

DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER DECISIONS IN THE SHORT-TERM RENTAL SERVICES MARKET (AIRBNB) IN THE ASPECT OF THE SHARING ECONOMY

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Purpose: The main objective of the manuscript is to identify the determinants influencing the purchasing decisions of consumers using short-term rental services as an aspect of the sharing economy.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted using an online survey method, and the research tool was a Google Forms. The subject scope of the study was consumers – members of Facebook groups dedicated to tourism, who had experience using Airbnb platform services.

Findings: The results of the study allow for the identification of consumer attitudes towards Airbnb services, the identification of key determinants of the use of Airbnb services and the identification of unique experiences that consumers using Airbnb services expect.

Research limitations/implications: Research limitations concern the size of the research sample. In addition, the article presents a statistical analysis of data conducted on the basis of structure indicators and correlation analysis.

Practical implications: The results and conclusions from the study regarding consumer preferences in using Airbnb services, the main determinants of choosing Airbnb services and the unique experiences that consumers expect constitute an important guide for entities on the Airbnb services market in terms of shaping their product offering.

Originality/value: The originality of the article lies in the comprehensive identification of key determinants of the use of Airbnb services by consumers and the identification of unique experiences that consumers using Airbnb services expect.

Keywords: sharing economy, short-term rentals, Airbnb, travel services.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The sharing economy is an important manifestation of technological progress and a response to the dynamic social and economic challenges of the modern world. It is developing based on new socio-economic models that use initiatives undertaken by individuals. Sharing economy is often defined as a disinterested exchange of resources and mutual provision of services. Sharing economy is an organizational models (Dreyer et al., 2017; Guyader, Piscicelli, 2019; Habibi et al., 2017) that include sharing, renting, borrowing, lending, bartering, swapping, trading, exchanging, gifting, buying second-hand, and even buying new goods. The sharing economy has many positive aspects. At one end of the spectrum community gardens, car-sharing programs, food co-ops and other small, not-for-profit entities are growing, pooling and sharing resources for the benefit of their members (Chang, Foley, 2018). The recent global economic recession helped catalyze the sharing economy, but it is also rooted in values related to sustainable consumption and community connectedness (Botsman, Rogers, 2010; Chase, 2015). It is assumed that the central feature of the sharing economy is P2P, i.e. relationships between individuals conducted via technological platforms (Leoni, 2020). The sharing economy reflects changes in the lifestyle and work organization of these generations. The main reason is an attractive alternative to the market offer due to lower prices - participants can use various products and services at a more affordable price, which contributes to increased accessibility for a wider group of people and promotes a more economical use of resources (Kwok, Xie, 2018). The rapid digitalization and penetration of smart phones, sharing economy platforms have been transforming production and consumption systems in cities around the world (Mont et al., 2017; McLaren, Agyeman, 2015; Zvolska et al., 2018). The sharing economy plays a key role in shaping contemporary consumer trends. It influences the way products and services are consumed, mainly due to leaders setting new directions of development not only for the sharing economy industry (Kim, 2019).

Of the home sharing companies operating today, the most well-known is Airbnb, an online peer-to-peer (P2P) platform that facilitates marketing exchanges between hosts and guests, whereby the host is a non-commercial provider (i.e., not a registered business) who has and is willing to offer a space suitable for overnight stays (e.g., entire place, private room, shared room) to the guest, who is an end user seeking paid accommodation in private vicinities (Lim et al., 2021). A peer-to-peer sharing approach for the accommodation sector such as Airbnb has been suggested as a more environmentally sustainable alternative to conventional forms of accommodation services (Cheng et al., 2020).

Airbnb and the sharing and platform economies have had as major an effect on tourism and hospitality research as they have on destination economies, the experience of place by resident and guest, and on the markets they serve (Hall et al., 2022). Within a few years, Airbnb had become one of the most successful sharing economy platforms (Roelofsen, Minca, 2018).

