WHO IS THE HOST? ONLINE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ON AIRBNB

0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Online identity is a dynamic, multi-faceted and socially constructed concept. On a peer-to-peer sharing accommodation platform such as Airbnb, markers and forms of identity conveyed on self-descriptions made by hosts only provide a partial impression of the individual's identity. Peers contribute to the construction of online identity validating, denying or complementing this concept on their reviews after face-to-face or direct communication with hosts. However, no previous study has approached the concept of identity on Airbnb considering both sources of information: self-descriptions and peer reviews. The main objective of this research was to explore how host online identity was constructed on Airbnb. For this purpose, 1,590 self-descriptions of hosts in Mallorca, Spain and 41,499 corresponding peer reviews were subjected to a qualitative thematic analysis with the aid of NVivo 11 software. Four global themes were identified: *The social person, the outstanding service provider, the active individual* and *the multi-cultural self.* These themes illustrate defining personal and social characteristics communicated about Airbnb host and shed light on the interactivity of identity on P2P platforms.

Keywords: Airbnb, online identity, thematic analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Airbnb has been considered the most successful platform in the field of peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation (Gutierrez, Garcia-Palomares, Romanillos & Salas-Olmedo, 2016). It was founded in 2008 as a platform for people to advertise and rent their spare rooms or second residences as tourist accommodation. Nowadays, provides access to 4 million listings in 65,000 cities, reaching more than 191 countries and over 200 million stays have been booked through the platform since its beginnings (Airbnb, 2017). The rapid success of the website has been attributed to its disruptive, internet-intensive business model and its unique value proposition which includes reduced costs, household amenities and opportunities for genuine interactions with the local culture (Guttentag, 2015). Being a P2P platform, information about users is a fundamental factor in Airbnb transactions: they involve individuals from different parts of the world with no previous experience with one another and result in face-to-face encounters. As in other accommodation P2P websites (Ronzhyn, 2013), profile information creates the user's identity on Airbnb.

Identity could be considered as a complex concept characterized by three factors: its dynamism, its multi-faceted nature and its origin in interactivity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Its dynamism is described by Wynn & Katz (1997) who understand the self is a product of changing social contexts managed to adapt itself to them. Defying a fixed, static or rigid definition since it is capable to evolve determined by the situation and to be subjected to continuous re-creation over time and space. Cover and Doak (2015) provide further insight on the multi-faceted nature of the self, by defining it as a product of multiple cultural, linguistic, legal and political constructions, 'discrete facets' comprehensible through common differentiations such as gender, race, and sexual orientation, and other facets related to day-to-day life including religion, profession, and preferences in fashion. Identities would then represent the different roles a person has in the society and the meanings and behaviors associated with them. Moreover, Delahunty (2012) introduces the idea that identity is socially formed and driven, affirming that it is socially constructed in dialogue and is shaped not only by self-perception but by the perceptions of others, and the interpersonal power relations at play during the process of expressing to others who one is and what one does.

Due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, in computer-mediated communication individuals need to create and convey their identities through software-enabled representations (Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011). On personal profiles, hosts use photographs as visual representations of their physical characteristics and textual self-descriptions to express other markers and forms of identity. Textual self-descriptions are discursive means usually crafted by the hosts through self-presentation, a method that comprises the strategic activities carried out by an individual with the purpose to convey to others the exact impression he is interested on conveying (Goffman, 1959). For hosts, self-presentation also allows the host to manage the boundaries of his different facets and supports the communication of his positive self-defining characteristics such as friendliness and closeness while avoiding disclosing detrimental images that might cause conflicts or rejection. However, authenticity is not assured in personal self-presentation. When evaluating self-presentation on personal web-pages

Döring (2002) found that users can hide certain aspects about themselves since they have more time to craft their ideal personas and less pressure to conform to social codes. Likewise, asynchronous communication and the lack of physical cues might impact host online identity creation on Airbnb.

Based on the previous argument, computer-mediated communication theories related to the channel-reduction model sustain that web-based self-presentation by itself "conveys at best a pale and incomplete impression of real people" (Döring, 2002, p. 7). This suggests that the self-presentational performances used to create a person's identity always need to be validated or discredited by interested parties in relation to the context of their interactions (Goffman, 1959). On Airbnb, personal profiles display public peer reviews posted by either previous guest or previous hosts to allow potential customers to learn more about the other party before completing an online transaction. Since identity has an interactive origin and is formed in dialogue, host self-descriptions would be subjected to confirmation or challenged by peers.

First, identity expressed by hosts through online self-presentation influences guest expectations. These online-formed expectations about the host are contrasted with personality cues 'given' and 'given off' by the host during face-to-face service provision. The new online-offline built image defines guest experience, which is communicated to others through online reviews. Peer perceptions of the host expressed through customer reviews help then to form hosts identity on the website. Ronzhyn (2013), presents evidence of the role of peers on online identity construction in her analysis of users' profiles on the P2P platform CouchSurfing.com. The author affirms that CouchSurfers are "allowed to construct their online identity only partially. The rest of the work is done by other members of a community through the references they leave" (p. 52). Couchsurfing references are the equivalent to Airbnb peer reviews, because both are left after a visit takes place. However, Airbnb introduced in 2016 user endorsements called 'References' that registered family or friends can post without the need of a reservation/stay taking place.

