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Homophily and peer-consumer behaviour in a peer-to-peer accommodation sharing economy platform

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ABSTRACT

Peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation is considered as an important subsector of the 'sharing economy'. P2P sharing economy (SE) platforms bring mostly individual actors called 'peers' together to create value. In general, interactions among peers in P2P SE platforms are considered novel and social with communal feelings such as friendliness and social satisfaction (Perren and Kozinets 2018, Lateral Exchange Markets: How Social Platforms Operate in a Networked Economy) and some research attention has been paid to peer interaction dynamics on P2P accommodation platforms in recent years. This study employs homophily, a potential user interaction dynamic but rarely studied in the context of SE platforms, and investigates its impact on peer-consumer behaviour in a P2P accommodation platform. We also examine homophily drivers in the context of accommodation sharing platforms. Our results suggest that homophily does contribute to peer-users' consumption intention through trust and attitude, and that ethnicity and gender, two strong homophily factors identified in the literature, do not have statistically significant effects on homophily in this context. However, qualitative analysis of open-ended questions suggests that other homophily factors may be more influential in the accommodation sharing economy context. We believe that this study makes a meaningful contribution by expanding our understanding of peer-users' interaction dynamics in the context of accommodation sharing platforms.

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Accommodation sharing economy; homophily; trust; Airbnb

1. Introduction

The 'sharing economy' has drawn attention from academia and practitioners with its phenomenal growth and potential. For example, 33.9 million adults used sharing economy services such as Airbnb and Uber in the United States in 2017, and its number is expected to increase to 45.6 million by 2022 (Statistica 2018). The European Commission reported that the five sharing economy market sectors of accommodation, transportation, buying or selling of goods, sharing or renting of goods, and on-demand personal services facilitated €27.9 billion worth of transactions between May 2015 and May 2016, with an estimated 191 million Europeans engaging in at least one transaction involving payment (Hausemer et al. 2017). The rapid growth in the accommodation P2P sharing, in particular, is disrupting the accommodation sector, the largest subsector of the tourism industry, as P2P accommodation accounts for 7% of accommodation globally, or roughly 8 million beds in 2017 and the annual growth rate for global P2P accommodation is projected to be at 31% between 2013 and 2025 (Bakker and Twining-Ward 2018).

Though the literature on the 'sharing economy' is growing fast in recent years, its definition is still elusive with many different terms being used such as 'sharing economy' (Cohen and Kietzmann 2014; Hamari, Sjöklint, and Ukkonen 2016), 'collaborative economy' (Botsman 2014), 'collaborative consumption' (Botsman and Rogers 2010), 'access-based consumption' (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012), and 'crowd-based capitalism' (Sundararajan 2016), 'two-sided markets/multi-sided platforms' (Evans et al. 2011), 'matching markets' (Azevedo and Weyl 2016), etc. With discussion on the exact definition and scope of the 'sharing economy' still undergoing, we subscribe to a broad umbrella view of the sharing economy as economic-technological phenomena encompassing various forms of emerging transaction platforms sitting across on a large spectrum between gift economies and market economies (Sundararajan 2016). The study, in particular, focuses on peer-to-peer accommodation sharing platforms, a notable subsection of the sharing economy.

P2P SE platforms bring together mostly individual participants, called peers, to create value together on P2P SE platforms. Networked actors sometimes participate in novel social situations, such as sleeping in someone's

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apartment or spare bedroom or riding a vehicle of a stranger for a fee. Such novel situations are social in nature and user interactions often evoke communal feelings of affability, friendliness, and social satisfaction (Perren and Kozinets 2018). It is generally agreed that P2P platforms create new forms of social connections mediating peer-users and user interactions on such platforms are social in nature (Hawlitschek, Teubner, and Gimpel 2016; Junglas et al. 2017; Perren and Kozinets 2018). Researchers have paid attention to peer interaction dynamics on P2P sharing platforms in recent years and some aspects investigated include trust among users (Cho, Park, and Kim 2019; Ert, Fleischer, and Magen 2016; Milanova and Maas 2017), trust in platforms (Ma et al. 2017; Mittendorf, Berente, and Holten 2019), and reputations systems and trust (Qiu, Parigi, and Abrahao 2018; Zhang, Yan, and Zhang 2018).

The main motivation of the study is to investigate if the well-known face-to-face social organising principle of homophily would work in P2P sharing economy contexts and if homophily impacts trust in the context of P2P interactions on an accommodation sharing platform. The literature suggests that contacts between similar people occur at a higher rate than among dissimilar people in various offline social interaction contexts (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), but the effects of homophily in the context of SE platforms are rarely investigated. This study aims to empirically examine how homophily might contribute to peer-users' behavioural intention through trust and attitude in an accommodation sharing economy platform and which factors can drive peer-users' perception of homophily.

The study makes some important contributions to theory and practice. First, it contributes to the growing body of P2P platform literature by providing some insight into user interaction dynamics on such platforms. It also adds to the homophily literature by investigating its role in the context of platform-mediated peer-to-peer interactions. The study expands the literature on trust as well by identifying and empirically testing homophily as a trust driver. It also has practical implications to P2P sharing platform owners and peer participants on such platforms. In the following, we review the theoretical background of the study and introduce the research model and hypotheses. Then, we present our research method, analysis, and results. Finally, we discuss the implications, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. User interaction dynamics on P2P sharing economy platforms

Sundararajan (2016) states that the sharing economy covers a wide variety of economic forms with gift economies at one end and market economies at the other end. We subscribe to such comprehensive view by Sundararajan (2016) as the SE platforms cover so much ground in real life and have huge untapped potentials in future applications, e.g. potentials of SE platforms to link consumers and resources in times of disaster, growth potentials of market-based platforms with the advancement of blockchain technology, etc. (Wirtz et al. 2019). While the academic discussion is still going on the definition and scope of the sharing economy (Belk, Eckhardt, and Bardhi 2019; Constantiou, Marton, and Tuunainen 2017; Perren and Kozinets 2018), we find that Wirtz et al.'s classification criteria are useful to scope our research. Wirtz et al. (2019) suggest three criteria to define sharing economy platforms: (1) capacity-constrained assets, (2) access provision vs transfer of asset ownership, and (3) peer-to-peer vs platform-provided assets. They state that the sharing economy 'implicitly refers to the sharing of capacity-constrained physical assets (e.g. cars, rooms, and bicycles) and the provision of performances and experiences that rely on shared assets and labor (e.g. a cooking or dining experience)' (455). Using the ownership transfer criteria, they exclude P2P platforms facilitating ownership transfer such as eBay and Amazon marketplace from the scope of the sharing economy. They categorise sharing economy platforms into two types: (1) P2P resource sharing where transacted resources are provided and consumed by individual participants and (2) non-P2P where one of the participant groups (usually providers) are marketers/businesses. Researchers may have different opinions on their view to classify non-P2P platforms as 'sharing economy platforms', but we still find their criteria useful to conceptualise a wide spectrum of SE platforms. Finding the exact definition or scope of the sharing economy is not the purpose of the study, and we narrow down our research focus on P2P accommodation sharing platforms. P2P accommodation sharing platforms involve transactions of capacity-constrained assets, which are provided and consumed by individual participants, not by markets or businesses (Wirtz et al. 2019).