Airbnb offers many benefits to its stakeholders. For customers, Airbnb accommodation is typically cheaper than traditional accommodation like a hotel (Guttentag, 2015; Lin et al., 2019; Varma et al., 2016). In addition, Airbnb offers local authenticity (Bucher et al., 2018; Amaro, 2019), giving customers the opportunity to live like locals in a listed apartment, house, or private room (Hamari et al., 2019; Gurrán, Phibbs, 2017; Lin et al., 2019; Paulauskaite et al., 2017; Chang, 2020). The Airbnb website (www.airbnb.com) is quite straightforward: a prospective guest searches based on destination, travel dates, and party size; the website returns a list of available spaces that can be refined by attributes like price, neighborhood, and amenities; and then individual listings can be selected for greater detail, including a description, photographs, and reviews from previous guests (Guttentag et al., 2016). The analysis of the literature indicates that the main reasons for using short-term rental services are: savings, trust, community affiliation, usefulness and satisfaction (Tussyadiah, 2016). This brings many benefits, but also raises concerns for sharing market participants. These are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Airbnb Benefits and Risks

Aspect	Benefits for Hosts	Threats for hosts	Benefits for renters	Risks for renters
Income	Additional revenue stream	Unprofitable rental	Lower price than market price	Poor quality, no way to cancel a reservation
Resource utilization	Monetize unused space	Damage to property	Access to various locations and an alternative to hotels	Lack of safety standards
Relationships	Interact with guests	Conflicts with the tenant or neighbors	Possibility of interaction with the host	Lack of support from the host
Reviews	Build a reputation through positive guest reviews	Deterioration of reputation due to negative guest reviews	Verification of the quality of the stay, better choice of place	Inaccurate or false reviews that are misleading
Loyalty	A steady stream of income from trusted customers	Dependence on regular customers	Preferential prices,	Limited choice, no flexibility in schedule

Source: (Hamari et al., 2016; Guttentag et al., 2016; Amaro et al., 2019; Tripp et al., 2023).

However, the benefits outweigh the threats due to the availability of publicly available information, the development of the Internet and the growing popularity of the sharing economy on a global scale. Consumers value non-standard experiences and the uniqueness of offers made available by hosts and local communities. Considering the development of the sharing economy, it is worth looking at the impact not only on its participants, but also on their surroundings. The social and economic attractiveness of peer-to-peer accommodation significantly affects the expansion of the choice of destination, increasing the frequency of travel, the length of stay and the range of activities in visited tourist destinations (Tussyadiah, Pesonen, 2016). The growing interest that travelers seem to express toward the possibility to replace standardized tourist experiences with experiences that allow them to be in touch with

the local community, the local identity and authenticity, makes it urgent to consider these renewed tourists' habits or tastes in Airbnb sector (Decrop et al., 2018).

2. Methodology

The main objective of the study was to identify and analyze the key determinants of the choice of Airbnb services by consumers in Poland. Additionally, the specific objectives were:

- to identify consumer habits and customs in terms of traveling and choosing a place to stay and accommodation,
- to identify consumer preferences in terms of choosing short-term rental services.

The study was conducted using an online survey method, and the research tool was a Google Forms form. The survey questionnaire consisted of 21 questions divided into five sections. The individual parts of the form included:

1. General travel habits - frequency, company during travel and method of planning trips.
2. Determinants of using Airbnb services - factors influencing consumers' decisions in terms of using short-term rental services.
3. Consumer preferences - type of rented facilities, negative experiences with Airbnb; preferences regarding the form of accommodation depending on location, length of stay and company during travel.

In addition, the interview questionnaire included questions allowing for the identification of the respondents in terms of demographic, economic, and social characteristics such as: sex, age, place of residence, material status, education. The interview questionnaire used scales adequate to measure attitudes, namely, the nominal scale and the ordinal scale. The basic criterion for selecting scales in the study was the type of allowed data transformations, without affecting the amount of information. The research sample consisted of 300 people – the selection of the sample was purposeful, and the scope of the study was consumers – members of Facebook groups dedicated to tourism, who had experience in using Airbnb platform services. The spatial scope of the study was Poland, and the time scope was August 2024.

3. Results and discussion

The basic information obtained during the study was the frequency of travel by the surveyed consumers, company during the trip and the way of organizing tourist trips. A significant group of respondents (regardless of age) indicated that they travel more often than once a year.

This answer was given by 83% of people. 12% go on vacation once a year, and only 5% of the respondents travel less often than once a year. This result may indicate a strong interest in traveling in the surveyed group. The largest group of respondents (45%) most often travels with a partner. A large percentage (28%) choose to travel with friends, while 20% of respondents prefer to travel with their family. Only 7% of respondents usually travel alone. These results indicate that the majority of respondents prefer to travel in the company of close people, which influences the choice of accommodation. The answers to the question about the way of planning trips indicate a clear dominance of independent preparations. As many as 93% of respondents organize their trips using the Internet and other available sources, which emphasizes the significant role of technology in this sector of the economy. The reasons for self-organization include convenience of access to information, the ability to personalize the trip, cost savings, and independence in decision-making. Barriers include information overload, lack of planning experience, time-consuming processes, and technical issues for less tech-savvy users. Only 6% of respondents admit to using trips organized by family members or friends. In turn, only 1% of respondents use the services of travel agencies, which indicates a clear decline in the popularity of this form of travel organization in the era of the development of online booking platforms.