On the other side, for being constructed in a social context by peers, host online identity can be further described from a social identity theory perspective, which argue that a person's identity consists of a personal and a social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Personal identity comes from individual personality traits and comprises specific attributes of the person such as skills and beliefs (Kim et al., 2011). For example, personal identity might be expressed via the use of adjectives that reflect personality traits such as easy-going, free-spirited, entertaining, or skills as flexible, efficient or innovative. In contrast, social identity comes from the belonging to a particular group. It is defined by the affiliation of the individual to a group based on the perceived meaning of what that membership says of himself (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Therefore, the host's online 'social identity' would consist on his classification within certain group that differentiates himself and the members of the group from members of other groups. For instance, social identity could be articulated through the categorization into groups such as professionals, parents or home-owners.

Based on the arguments presented above, in this research host online identity is considered as a 'dynamic configuration of the hosts defining personal and social characteristics in online space constructed through the social interaction between host and peers'. This definition draws the phrase 'defining characteristics' from the conceptualization proposed by De Ruyter and Conroy (2002) in which they considered as defining exclusively the aspects that one or others regarded as the most representative of a person's character from his multiple facets.

Understanding host online identity is important since guests on Airbnb use not only listing's information, but also host's information as cues to make their purchase decision (Ert, et al., 2016). Previous research has described the impacts of host characteristics such as race (Edelman & Luca, 2014; Wang, Xi & Gilheany, 2015) and physical appearance (Ert, et al., 2016) on accommodation prices, hosts' earnings and guest willingness to purchase. In addition, the dynamic role of guest reviews on shaping host online identity has also been illustrated by Liang, Schuckert, Law and Chen (2017) who found that good reviews granted Airbnb host a "Superhost" badge, which in turn acted as a cue for guest to be willing to pay more for those hosts' listings.

Despite the documented impacts of host identity on purchasing behavior, only one previous research study has dealt with its creation. Tussyadiah (2016) studied hosts' self-presentation efforts to communicate personal and commercial brand on Airbnb. As a result, she identified 5 clusters of host descriptions based on the words used for self-presentations, these were: The Global Citizen, The

Local Expert, The Personable, The Established, and The Creative. Although providing evidence of the use of self-description to articulate host online identity on Airbnb, this research overlooked the role of guests on assessing, validating and complementing that identity crafted by the host. In fact, the author recognizes such shortcomings and suggests the analysis of peer reviews to look for identity consistency.

2. OBJECTIVE

As in the case of other online communities (Delahunty, 2012), in accommodation sharing platforms what hosts and guests write seem to offer important insight into the multidimensional and dynamic nature of identity. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how host online identity is constructed on Airbnb, by analyzing the themes on host self-descriptions and peer reviews. In order to achieve this objective, 1,590 self-descriptions of Airbnb hosts in Mallorca and 41,499 peer reviews were subjected to a qualitative thematic analysis using the aid of Nvivo11 software. Four major themes were identified and defined to provide a vision on who the Airbnb host is said to be. The results of this study have practical implications on identity management for users of accommodation rental P2P platforms.

The present study pretends to fill a research gap on online identity construction and approach online identity as a multidimensional dynamic concept forged on host and guest interactions. It will also contribute to the understanding of the actors that participate on the sharing economy. Given the dynamic, multifaceted and socially rooted conceptualization of identity, an interpretivist research paradigm was adopted on this research, the methods of analysis are described in the following section.

3. METHODOLOGY

For the study, data about listings in the island of Mallorca compiled in January 2016 were analyzed. Textual data containing hosts descriptions and customer reviews were obtained from the Inside Airbnb website, an independent project which compiles information published on Airbnb's official website about listings in more than 30 cities. The listings database for Mallorca included 11,271 listings rented by 5,072 different hosts. Hosts were classified according to their number of listings on the platform following Li, Moreno & Zhang (2015) criteria. 70.3% hosts in Mallorca were non-professionals who offered one spare room or property for rent, while 29.7% were professionals who had from 2 to 533 properties listed.

Attention was restricted to the listings posted by non-professional hosts to exclude any professional organization conducting business on the platform and only data in Spanish and English were extracted for analysis. The total sample included self-descriptions by 1,590 hosts, who represented 44.6% non-professional hosts in Mallorca. This data was extracted from the 'Host About' section of the listings. An additional sample of 41,499 peer reviews of listings belonging to those hosts were selected to analyze peer contributions to hosts online identity creation.

Organization and exploration of the content was performed with the aid of the qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) NVivo 11, as the volume of data was considerably large. Despite early criticism about the appropriateness of using computers for textual analysis, QDAS has proven to be of great assistance to qualitative researchers in the management of large amount of unstructured data, information coding, retrieval and storage of emerging ideas and research records (Kelle, 1995).

