neighbours and housing costs) supports the assertion by social licence scholars that the concept is most relevant at a local level (Cooney, 2017; Joyce & Thomson, 2000). It also helps to answer the question posed by Baumber et al. (2019) of whether local communities are still relevant to the social licence of globalised online sharing platforms. However, while some local community factors align with social licence categories from existing frameworks (e.g. impacts on neighbours relates to distributional fairness), others cut across more than one category (e.g. community engagement affects both procedural fairness and confidence in governance). The case study also suggested that certain local factors, such as ownership of local properties, size of operation and brand identity, can act as proxies for credibility and legitimacy when an activity is in its infancy and there is a lack of direct knowledge about specific impacts, processes or governance arrangements. Direct ownership of local properties was seen as an indicator of the “degree of connection” to local communities (C1), while size of the operation was associated with “community feel” (T1) and social licence was seen to align “with the brand, not the ownership” (EI), as consumers are often unaware of who owns what brand in the accommodation sector.

The Social Licence of Home Sharing framework shown in Fig. 5 incorporates not only the four determinants of trust, procedural fairness, distributional fairness and confidence in governance from Zhang et al. (2015), but also adds:

- specific influencing factors with relevance for home sharing;

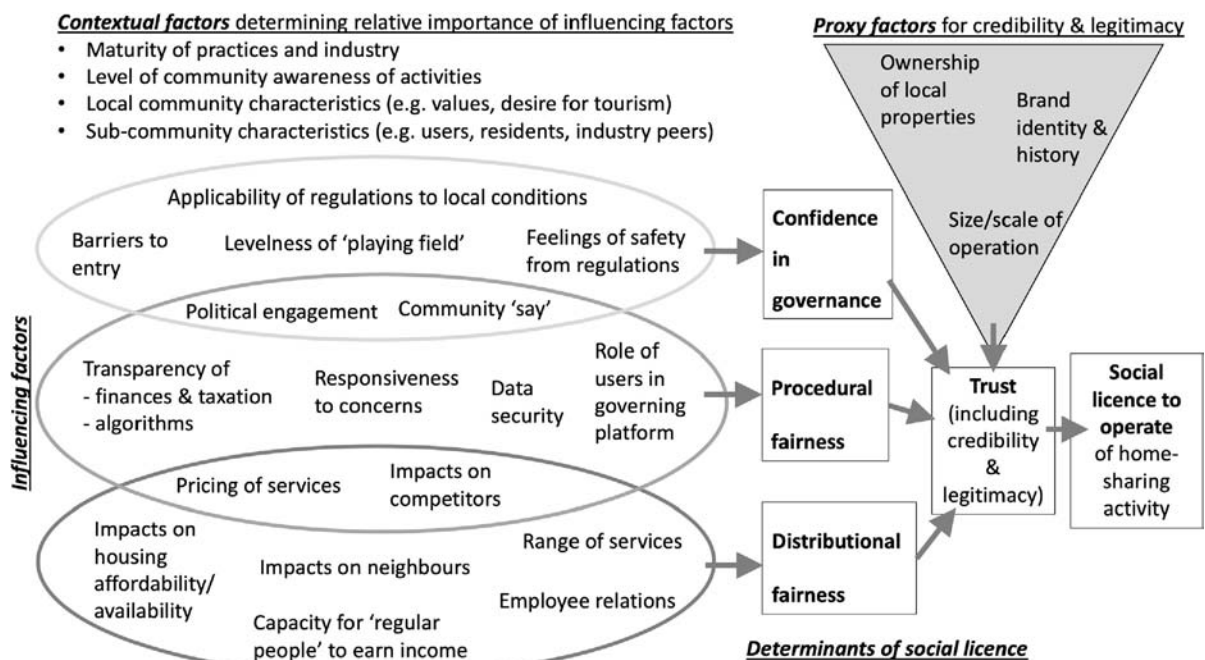


Fig. 5. The Social Licence of Home Sharing framework.

- contextual factors that affect the relative importance of the influencing factors in different contexts; and
- proxy factors that can “bypass” the influencing factors to create feelings of credibility and legitimacy in the absence of detailed knowledge.

As with the frameworks of Zhang et al. (2015), Thomson and Boutilier (2011) and Hall et al. (2013), trust acts as an overarching determinant in the proposed framework. The various influencing factors in the framework are not an exhaustive list, but rather represent key factors identified through this case study and may be expanded upon through future application of the framework to different contexts. Aside from identifying these specific influencing factors, the proposed framework also deviates substantially from the frameworks of Zhang et al. (2015), Thomson and Boutilier (2011) and Baumber (2018) by including contextual and proxy factors.