During the survey, respondents were asked about the frequency of using Airbnb services compared to traditional hotels. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Airbnb's Frequency of Use Compared to Hotels

Variables	Percentage
more often	20.00%
equally often	45.00%
less often	36.00%

Source: own research.

The survey results indicate that 20% of respondents choose Airbnb more often than other accommodations such as hotels, hostels or campgrounds. 36% of respondents declared that they use Airbnb and other forms of accommodation equally often, while 45% of respondents indicated that they choose Airbnb less often compared to other accommodations. As a result, despite the growing popularity of the platform, some users prefer traditional accommodations due to greater certainty regarding the standard of service and the convenience they provide.

The study also identified respondents' preferences in the context of travelling alone or with a group (Table 3) and depending on the specific location (Table 4).

Table 3.
Preferences of consumers travelling alone and in groups

Variables	Hotel	Airbnb	No matter
alone	55.00%	14.00%	31.00%
with a partner	22.00%	35.00%	43.00%
with family	22.00%	43.00%	35.00%
with friends	5.00%	58.00%	37.00%
with a pet	6.00%	33.00%	61.00%

Source: own research.

When travelling alone, 55% of respondents prefer a hotel, while 14% choose an Airbnb property. When travelling with a partner, the most common (43%) choice was no preference for accommodation, although a larger number of people (35%) choose to stay in Airbnb properties. When travelling with a family, 22% of participants choose a hotel, while as many as 43% prefer to rent a property from Airbnb. When travelling with friends, only 5% choose a hotel, while 58% indicate Airbnb as their preferred form of accommodation. When travelling with a pet, 61% of respondents do not consider accommodation to be of major importance, but only 6% choose a hotel as their preferred option. For around one third of respondents, the form of accommodation is irrelevant, both in the context of individual (31%) and family (35%) travel.

Table 4.
Consumer preferences by location

Variables	Hotel	Airbnb	No matter
big city	19.00%	39.00%	32.00%
small town	25.00%	42.00%	33.00%
seaside town	19.00%	41.00%	40.00%
village	13.00%	50.00%	37.00%
mountains	13.00%	49.00%	38.00%
near a lake	10.00%	45.00%	45.00%
exotic place (e.g. tropics)	51.00%	23.00%	26.00%
ski resort	29.00%	25.00%	46.00%
near an airport	44.00%	15.00%	41.00%

Source: own research.

The analysis of accommodation preferences in different locations indicates that the highest interest in hotels (51%) occurs in the case of travel to exotic destinations and places near airports (44%). The fewest people decide to choose a hotel near a lake, in the countryside and in the mountains. In turn, these locations are more likely to be chosen in the case of accommodation in a place from Airbnb, obtaining the results: near a lake (45%), in the countryside (50%), in the mountains (49%). The trends in a large and small town are similar - Airbnb is chosen by about 40% of people, a hotel by about 22% of respondents, and for one third it is not important. In the case of seaside towns, Airbnb is very popular (41%), but as many as 40% of respondents indicate that the form of accommodation in this location is not important to them, while 19% choose a hotel. The most concentrated results are in the case of a ski resort, where 29% of people choose a hotel, 25% Airbnb, and for 46% of respondents it is not important. In many cases, a significant proportion of respondents declared no clear preferences regarding the form

of accommodation. On average, respondents indicated this option at the level of 38%.

The main objective of the study was to identify the determinants influencing the choice of Airbnb accommodation by individual consumers. Respondents rated individual factors on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 – low importance; 5 – the greatest importance). The results of the study are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Determinants of choosing an Airbnb rental property

Variables	Women (\bar{x})	Men (\bar{x})
reviews from other users	4,41	4,51
price	4,40	4,62
location	4,40	4,24
privacy of the place	4,35	4,10
flexibility of check-in and check-out	4,25	4,00
comfort and facilities of the property	4,14	3,66
description of the offer	4,09	4,00
home amenities	4,01	3,79
host profile	3,50	3,31
authenticity and unique experiences	3,04	2,93
direct contact with the host	2,99	2,75
additional amenities	2,90	2,44
activities provided by the host	2,01	1,76

Source: own research.