Research on P2P SE platforms has been growing quickly in recent years. Accommodation and ride-sharing platforms got the most attention because of the rapid growth of big platforms like Airbnb and Uber and their disruptive impacts in the markets. One stream of research focuses on business/economic aspects of SE platforms such as their impacts on the economy and existing industries (Guo, Li, and Zeng 2019; Zervas, Proserpio, and Byers 2017), and business models (Constantiou, Marton, and Tuunainen 2017; Perren and Kozinets 2018). Some researchers pay attention to social issues

such as discrimination and economic inequalities in the context of SE (Edelman, Luca, and Svirsky 2017; Kakar et al. 2018; Schor et al. 2016). Among diverse aspects of SE platforms, this study aims to contribute to the growing research on user interactions on P2P sharing platforms.

User interactions among participating peers are considered a key characteristic of sharing economy platforms, especially among young individuals. Though some researchers state that IT-mediated social interactions are becoming prevalent but empirical studies are rare (Qureshi et al. 2018), studies on P2P SE platform user interactions have recently been conducted in the context of accommodation sharing platforms with the commercial success of Airbnb partially explaining the popularity of the phenomenon. Some studies investigate the influences of hosts' identity information and platform verified information on trust and purchase intentions (Cho, Park, and Kim 2019; Ma et al. 2017). Others examine peer-consumers' reviews and reputations systems such as ratings and their impacts on perceived trust and behavioural intentions (Abrahao et al. 2017; Cheng et al. 2019; Qiu, Parigi, and Abrahao 2018; Xu 2020; Zhang, Yan, and Zhang 2018). Some research finds that self-disclosed profile information such as self-introductions, photos, and facial expressions enhances trust and facilitates consumers' behavioural intention (Ert, Fleischer, and Magen 2016; Fagerstrøm et al. 2017; Ma et al. 2017). Many user interaction studies mentioned above revolve around a common theme of trust. It is understandable as trust is considered as a major enabler of successful user interactions, and ultimately the success of intermediary platforms (Botsman and Rogers 2010). Trust can be discussed at various levels (individual, community, society, and institutional levels), but the study focuses on the individual level. While reviewing the emerging studies on factors of user interaction dynamics in the sharing economy platforms, we find that one potential trust factor, homophily, is largely unexplored in the research context.

2.2. Homophily

Homophily is a well-known social organising principle in human interactions referring to the tendency of people to choose to interact with similar others (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Homophily structures network ties of every type, including marriage, friendship, work, support, information transfer, exchange, and other types of relationships. Forming of social ties based on homophily has been studied in various contexts such as social networks, voluntary associations, social capital, social movements, culture, organisations, and a variety of substantive topics that are affected by network processes (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001).

Homophily is categorised into two types: status homophily and value homophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954). In status homophily, the similarity is based on 'ascribed' characteristics including the major sociodemographic dimensions such as race, ethnicity, sex, or age, or 'acquired' characteristics such as religion, education, occupation, and other behavioural patterns (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Value homophily is based on individuals' values, attitudes, and beliefs. Various homophily factors have been studied in the sociology and communications literature. In their meta-study on homophily dimensions, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) report that salient dimensions of homophily include ethnicity, gender, age, religion, education, occupation, social class, network positions, behaviour, attitudes, abilities, beliefs, and aspirations. While such homophily factors are well established in the studies of human social interactions, they are rarely examined in the SE context.

However, there exist some studies that have investigated race and gender in the context of accommodation SEs though they are not investigated as factors of homophily. For example, Edelman, Luca, and Svirsky (2017) found that guests with African American names were 16% less likely to get accepted than those with Caucasian names, and Kakar et al. (2018) reported that Asian and Hispanic hosts would charge lower prices than their white counterparts. As for gender dynamics, Schor and colleagues found that practices of work and consumption are different by gender by examining and comparing four different types of sharing economy sites (Schor et al. 2016). These studies investigate race and gender as contributing to forms of discrimination or inequality on SE platforms, but not associated with homophily at all. Drawing upon the literature review, we adopt ethnicity and gender, two well-established 'ascribed' factors of status homophily and propose that such factors would affect the perception of homophily in peer-users' interactions on sharing economy platforms. Thus, we state the following hypotheses.

> H1: A peer-consumer perceives higher levels of homophily/similarity for a peer-provider with the same ethnicity.

> H2: A peer-consumer perceives higher levels of homophily/similarity for a peer-provider with the same gender.

Though not exactly in the context of SE platforms, some studies have explored and found the effects of homophily in various contexts, which could be extended

in the context of SE platforms. Gu et al. (2014) studied the extent to which social media participants exhibit homophily in the context of virtual investment communities and found that investors are more likely to respond to those threads that echo their own opinions. Kordzadeh et al. (2014) investigated the impact of reciprocity and homophily (similarity of user characteristics such as age, gender, and tenure) on user participation in virtual health communities and found that gender homophily is positively associated with posting supporting messages for peers. In their analysis of Facebook data, Han et al. (2015) found that people tend to exhibit more similar tastes/interests if they have similar demographic characteristics (e.g. age, location). More interestingly, the effect of homophily on trust has been explored and studied in the context of e-commerce transactions. Gaskin and Oakley (2010) found that customers who feel similar to a product reviewer are more likely to trust the person and purchase the product. Lin and Xu (2017) found that perceived similarity in ethnicity has a significant effect on perceived reviewer trustworthiness in online consumer reviews. Thus, we propose that the sense of homophily affects trust in peer-to-peer interactions in the context of sharing economy platforms and state the following hypothesis.

H3: A peer-consumer's perceived homophily for a peer-provider is positively associated with his/her perceived trust in the peer-provider.

Homophily is known to have powerful implications for the attitudes individuals form and the interactions they experience (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). In their study of the consumer-generated media adoption, Ayeh and his colleagues (2013) argued that perceived homophily would influence both credibility and attitude, and found that homophily has a direct impact on attitude and an indirect impact through trustworthiness. In addition, Kim, Kandampully, and Bilgihan (2018) introduced homophily in their study on the social influence of online reviews and empirically found that consumers having strong homophily with a website have positive attitudes towards the website and the information on it. Based on the literature supporting the impact of homophily on attitude, we propose the following hypothesis.

H4: A peer-consumer's perceived homophily for a peer-provider is positively associated with his/her attitude towards the peer-provider.

2.3. Trust, attitude, and consumer behaviour

Prior research on trust has explored and discussed the effects of trust on human behaviour. For example, trust has been identified and studied as a salient factor that affects perceived uncertainty (Pavlou, Liang, and Xue 2007), the intended use of the system (Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub 2003; Vance, Elie-Dit-Cosaque, and Straub 2008), customer attitude (Elliot, Li, and Choi 2013; Pan and Chiou 2011; Teo and Liu 2007), and purchase/repurchase intention (Chiu et al. 2014; Cho, Park, and Kim 2019; Fang et al. 2014; Ou, Pavlou, and Davison 2014). More specifically in the e-commerce context, Ayeh and his colleagues (2013) examined online travellers' perceptions of trustworthiness on the user-generated sources and found that such perceptions influence their attitudes towards the source in the travel planning process. In their study on Airbnb, Ert, Fleischer, and Magen (2016) found that peer-users' purchase decision is influenced by the trustworthiness of hosts. Drawing on prior research on trust and its effects on attitude and behavioural intention in the e-commerce context, we examine how a peer-consumer's perceived trust in the host can affect his/her attitude and behavioural intention in sharing economy platforms. Thus, we state the following hypotheses.