Proxy factors were included in the framework following suggestions from workshop participants that there is often a lack of awareness around the specific impacts, processes and regulatory conditions for new and emerging activities such as home sharing. In such cases, community members may rely on prior relationships, assumptions and rules of thumb when determining whether an activity is legitimate. In the case of home sharing and traditional accommodation, this can include consideration of whether properties are owned and operated by local people, the size or scale of an operation (e.g. smaller operations being more trusted) or the pre-existing reputation of a brand. The importance of these proxy factors has parallels in other industries such as renewable energy, where pre-existing networks of trust and alignment with stakeholder identities can engender trust in the absence of detailed knowledge about the impacts, processes or governance of an emerging activity (Hall et al., 2013).

The contextual factors included in the proposed framework allow for differences between regions and sub-communities in the same region to be analysed when planning or regulating home sharing activities. Case study participants noted that communities in different geographic regions are likely to have different views on the desirability of both tourism generally and disruptors like Airbnb specifically. This mirrors the findings of Gurran et al. (2020) from different communities across Australia. However, the proposed framework also highlights that different sub-communities in the same location (e.g. users of home sharing platforms, competitors, neighbours) will hold differing views on factors such as the fair distribution of costs and benefits, what restrictions (if any) should be placed on how property owners are able to use their properties and what represents a “level playing field” in relation to regulations and barriers to entry. This reflects the arguments of Dare et al. (2014) and Ford and Williams (2016) that social licence is best viewed as multiple licences to be negotiated with separate but overlapping communities.

The contextual factors featured in the proposed framework the maturity of the industry sector (i.e. home sharing) and the level of community awareness, both of which have a temporal dimension. Community awareness can be expected to increase as an industry grows, leading to increased scrutiny that may in turn help to advance industry maturity, as home sharing operators adapt their practices and governments adjust regulations. This element of adaptability, previously discussed by Baumber (2018) and Dare et al. (2014) in the energy and forestry sectors, is critical to the interrelationship between the contextual and influencing factors shown in Fig. 5.

### *Practical implications for home sharing*

Aside from affirming the relevance of social licence frameworks developed around extractive industries, the research results also demonstrated that many of the community issues that have emerged around home sharing globally are also issues in New South Wales. Calls for home sharing platforms and hosts to face increased safety and planning regulations to create a “level playing field” mirrors debates in Europe and the United States (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020). Similarly, impacts on local residents such as increased housing costs and anti-social guest behaviour have been identified overseas (Chang, 2020; Gurran et al., 2020; Lee, 2016). Furthermore, while most of the home sharing impacts cited by interviewees were framed as negatives, the positive impacts also aligned with previous studies, such as economic benefits for regions desiring more tourism and benefits for consumers like lower costs and greater choice (Cherry & Pidgeon, 2018; Dogru, Mody, Suess, et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2016; Gurran et al., 2020). However, some other potential benefits identified in previous research, such as social interaction/community cohesion (Cherry & Pidgeon, 2018; Xu, 2020), sustainability (Heinrichs, 2013; Heo, 2016) and optimisation of housing supply (Breibach & Brodie, 2017) were not raised in this study.

The proposed framework offers a means of strategically identifying potential issues and targeting them through proactive engagement by new entrants or government agencies. Home sharing activities may continue to expand regardless of whether these issues are addressed, but the use of a social licence framework allows proponents, policy-makers and local communities to be proactive in addressing risks and building trust. Furthermore, by understanding how contextual factors may vary over space (i.e. between different regions) and over time (i.e. as the industry matures), strategies and policies can be tailored to specific circumstances. Business strategies and regulatory responses may be different in regions that welcome more “pop-up” accommodation to those that view home sharing as an “invasion” (Gurran et al., 2020).

A key contribution of the proposed framework is its focus on contextual and proxy factors that can change quickly over time, such as local ownership, brand reputation, community awareness and industry maturity. Practices such as home sharing have the potential to go “under the radar” during their early growth phase in a way that highly visible activities such as mining cannot (Baumber et al., 2019). While mining activities tend to be large and subject to extensive regulatory approvals processes, home sharing tends to be small-scale, dispersed, conducted through online transactions and often exempt from regulation. However, while home sharing may be able to commence and expand “under the radar”, it is arguable that any social licence they hold while operating in this manner will be weaker than one based on deep engagement with the local community and susceptible

to being lost through relatively minor incidents or negative publicity. As such, measurements of community awareness, industry maturity and proxy factors like local ownership may help home sharing platforms to head off future disruptions to their operating model, as well as government agencies trying to decide whether to take a more or less restrictive approach to regulation.