The results indicate that the factors presented were assessed by respondents at a similar level regardless of gender. Slightly more important factors for men were financial savings and the experience of other users, while for women the location and privacy of the place were more important. The results suggest the following motivations for travelers to book on the Airbnb platform:

- opinions of other users; tourists choose properties based on positive reviews and reject offers that are not verified or have negative comments, focusing on their sense of comfort and safety,
- price; respondents are looking for savings and choose places with a lower rental cost, choosing offers with a good quality to price ratio,
- location is important for the overall comfort of the stay due to the time saved in traveling to tourist attractions and other important travel destinations,
- privacy of the place is important for people looking for freedom and comfort.

The people taking part in the survey also indicate that aspects such as:

- flexibility of check-in and check-out – due to the possibility of making changes due to external factors (such as delays in transport) and internal factors (e.g. preferred check-in in the early morning hours),
- home amenities: motivated by the need to function in conditions similar to home, especially in the case of longer trips; the possibility of cooking independently, allowing for financial savings.

The least rated factors determining the choice of a property on Airbnb were activities provided by the host. The analysis shows that travelers value independence and autonomy. This means that they prefer to travel at their own pace without having to participate in organized activities. Organizing a trip independently is often associated with planned attractions, so guests may not be interested in additional offers from hosts. People who use this option are open to new acquaintances and are more willing to get to know the local culture than others. A barrier to using such services may be the lack of information about the proposed activities or an undetailed description of the offer. In addition, the offers may not suit travelers' tastes due to the nature of the activity, and additionally limit their privacy due to the need to interact with other people. Direct contact with the host was rated by respondents as less than neutral as a factor determining the choice of a place on Airbnb. This determinant is important for people looking for security through the possibility of asking local hosts questions, thanks to which they gain additional information about the place and the chosen destination. This also allows for a more personalized user experience, as hosts can tailor services to the individual needs of travelers. However, the analysis shows that this is not a significant factor for travelers. Most respondents rely on the information available on the platform. A barrier that guests may encounter is the lack of immediate response from hosts, especially in emergency situations. This can lead to frustration and limitations related to the lack of necessary information. Misunderstandings due to language differences can also be a threat, but Airbnb's platform offers automatic translation of conversations between hosts and travelers, which minimizes this problem.

During the study, respondents were asked to share negative experiences related to renting properties via the Airbnb platform. The results indicate that as many as 41% of surveyed consumers had to deal with unpleasant situations while using this form of accommodation. The aforementioned experiences largely concerned the cleanliness of the property (55%) and differences in the actual appearance of the premises and the one presented in the offer (50%). There were also responses related to poor contact with the host (32%), low sense of security (21%), problems with check-in (11%) and hidden rental costs (9%). The respondents had the opportunity to indicate their own answer. 6% indicated a situation with a cancellation of the reservation just before the start of the stay.

In order to compare the benefits of staying in a private place and in a hotel, respondents were asked what additional services in properties offered on the Airbnb platform would be useful for them. The most responses were received by factors such as the option of airport transfer (40%) and food provided at the property (34%). Respondents were also eager to indicate answers such as: cleaning services during the stay (18%), travel and stay insurance (18%), rental of recreational equipment (11%), services of local guides (10%). For 28% of respondents, none of the given answers would be an additional value in the context of renting on Airbnb.

4. Conclusions and limitations

For consumers using short-term rentals on the Airbnb platform, price and location are key factors in their choice. Both of these factors received high average scores of 4.47 and 4.36 on a scale of 1 to 5, respectively. The results show that rental costs and the convenient location of the property are priorities for people choosing this form of accommodation. The indication of price as the most important selection criterion is reflected in the growing sharing economy, which is based on the use of available resources and cost savings. New solutions in the tourism industry attract travelers who want to maximize benefits while minimizing expenses. It can therefore be said that travelers using Airbnb are highly price-sensitive.

Although cheaper offers are preferred, respondents do not give up comfort. This is confirmed by the results of the Pearson correlation analysis. It showed the existence of a weak negative correlation at the level of -0.01 between the importance of price and the standard of equipment of the facility. A result very close to zero means there is no relationship between these two variables. These factors of choosing an accommodation facility seem to be independent of each other for respondents. This means that tourists choosing lower prices are not necessarily willing to accept low comfort during their trip, nor are they always able to pay more for a higher standard of rental accommodation. The lack of a significant correlation suggests that travelers are guided by other factors when choosing short-term rental facilities.