H5: A peer-consumer's perceived trust in the peer-providers is positively associated with his/her attitude towards the behaviour.

H6: A peer-consumer's perceived trust in the peer-providers is positively associated with his/her consumption intention.

Theories of reasoned action and planned behaviour have been among the most influential theories in explaining and predicting a wide range of behaviours (Ajzen 1985; Fishbein and Ajzen 1980; Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw 1988). According to those theories (Ajzen 1991), the proximal determinant of behaviour is the behavioural intention, and attitude is considered as one important determinant of behavioural intention. The link between attitude and behavioural intention has been well-established theoretically and empirically in previous studies on e-commerce (Elliot, Li, and Choi 2013; Teo and Liu 2007). For example, Chang, Cheung, and Lai (2005) developed reference models of online shopping adoption from an extensive literature search and review, where they found that six empirical papers confirmed the significant positive impact of online shoppers' attitude on online shopping intention and behaviour. Hence, we state the following hypothesis.

H7: A peer-consumer's attitude is positively associated with his/her consumption intention.

Figure 1 shows a schematic diagram of the research model, including all seven hypotheses.

3. Research method, analysis, and results

3.1. Instrument development, procedure, and analysis

The survey method was used for this study. The survey items were used to test the hypotheses in the research model, and open-ended questions were asked to explore homophily factors not hypothesised in the model. For the survey instrument, we adopted the established multi-item measures for homophily, trust, attitude, and consumption intention. We adapted four items of homophily from McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975), three items of trust from Gefen and Straub (2003), two items of attitude from Pavlou and Fygenson (2006), and three items of consumption intention from Gefen and Straub (2003) and Cho, Park, and Kim (2019). Those items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' or 'very unlikely' to 'very likely'. Two single-item dichotomous measures were created to ask participants if they have a host of the same or different gender, and the same or different ethnicity. Appendix A shows the constructs and measures used in this study.

For data collection, we conducted a structured and open-ended online survey about Airbnb, one of the fastest-growing sharing economy platforms. Airbnb provides a peer-to-peer lodging service where peer providers voluntarily share their identity information such as gender, ethnicity, and age with a typed profile and a photo. Hence, we believe that Airbnb is suited to test our research model hypothesising the antecedents (e.g. gender and ethnicity) and the consequences (e.g. trust, attitude, and consumption intention) of homophily on sharing economy platforms.

At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to read a short scenario explaining the survey context where they plan to visit New York for vacation and have already searched for candidate lodging places on Airbnb. After reading the scenario, they were guided to click a host profile page link embedded in the online survey, which was a randomly generated link from the pool of pre-designed host profiles. The pool of host profiles included six combinations of two different gender (e.g. female and male) and three different ethnic groups (e.g. black, Hispanic, and white). One host profile was randomly selected from the pool and assigned to each participant. While all the other information including the travel destination (i.e. New York), job, and self-introduction was controlled in the survey to preclude any effect of different preferences, each participant was randomly assigned to a host with a 50% chance of the same gender and a 33% chance of the same ethnicity. Each participant was given time to read the profile information including the photo of his/her potential host, and then was asked to answer the survey questions.

A total of 419 participants were recruited in two public universities in the United States. Their participation was voluntary and those who did not wish to complete the survey could leave without completion. No incentives were given for their voluntary participation. Thirty-four responses were dropped due to incomplete questionnaires, and the response rate is 91.8% with the completed responses of 385. Eighty-five out of 385 participants have used Airbnb or other peer-to-peer accommodation services before. We ran the path analysis separately for each of the two participant groups with and without prior peer-to-peer accommodation service experience and found no difference between the two groups. Based on this preliminary analysis results, we decided to combine the data for further analysis.

Partial least squares (PLS) analysis with SmartPLS 3 was used as the primary analysis tool to validate the measurement items and estimate the structural paths in the research model (Hair et al. 2017). As an extension of the multiple linear regression model (Marcoulides and Saunders 2006), PLS first computes loadings of indicators on each construct in the measurement model, and then iteratively estimate causal relationships among construct in the structural model (Fornell and Bookstein 1982). PLS is considered preferable to other traditional methods such as factor analysis and regression because it assesses both measure and structural models (Gefen, Straub, and Boudreau 2000). We prefer to use PLS analysis because we can analyze the complex research model with six constructs in one unified process, our model includes formatively measured single-item constructs (i.e. same ethnicity and same gender), and this study attempts to understand the variation in the dependent variables explained by the independent variables in the proposed model (Gefen, Straub, and Boudreau 2000; Hair et al. 2017; Petter 2018).

3.2. Measurement model

In the measurement model of PLS analysis, we evaluate convergent and discriminant validity by examining the psychometric properties of the construct measures. As the assessment of convergent validity, we calculated and examined the standardised loadings for each factor model. The standardised loading is the shared variance between each item and its associated construct, which should be higher than 0.707. Table 1 shows that the standardised loadings of all measurement items are 0.86 or higher. Therefore, we retain all the indicators for subsequent analysis.

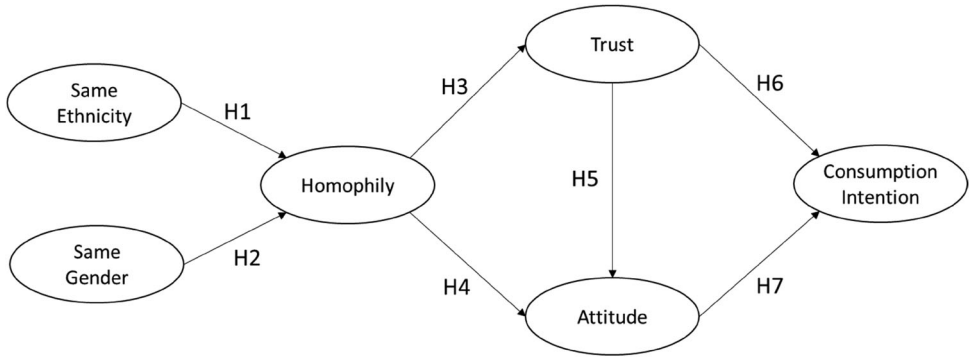

Figure 1. Research model.

In order to assess the internal consistency for each block of measures in each construct, we examine the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). While the threshold for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability is not absolute, it is suggested that 0.70 indicates extensive evidence of reliability and 0.80 or higher provides exemplary evidence (Bearden and Netemeyer 1999). As shown in Table 1, all the constructs in the measurement model exhibit Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 or higher and the composite reliability of 0.90 or higher, indicating exemplary reliability. AVE has been suggested as another measure of construct validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981), which compares the amount of variance obtained from indicators with variance due to measurement error. The acceptable value for the AVE is 0.5 or higher, indicating that 50% or more variance of the indicators is accounted for. Table 1 shows that all the AVEs are 0.78 or higher. Thus, our evaluations of standardised loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE indicate that the construct reliability of all measurement items in this research has been established satisfactorily.