Drawing on the systems thinking metaphor of a “ball in a basin” (Levin et al., 1998), a weakly-held social licence for home sharing that is “under the radar” could be seen to exist in a relatively shallow basin (Fig. 6) and require only a small disturbance to tip it over the edge to a state where it is withdrawn (i.e. it has low resilience). In contrast, a strongly-held social licence may be more resilient and able to withstand much greater disturbances (e.g. media attacks, community protests, political debates) due to strong balancing feedbacks (e.g. supporters rising to its defence) or reserves of trust and goodwill that have been built up over time. Future research could focus more specifically on the influencing factors and strategies required to build a resilient social licence for home sharing that can withstand future disturbances.

One regulatory strategy suggested by an interviewee (T1) is to presume home sharing activities hold a social licence until proven otherwise, drawing on the concept of “negative licensing”:

“There’s something called a negative licence. Which is, you don’t need a licence to commence this operation... but the government has the ability to ban you from continuing that work if you have been found to have done the wrong thing... I always laugh that a social licence operates in that way, in that you don’t need anything to get it and it doesn’t exist as a frontend, but it can certainly be taken away from you if there is a feeling that you have breached guidelines or laws or whatever it is” (T1).

In December 2020, 12 months after the Stage 3 workshop, the NSW Government introduced new regulations and a code of conduct setting out minimum standards of behaviour for platform operators and users in the short term rental accommodation industry (Fair Trading NSW, 2020). These regulations follow a negative licensing model by creating an “exclusion register” under which hosts and guests may be banned from participating in the industry for five years. This mirrors how negative licensing has been employed in other sectors such as healthcare and social services to focus on “hot spots” of illegal, unethical, incompetent, exploitative or predatory behaviour (Braithwaite, 2009). While negative licensing has been argued to offer a “more targeted, less restrictive and less costly” approach in the healthcare sector (Victorian Department of Health, 2013 p. 24), it has also been criticised for putting vulnerable people at risk through a lack of screening (e.g. for criminal history) and a lack of reporting and accountability (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2014). Measuring social licence offers a potential middle ground between one-size-fits-all regulation and targeting only hotspots, particularly if factors such as industry maturity, community and awareness and proxy factors for trust are used as indicators of whether a region might emerge as a “hot spot” in the future.

#### Limitations and future research opportunities

This article presents exploratory research that has identified factors affecting the social licence of home sharing in one region of one country, based on the views of a small representative group of stakeholders. As such, the framework that has been developed requires testing and refinement through larger-scale data collection and application to other contexts. Large-scale surveys, such as those conducted in the mining sector around social licence (Moffat & Zhang, 2014) and in the home sharing sector around local community impacts (Mody et al., 2019), represent an important research tool for measuring the factors identified in the proposed framework, as well as providing affected stakeholders with an opportunity to suggest additional factors. This research has laid the foundations for such instruments to be employed across different geographical locations as well as for standardised instruments and measurement scales to be developed in future. Localised studies employing interviews and workshops with diverse stakeholder as part of a process of transdisciplinary co-production may also provide locally-specific data on the factors and strategies determining social licence in specific communities.

The contextual and proxy factors identified through this study, such as industry maturity, community awareness, local ownership and brand reputation may also have relevance for other contexts where new and emerging practices have the characteristics

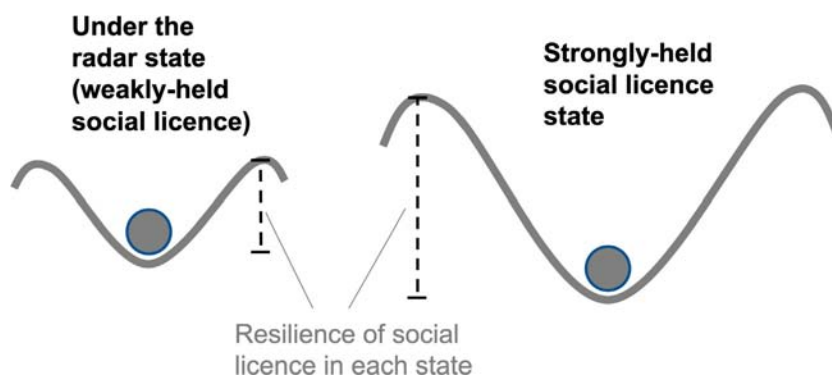


Fig. 6. Representation of the difference between a weakly held and strongly held social licence using the systems thinking “ball in a basin” metaphor. Adapted from Baumber et al. (2019).