The second important factor when choosing an Airbnb listing is location, which often determines the comfort and functionality of the stay. A convenient location saves time and additional costs related to transport. The choice of accommodation often depends on the distance to tourist attractions, transport hubs and city centers. In the questionnaire, respondents indicated their preferences for choosing a place to stay between short-term rentals and hotels based on the nature of the destination. The results indicate that Airbnb rentals are preferred in more secluded locations, such as villages, mountains and places near lakes. This suggests that travelers in such locations are looking for a more intimate and individual experience that short-term rentals offer. Most respondents also indicated a preference for Airbnb over hotels in large and small cities. Travelers probably value the flexibility and variety of offers available on Airbnb, which can better suit their individual needs and budget. In large cities, Airbnb often offers locations in more diverse districts, as well as access to more spacious accommodations compared to standard hotels. In the case of exotic destinations, respondents tend to prefer hotels. The answers indicate that travelers choosing more distant and exotic locations can expect a higher standard of service and greater safety. Additional hotel amenities, such as organized tours, 24-hour service, or security, may be particularly important in these locations. The results may also indicate a desire to take advantage of luxury and comprehensive offers, which are more common in this market segment. Also in the case of locations near airports, respondents are more likely to choose hotels. Such facilities guarantee ease of organization thanks to

additional amenities such as airport transfers, 24-hour reception, or an on-site restaurant. In turn, for locations such as ski resorts or seaside towns, the choice between a hotel and an Airbnb place is not very important for most respondents. This may mean that other factors play a greater role when choosing accommodation in these locations. Tourist attractions, accessibility, or the general atmosphere of the place may be more important, with the type of accommodation being secondary.

For respondents, the opinions of other users (4.45) and the privacy of the place (4.29) were equally important when choosing accommodation on Airbnb. This shows that users make decisions about choosing accommodation based on guest ratings posted on the online platform. In this case, platform users create a community around which trust in the validity of the content published on the website is built. The opinions of other travelers and their recommendations are an important element influencing the choice of the facility. In turn, owning a place is appreciated by travelers due to greater comfort, a sense of security and intimacy. Additionally, travelers have control over the conditions of their stay, which significantly improves the quality of their experience. Travelers using Airbnb are aware of the standard of accommodation and do not expect non-standard amenities that can be experienced more often in hotel facilities. A greater advantage for them is the comfort of living provided by private premises, which are gaining popularity thanks to the growing awareness of consumers about the sharing economy.

The least important factors when choosing a property for short-term rental are: direct contact with the host and additional activities provided by them. Interest in additional activities organized by Airbnb hosts is very low. As many as 97% of respondents declared no participation in such initiatives. This suggests that for the vast majority of Airbnb users, additional attractions offered by hosts are not an important element of their stay. It can be concluded that travelers using Airbnb are not looking for deep immersion in the local culture or an offer related to active participation in experiences organized by hosts. The literature review suggested that an important factor in choosing Airbnb by travelers is the possibility of renting an unusual, distinctive property, offering a different experience than traditional forms of accommodation. However, the results of the study indicate that this aspect is not important for respondents. Moreover, a contradiction also appears in the context of the idea of belonging to a community and establishing contacts with other travelers or hosts. Theorists assumed that Airbnb users would prefer social interaction and connecting with others as part of their trip. However, the study found that such aspects are not a key consideration for most users. The results suggest that the real motivations of travelers using Airbnb are related to functional aspects such as price and location, rather than seeking unique experiences or social interactions. While Airbnb theoretically offers a choice of unique, local places, travelers are guided by more pragmatic factors when choosing a place to stay.

The study was conducted on a group of 300 respondents using Airbnb services, which may significantly affect the representativeness of the obtained results. Such a research sample limits the possibility of generalizing conclusions to a wider population of users of this platform.

Therefore, the results may not reflect the full range of preferences and behaviors of travelers. In order to obtain more reliable data, it is recommended to repeat the study on a larger and more diverse sample. Additionally, to obtain more precise conclusions, it is suggested to focus on more detailed aspects related to the use of Airbnb. Examples include studies focused exclusively on group travel or on the analysis of unique experiences of tourists. Such detailed questions would allow for a deeper understanding of travelers' motivations and expectations, which in turn would allow for a better definition of the factors that determine the choice of a specific offer on the short-term rental market. Conducting the study on a wider scale and taking into account more detailed aspects could also contribute to the identification of new trends and preferences among Airbnb users, such as the role of home amenities, access to local attractions or the need for personalized experiences. This, in turn, could help hosts and intermediary platforms better adapt their offers to the dynamically changing expectations of consumers.

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