We conducted two tests to evaluate the discriminant validity. First, we calculated and compared each indicator's loading on its own construct and its cross-loadings on all other constructs. Table 2 shows that each indicator has a higher loading with its own construct than its cross-loadings with any other constructs. For example, HOM1 loads higher on Homophily (0.906) than on Trust (0.544), Attitude (0.407) or Consumption Intention (0.423). Moreover, all indicators for their intended construct form a block with similar loadings, which are higher collectively than the loadings of other bocks in each column. These results show that discriminant validity is established.

As the second test of discriminant validity, we compared AVE of each construct with the shared variance between all possible pairs of constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981). As shown in Table 3, AVE for each construct is higher than the squared correlation between the construct pairs. It means that more variance is shared between the latent construct and its block of indicators than with other constructs representing different blocks of indicators. Thus, it also supports discriminant validity.

3.3. Structural model

We can assess the structural model by examining path coefficients, their significance levels, and the R^2 values of dependent variables. First, we computed the path coefficients with the entire sample of 385 and employed the bootstrapping method with 500 resamples to obtain the t-values corresponding to each path. The acceptable

Table 1. Item loadings and reliability.

Construct	Item	Standardised Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Homophily	HOM1	**0.906**	**0.946**	**0.961**	**0.861**
	HOM2	**0.938**			
	HOM3	**0.927**			
	HOM4	**0.940**			
Trust	TR1	**0.882**	**0.862**	**0.916**	**0.784**
	TR2	**0.911**			
	TR3	**0.862**			
Attitude	AT1	**0.906**	**0.793**	**0.906**	**0.828**
	AT2	**0.914**			
Consumption Intention	INT1	**0.923**	**0.933**	**0.957**	**0.882**
	INT2	**0.943**			
	INT3	**0.950**			

Table 2. Construct loadings and cross loadings.

Construct	Item	1	2	3	4
1. Homophily	HOM1	**0.906**	0.544	0.407	0.423
	HOM2	**0.938**	0.531	0.368	0.379
	HOM3	**0.927**	0.538	0.350	0.388
	HOM4	**0.940**	0.555	0.364	0.406
2. Trust	TR1	0.460	**0.882**	0.571	0.643
	TR2	0.596	**0.911**	0.502	0.524
	TR3	0.497	**0.862**	0.485	0.488
3. Attitude	AT1	0.352	0.517	**0.906**	0.648
	AT2	0.379	0.553	**0.914**	0.664
4. Consumption Intention	INT1	0.386	0.576	0.641	**0.923**
	INT2	0.428	0.602	0.684	**0.943**
	INT3	0.398	0.585	0.704	**0.950**

t-values for two-tailed tests are 1.96 and 2.58 at the significance levels of 0.05 and 0.01, respectively.

As shown in Figure 2, while four out of seven hypothesised paths have been supported, three of them are not supported. First, both ethnicity and gender did not have a significant effect on homophily ($\beta = 0.059$, n.s.; $\beta = 0.067$, n.s.; respectively) and therefore H1 and H2 are not supported. It means that neither ethnicity nor gender is a significant factor influencing a consumer's perception of homophily. Homophily positively affects trust ($\beta = 0.584$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H3. While trust has a direct positive effect on attitude ($\beta = 0.537$, $p < 0.01$, supporting H5), homophily does not have a direct, significant effect on attitude ($\beta = 0.088$, n.s., not supporting H4). These results imply that homophily has an indirect effect on attitude via trust. Both trust and attitude positively affect consumption intention ($\beta = 0.309$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.539$, $p < 0.01$; respectively), supporting H6 and H7.

Another important analysis in the structural model is to evaluate the explanatory power by examining the R^2 value of the final dependent variable. The final dependent variable, consumption intention, had an R^2 value of 0.58, which indicates that our research model accounts for 58% of the variance in the dependent variable. This R^2 value is sufficiently high to indicate that trust and attitude have a reasonable power to explain the consumption intention in sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb. In addition, this R^2 value for the final dependent variable is comparable to the results obtained in previous studies that examined other factors influencing purchase or consumption intention in the e-commerce context. For example, Ou, Pavlou, and Davison (2014) reported an R^2 of 50% for purchase intention in their research model that investigated the effects of communication technologies on purchase in online market places, and Cho, Park, and Kim (2019) reported an R^2 of 57% for a model that investigated the effects of social presence and trust on consumption intention in a sharing economy platform. It is also instructive to examine the R^2 values for the intermediate variables in the research model. The R^2 values for attitude, trust, and homophily are 0.351, 0.341, and 0.008, respectively. The first two R^2 values for attitude and trust are also high enough to make meaningful interpretations of the path coefficients from one independent variable of interest (i.e. homophily) to the intermediate variables (i.e. trust and attitude) in the research model. However, the R^2 value for homophily is not high enough to make meaningful interpretation of the path coefficients from two independent variables (i.e. ethnicity and gender). It may not be a surprise since both path coefficients are not significant in the hypothesis testing.

Table 3. AVEs versus squares of correlations between constructs.

Construct	AVE	HOM	TR	AT	INT
Homophily (HOM)	0.86	-			
Trust (TR)	0.78	0.34	-		
Attitude (AT)	0.83	0.16	0.35	-	
Consumption Intention (INT)	0.88	0.19	0.39	0.52	-

3.4. Mediation analysis for homophily and attitude

While Hypothesis 4 has been theoretically established and empirically supported in prior research, it was not supported in our PLS analysis. In order to better understand its insignificant result, we ran an independent regression analysis on the path between homophily and attitude. The regression analysis shows that homophily does have a significant effect on attitude ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < 0.01$, R^2 of 0.161 for attitude) when trust is not included in the regression model. Thus, it implies that homophily has a direct effect on attitude, but its effect is mitigated when a strong mediator (i.e. trust) comes into play together.

3.5. Post hoc qualitative analysis of open-ended questions for homophily factors

While the existing social science literature has identified ethnicity and gender as strong factors affecting homophily, our quantitative analysis in the structural model shows that their effects on homophily are not significant. In order to find potential homophily factors, we conducted a post hoc qualitative analysis with an open-ended question in the survey.

We had an open-ended question to ask why a respondent feels similar to the given host and collected 131 meaningful responses to the question. We coded the qualitative data collected from the responses being guided by the themes and coding categories identified in the theory of homophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). We

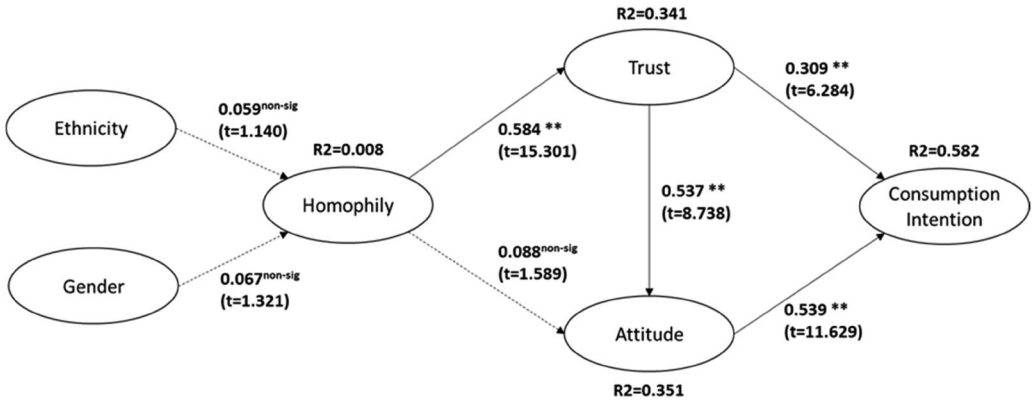

Figure 2. Structural model.

used NVivo to conduct the coding for the data to find out which homophily factors, value or status (ascribed or acquired within status homophily), influence most peer-consumers' perception of homophily towards the given host. The qualitative data analysis includes the following steps such as (1) creating the hierarchical coding scheme based on the categories proposed by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) with the parent nodes (e.g. status and value homophily) and child nodes (e.g. acquired, ascribed, attitude, and faith); (2) using NVivo and manually coding all responses in phrases and sentences according to the coding scheme; (3) reviewing all node references and sources and crosschecking data coding by merging relevant nodes and removing irrelevant ones as needed (See the coding scheme and example references in Table 4).