of disruptive innovation that have been attributed to home sharing (Guttentag, 2015). In particular, renewable energy may take the form of a disruptive innovation and may even go “under the radar” in situations where small-scale, distributed forms of energy such as wind, solar or biomass crops gradually displace large, centralised energy systems reliant on fossil fuel extraction (e.g. Baumber, 2018; Hall et al., 2015). As such, the insights obtained and framework developed through this study may have relevance for future research into the social licence of industries far removed from home sharing and the sharing economy.

A key source of uncertainty is the long-term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the home sharing sector. Global and national travel shutdowns have led to a decline in home sharing, income loss for hosts and risks for those who have invested in properties for home sharing purposes (SMH, 2020). Chen, Cheng, Edwards, and Xu (2021) reported that Airbnb hosts lost 70% income in Sydney alone between January and March 2020. Impacts include the return of short-term and holiday rentals to the regular rental market, along with downsizing and consolidation amongst hosts (ABC News, 2020). Some of these impacts may be temporary, as strong increases in short-term rental demand were observed in June 2020 when intra-state travel restrictions were lifted in NSW (AccomNews, 2020). However, the longer-term effects of the pandemic on the NSW and global home sharing sector are yet to be determined.

## Conclusion

While home sharing offers a range of potential benefits to a variety of stakeholders, it also has a “dark side” that has been identified by previous research and affirmed by this case study. Impacts on local residents and incumbent accommodation providers have the potential to threaten the social licence of home sharing practices, platforms and hosts, as do concerns about a lack of transparency and community input into management processes and a sense that the regulatory playing field is not level.

Social licence frameworks developed around very different practices, such as mining, have broad applicability to home sharing activities and may offer pathways to better understand, predict and strategically build social licence. Distributional fairness, procedural fairness and confidence in governance all contribute to the building of trust in the proponents and managers of home sharing activities, which in turn contributes to the overall social acceptability of these practices. Local communities are central to obtaining and maintaining a social licence in relation to both mining and home sharing and the fact that home sharing is practiced by a globalised online community of platform users does not negate the need to obtain a social licence from affected local communities.

While social licence frameworks from mining and other industries may provide opportunities to measure and build social licence around the sharing economy, this study has also shown that adaptations are likely to be required. In particular, issues of industry maturity, community awareness, proxy factors and the range of different sub-communities involved in the sharing economy require careful consideration. The relative importance of different influencing factors needs to be studied further across locations with different characteristics (e.g. regions with “overtourism” and those desiring more tourism) and home sharing activities at differing stages of industry maturity.

The fact that home sharing is often able to go “under the radar” means that social licence may have relevance for other, very different practices that have the potential to go “under the radar” due to their small-scale, distributed nature, such as wind, solar and biomass in the renewable energy sector.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

This article extends conceptual and theoretical understandings of community acceptance in relation to home sharing practices and platforms by applying the concept of social licence to operate. It provides a conceptual framework through which to analyse community impacts and perspectives around home-sharing, building on other recent research such as the article published in *Annals of Tourism Research* by Nicole Gurran, Yuting Zhang and Pranita Shrestha in 2020 on Airbnb in coastal Australia (Volume 81, Article 102,845). Insights drawn from other sectors where social licence has been applied, such as mining, forestry and energy, add to our understanding of the factors that influence social licence around home sharing. Conversely, by applying the social licence concept to a new activity (home sharing), this research extends social licence theory, particularly through the identification of contextual and proxy factors and the discussion of social licence as a form of negative licensing.

This article employs a social science approach based on the principles of transdisciplinary co-production, which emphasises inclusion, collaboration, integration, usability and reflexivity. A case study focused on the state of New South Wales, Australia, was explored through a combination of collaborative workshops and interviews with diverse stakeholders impacted by home sharing in the case study region. These are well-established social science methods that are well-suited to complex phenomena with a large number of relationships and variables. The workshops and interviews were employed to enable participatory appraisal of key issues along with the co-creation of a framework for evaluating social licence in relation to home-sharing in New South Wales, with potential application to other locations.

## Declaration of competing interest

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103293>.



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