The analysis showed that 86.86% (86 out of 99) of the references belong to status homophily while only 13.13% (13 out of 99) belong to value homophily. Within status homophily, acquired factors were cited far more frequently (72 out of 86) by peer-consumers for their feeling of similarity to the host. It means that a peer-consumer perceives higher homophily for a peer-provider from acquired characteristics such as languages, occupations, and behavioural patterns including the same hobbies than from ascribed characteristics such as ethnicity and gender. In addition, it shows that value factors (13/99) were cited far less than the overall status factors (86/99), but they were cited as many as the ascribed factors (14/99) of status homophily (e.g. gender, ethnicity, and age). These findings from the qualitative analysis imply that acquired factors of status homophily may be most influential in peer-consumers' perception of homophily to peer-providers in the accommodation sharing economy context. The treemap in Figure 3 graphically represents all the major themes and categories with respective frequency weights.

4. Discussion

4.1. Theoretical and practical implications

In this study, we have investigated peer-users' interaction dynamics and behavioural intention on an accommodation sharing economy platform employing the well-established social organising principle of homophily. We theoretically proposed a model and empirically investigated the impact of homophily on a peer-consumer's behavioural intention in a sharing economy

Table 4. The coding scheme and example references.

Category	Sub-Category	Examples	References	Coding Examples
Status	Acquired	Language	8	'She also knows how to speak in Spanish'.
		Love Cooking	2	'This person is similar to me because both he and I like cooking'.
		Love Movie	5	'We are both interested in film and creative expression'.
		Love Music	10	'because he has interests in music like me'.
		Love Pets	5	'We both seem to be huge animal lovers'.
		Love Travel	35	'We both like to travel and explore new places'.
		Occupation	7	'We both are in the business-related field'.
	Ascribed	Age	2	'We're the same in age and that helps'.
		Ethnicity	4	'She also is of Latin/Hispanic ethnicity'.
		Gender	8	'We are both females'.
Value	Attitude	Respectful	6	'She is very respectful'.
		Responsible	4	'I believe this person is similar to me in being responsible'.
	Beliefs	Faith	3	'Because he has a very strong faith'.

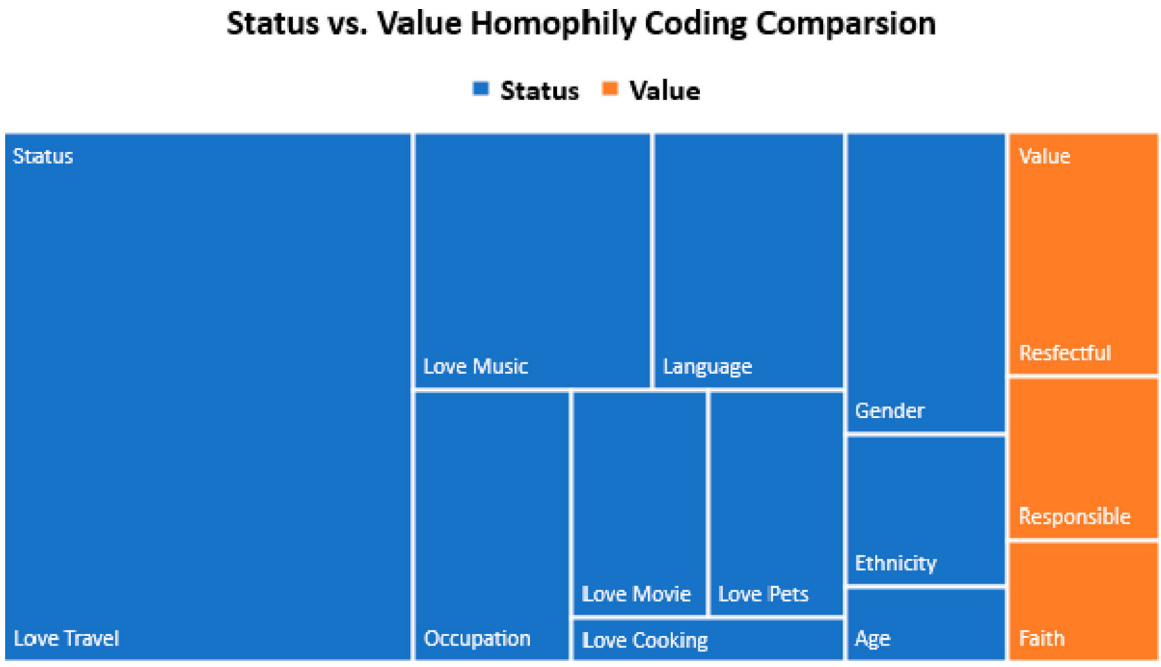

Figure 3. Status vs. value homophily coding comparison.

platform. The study expands our knowledge with some significant implications. First, it contributes to research on peer-users' interaction dynamics on the accommodation SE platforms by introducing homophily. We have witnessed a large number of studies are being accumulated on the topic recently, and this study expands our understanding by shedding some light on the role of homophily in the context. This study is one of the first studies that have investigated homophily and empirically tested its roles and effects in user interactions on SE platforms.

On the flip side of the first contribution, this study expands the existing literature on homophily to a novel context of SE platforms. Ethnicity and gender are considered two of the most influential drivers of homophily in the communications and psychology literature but have rarely been studied in the sharing economy context where user interactions are considered characteristically social. This study empirically tested the two well-known homophily drivers in the context of peer-to-peer transactions on an accommodation sharing economy platform but found their effects on homophily were not statistically significant. Such findings are intellectually intriguing as they are not aligned with the existing social science literature, which identifies ascribed characteristics of ethnicity and gender as two influential homophily factors in offline interaction contexts. One possible explanation for their insignificant effects could be that the research context is task-related rather than purely social. Researchers report that social characteristics may outweigh demographic ones such as gender and race in task-related relationships (Yuan and Gay 2006). Another explanation can be the lack of richness in computer-mediated communications. While the homophily drivers (e.g. ethnicity and gender) in the social science have been identified in the face-to-face interaction context, this study tested them in the online communication environment. According to Postmes, Spears, and Lea (1998), individual differences are less salient in the computer-mediated communication. Thus, participants' senses of individual differences such as ethnicity and gender through the host profile photos in the web pages may not be as salient as those they may have in the face-to-face interactions. We can speculate that some other drivers than ethnicity and gender may be more salient in the online interaction context. The qualitative analysis of open-ended questions shows that, unlike in the face-to-face socialisation context, acquired characteristics such as occupations and other behavioural patterns (e.g. hobbies) could be more influential in peer-consumers' perception of homophily towards peer-providers in the context of an accommodation sharing economy. This calls for future research to further explore and examine the role of homophily and its drivers in diverse sharing economy contexts as well as other technology-mediated user interaction contexts.

It is also interesting to note the mediating role of trust in the relationship between homophily and attitude. Our mediation analysis shows that, while homophily has a significant effect on attitude, its effect is fully mediated by the trust when trust is included in the model. In other words,

homophily has an impact on consumption attitude in sharing economy platforms only by building up trust in the peer-providers. This finding highlights the role of trust in the overall relationship between homophily and consumption intention in the research model. It also supports a practitioner's argument that trust is crucial for the success of the sharing economy (Ufford 2015).

This study also confirms the effect of trust on consumption intention through mediation. While the direct effect of trust on consumption intention has been identified and tested in prior research, its indirect effect via attitude has been less examined and discussed in the literature. In one of the few such studies, Pavlou and Fygerson (2006) proposed and empirically found that trust creates favourable perceptions about the outcomes of the provider's actions, thus creating a positive attitude in the B2C e-commerce transactions. This study confirms and extends the mediating role of attitude in the relationship between trust and consumption intention in the accommodation sharing economy context.

Our findings on homophily in the sharing economy context provide some practical implications as well. Homophily appears to have a significant effect on trust, which in turn leads to peer-consumer's consumption intention. Peer-providers in sharing economy platforms may be able to take advantage of the fact that peer-consumers are more likely to trust the peer-providers when they feel alike, i.e. homophilous. For example, peer-providers can provide more information that can increase the level of perceived homophily. As our qualitative analysis results show, acquired homophily factors such as hobbies, occupations, and languages are more influential than ascribed factors of ethnicity and gender or value homophily factors. Peer-providers may be able to build more trust and attract more potential peer-consumers by sharing more information on acquired homophily factors. In addition, it may be a better strategy for accommodating sharing economy platform companies to use effective homophily factors that help peer-consumers perceive homophily with peer-providers, which in turn may lead to more revenue.

4.2. Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations, which need to be addressed in future research. First, we tested the research model using only one accommodation sharing economy platform. It would be interesting future research to replicate this research model with other accommodation platforms, or even to other types of sharing economy platforms such as ride-sharing to verify and extend our research findings to different types of sharing economy platforms. Second, our study examines two important social relationship factors – homophily and trust – and their effects on sharing economy platforms. Other interesting social relationship factors such as tie strength and social capital could be interesting research topics. Future research investigating the effects of such social relationship factors will deepen our understanding of the peer-users' interaction dynamics in the sharing economy platforms. Third, our empirical findings report no significant effects of ethnicity and gender on the perception of homophily but potential roles of other homophily factors in perceiving homophily in our study context. However, we acknowledge that the identified potential homophily factors such as hobbies and occupations could have been influenced by the information given to the study participants. We call for further research to investigate other potential homophily factors and their effects on homophily in different contexts. In terms of research design, we included only three ethnic groups such as Hispanic, African-American, and White due to the limited population of other ethnic groups in our research site, and future research could extend this study by including other growing ethnic groups such as Asian in the U.S. Fourth, this study investigates the effect of homophily in a peer-consumer's side of accommodation sharing economy platforms. However, homophily may also affect a peer-provider's preference over or decision to accept/decline potential peer-customers. Thus, it would be interesting to examine how homophily comes into play on the peer-providers' side in the sharing economy context.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix A. Survey items

Constructs	Item Wording (1 = very unlikely/strongly disagree; 7 = very likely/strongly agree)
Ethnicity	Is this person's ethnicity the same as yours? (yes/no)
Gender	Is this person's gender the same as yours? (yes/no)
Homophily	In general, this person thinks like me.
	In general, this person behaves like me.
	In general, this person is similar to me.
	In general, this person is like me.
Trust	I'd trust this person to do the job right.
	I trust this person.
	I am quite certain what to expect from this person.
Attitude	For me, booking his/her room/apartment would be: (a good idea/a bad idea).
	For me, booking this person's room/apartment would be: (desirable/undesirable).
Consumption Intention	I intend to stay in this person's room/apartment for the trip.
	I would contact this person to arrange my stay.
	I would like to stay in this person's room/apartment for the trip.

Appendix B. Demographic information of participants

Demographic profile	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency of the same gender/ethnicity
Gender			
Female	210	55%	Same with the host – 103 Different from the host – 107
Male	175	45%	Same with the host – 89 Different from the host – 86
TOTAL	385		
Ethnicity			
African American	17	4%	Same with the host – 5 Different from the host – 12
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	~2%	Same with the host – 0 Different from the host – 6
Hispanic/Latino	317	82%	Same with the host – 107 Different from the host – 210
Native American or American Indian	2	~1%	Same with the host – 0 Different from the host – 2
White	38	10%	Same with the host – 11 Different from the host – 27
Other	5	1%	Same with the host – 1 Different from the host – 4
TOTAL	385		
Prior Experience on Airbnb or other peer-to-peer lodging service			
Yes	85	22%	
No	300	78%	
TOTAL	385		

Appendix C. Scenario and instructions

The survey is based on the following scenario. Please read it carefully and answer questions with the scenario in mind.Scenario:You have a plan to spend your three-day vacation in New York in a couple of months.This time, you decided to find lodging service on Airbnb, where individuals (not hotels) rent their private rooms or apartments.You have searched the Airbnb website, and found a room/apartment that you like and in the price range you like.And following link is the information about the person who is renting the particular room/apartment you are interested in.Open the link below and read the information on that page.Please, spend some time to look at the web pages, and fill out the survey based on the given scenario.

Appendix D. Host profile page samples

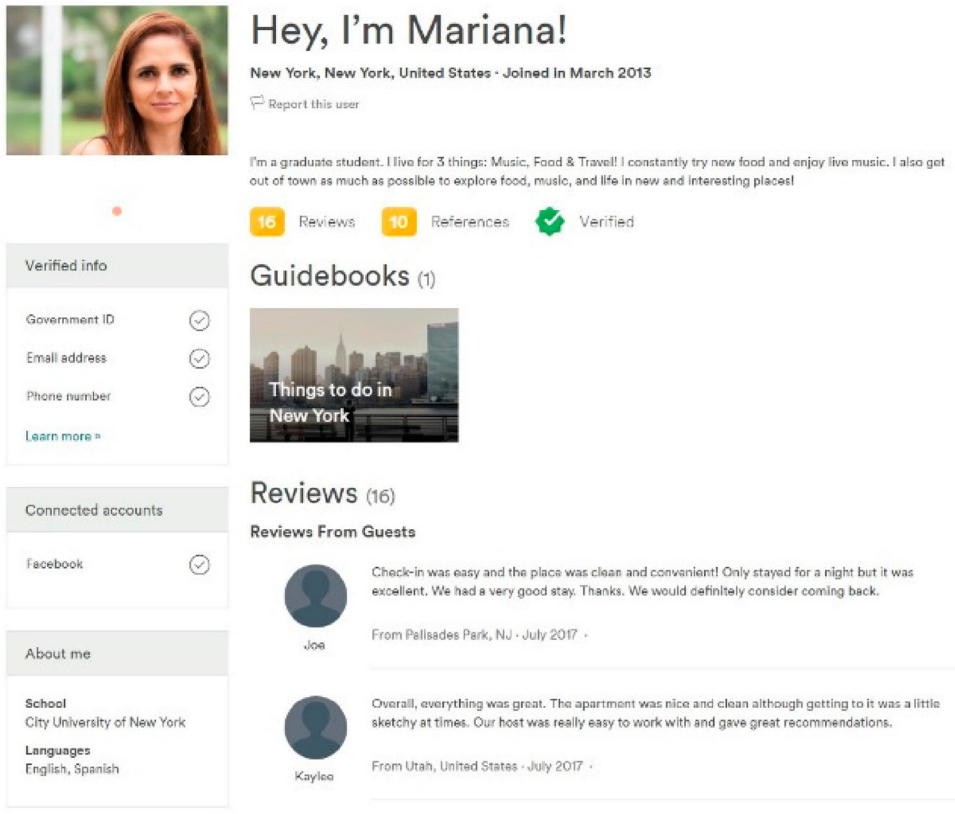

Figure D1. Hispanic female host profile page.

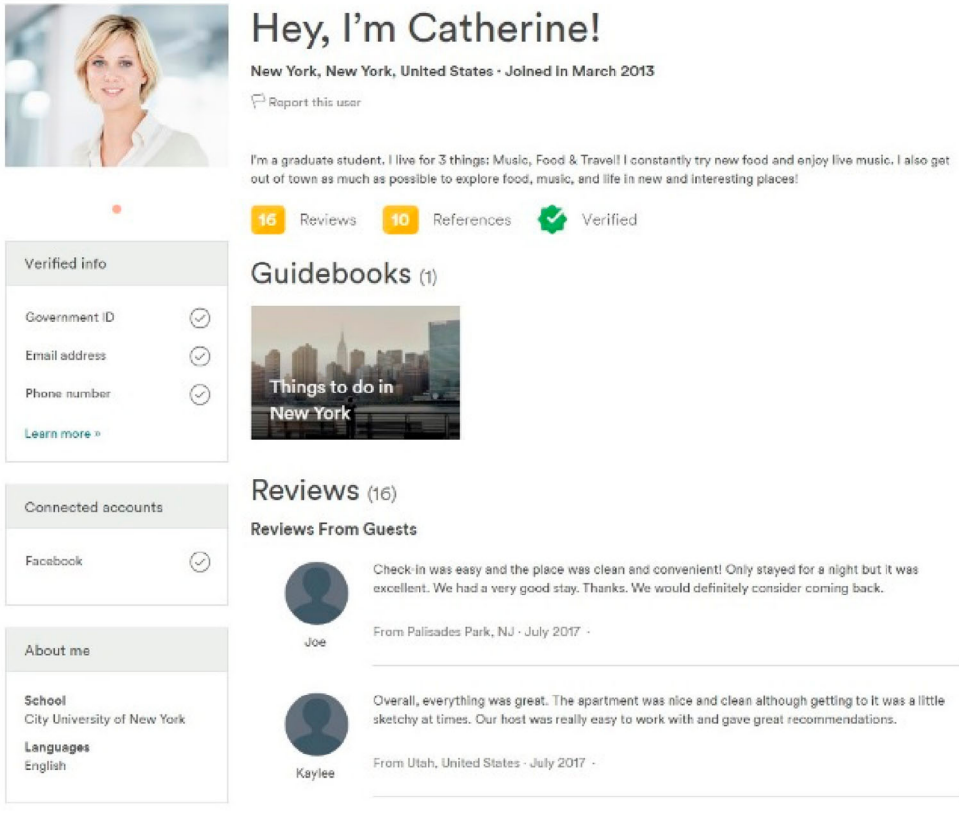

Figure D2. White female host profile page.

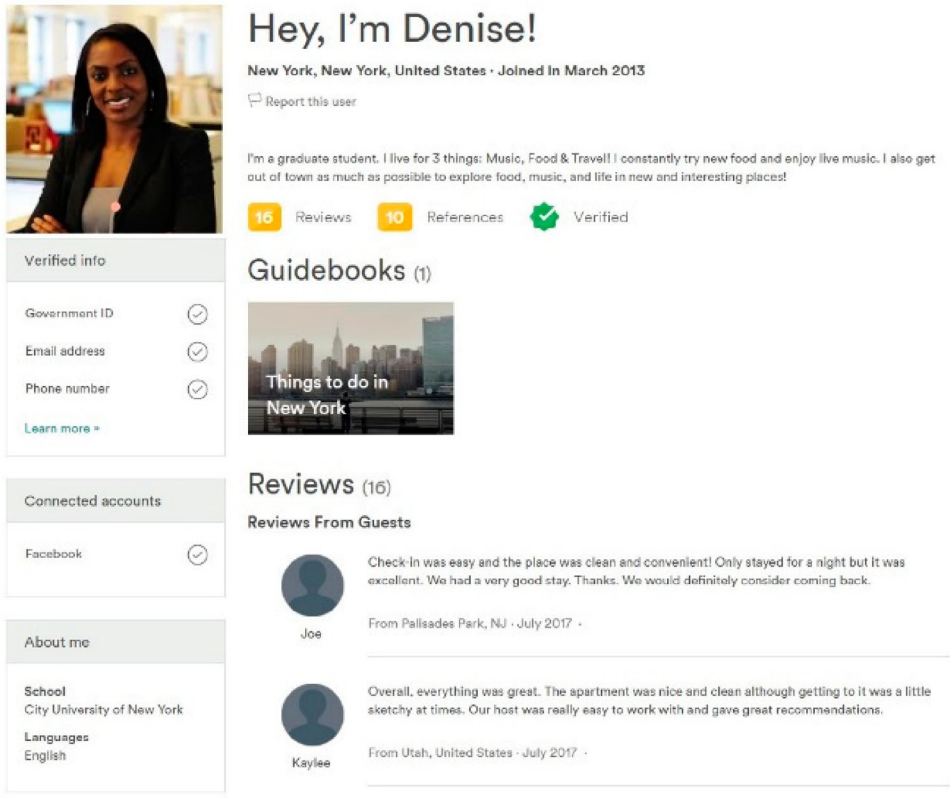

Figure D3. Black female host profile page.

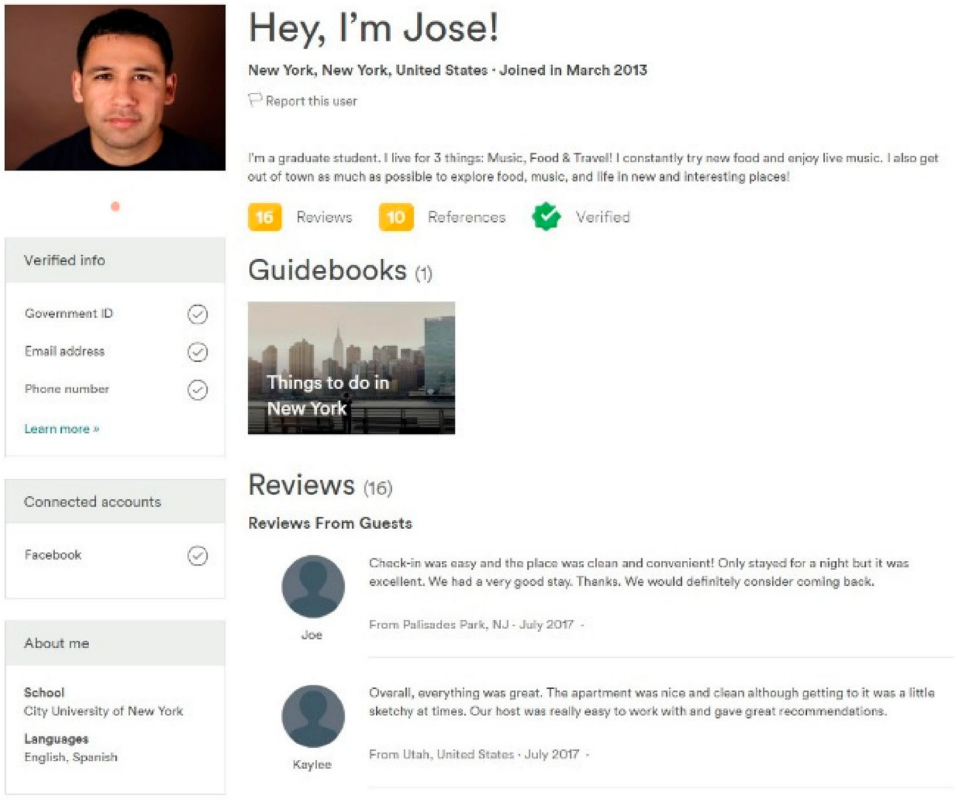

Figure D4. Hispanic male host profile page.

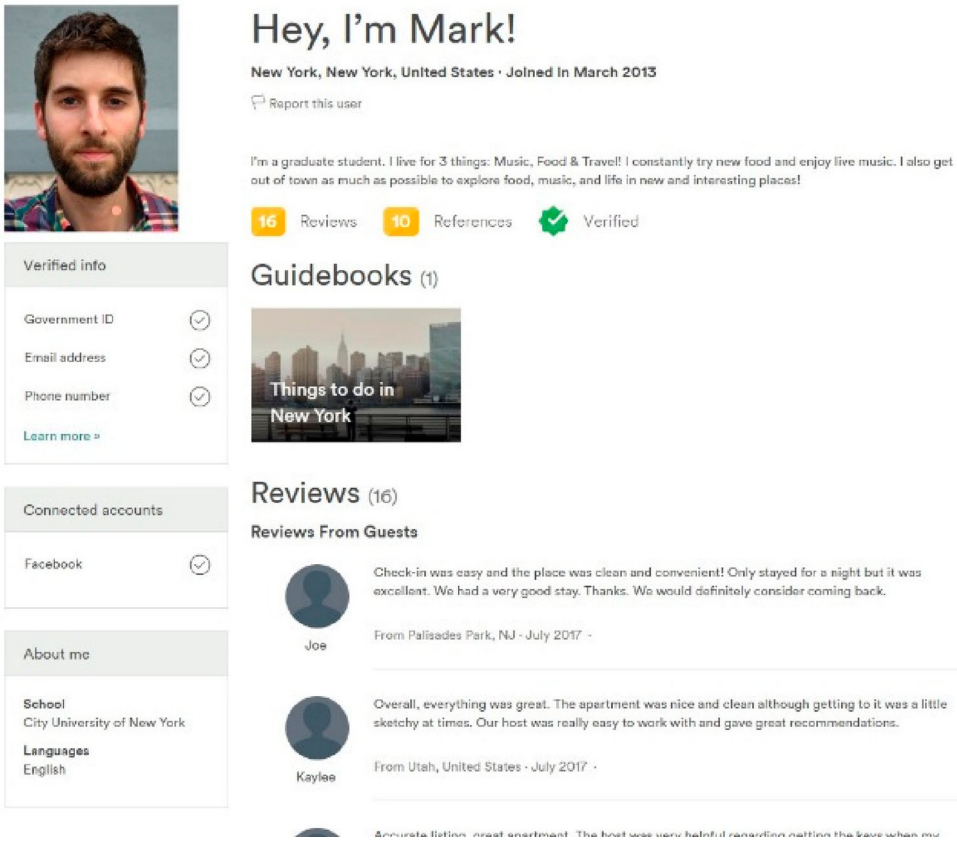

Figure D5. White male host profile page.

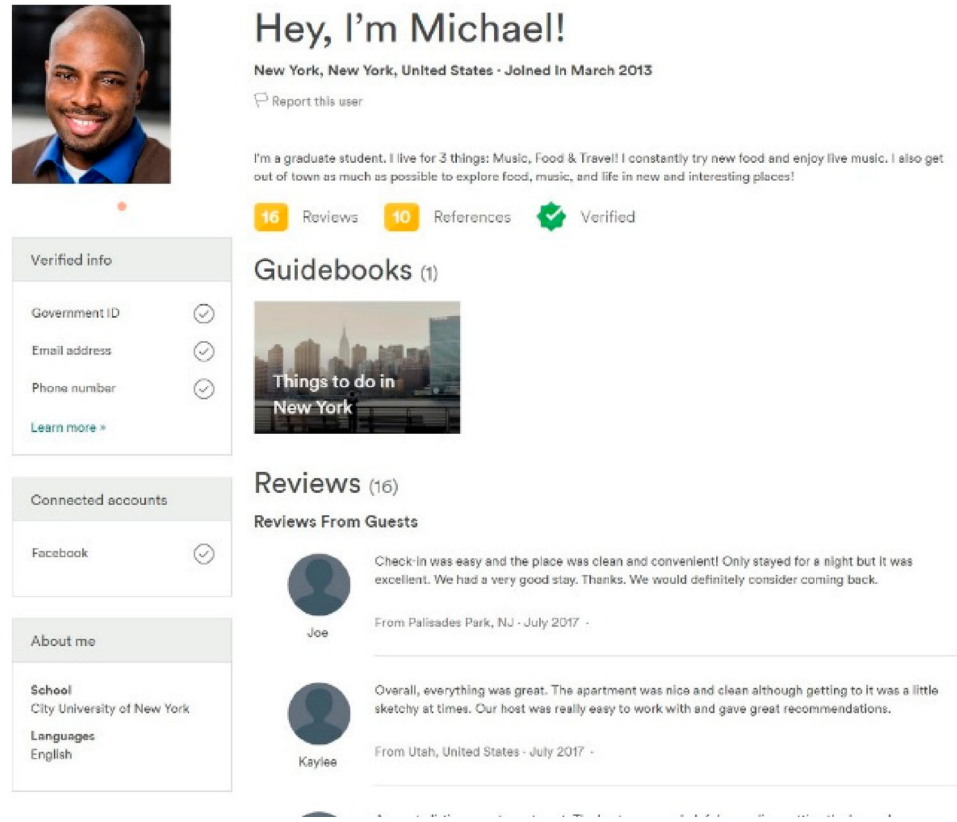

Figure D6. Black male host profile page.