Hosts' self-descriptions and peer reviews were subjected to qualitative analysis to identify the final global recurrent themes surrounding the host's online identity as a creation in the context of the online accommodation platform Airbnb. Thematic analysis is considered "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It minimally organizes and describes your data in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6). Although thematic analysis in the field of tourism research remains relatively infrequent, its suitability has been demonstrated in conditions where a concept is subject to social, cultural, and temporal variation (Walters, 2016) such as the study of identity. However, the main reason for selecting thematic analysis was the subjective and multi-faceted nature of online identity, which was believed would not be sufficiently captured from the rich body of descriptive data by quantitative techniques.

The thematic analysis followed the six steps suggested by Walters (2016). Because research about host online identity was so scarce, the analysis was conducted starting from an inductive approach. This meant that code generation and theme identification did not try to fit the data into a pre-existing model described on the literature but were driven by the data so responded to the findings in host and peer's discursive representations. Before the analysis, data was compiled into four source files according to the language (English or Spanish). Each host's textual self-description and each peer's textual review was classified as a 'Reference' for a total of 1,590 references contained in the host source files and 41,499 references in the guest source files.

Phase 1 involved familiarization with the data. All 1,590 references in the host source files were read in detail looking for patterns of meaning and subjects of potential interest (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To become familiar with the content of the 41,499 peer reviews, word frequency queries were run on NVivo 11 and words, phrases, similar concepts and expressions commonly used to define the hosts were noted. During phase 2, text search queries were used to find all the references on the source files that contained the terms that had been considered frequent, interesting or prominent on phase 1. These were automatically coded to generate initial codes (See Table 1). Next, word trees showed the initial codes in context so other significant topics and relations could be recognized and coded. The process of re-reading and exploring codes continued until the widest possible number of codes had been generated. By the end of this phase over 400 total codes had been generated from the sources. Codes from hosts and peer references in English and Spanish were developed in the same way but they were recorded separately in their corresponding source files, in order to avoid confusion and unmanageable document sizes

In the third phase, basic themes that could relate the codes generated in phase 2 needed to be identified. According to Braun and Clarke (2016) "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 10). Codes, accordingly, would differ from themes as the latter are generally broader and represent the units of analysis derived from interpretation. This phase involved translating codes defined from the host source file in Spanish into English and collating them with codes that seemed to have a resemblance or correspondence, to obtain a group of comprehensive basic themes from host self-descriptions. This procedure was also carried out with codes from peer source files to consolidate them on basic themes. Afterwards with the use of search queries, themes generated for hosts' self-descriptions were compared to themes on peer reviews. By obtaining themes from different sources and then contrasting them, a form of triangulation that enhances the credibility of the thematic analysis was achieved (Walters, 2016).

In phase 4, basic themes from all sources were condensed to create organizing themes, which represented a higher level of meaning that could be defined and named. For this, different basic themes were associated to form broader themes or dropped if there was not enough data to support them. Internal coherence and consistency of themes were verified by retrieving codified references from the original sources and overall coherence was checked across the entire data set to avoid overlapping concepts and make sure themes expressed by hosts did not have different connotations when articulated by peers.

In phase 5, global themes were formed after a refinement of organizing themes to define their essence and capture the distinctive aspects of the data. In the case of this study, global themes are major pillars of the host online identity according to how it is created by hosts and peers. These were: 1. The social person, 2. The outstanding service provider, 3. The active individual and 4. The multi-cultural self. Determining these four global themes involved revisiting, reevaluating and re-configuring codes and different-level themes until each global theme expressed a solid and single argument, no expansion added anything substantial to the themes and the overall model fitted the data well (Walters, 2016). The final product of the thematic analysis must be considered "an overall conceptualization of the data patterns, and relationships between them" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 19). Finally, in the sixth phase, the four resulting global themes regarding hosts online identity were described, explored and analyzed by providing examples directly extracted from the content of the peer reviews and the host self-descriptions. The thematic network was also completed to culminate this phase.

The present research closely followed the methodology proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Walters (2016) which included detailed instructions to avoid research pitfalls while using thematic

analysis and ensure its rigor. For the authors, such conditions should largely address any issues related to the credibility, applicability, dependability and confirmability, concepts considered equivalents to validity criteria used in the positivist research.

**Table 1.** Example of thematic analysis using a Host Self-Description Reference

Host Self-Description Reference	Initial codes	Basic themes	Organizing themes	Global Themes
"My name is Kristian*, live with my family, wife and two daugthers [sic], in Stockholm. Important for me is my family, work and to have an active life. Training sports like skiing, snowboarding, surfing, volleyball, Pilates etc. Hope you would like to stay in our apartment on the east cost of Mallorca. Welcome!! Best regards Kristian with family"	Host name (1), Family (2), Wife (3), Children (4), Country (5), Important (6), Work (7), Active (8), Sports (9), Surf (10), Team sport (11), Pilates & Yoga (12), stay (13), Apartment (14), Mallorca (15)	Sport activities (1), spare time (2), interpersonal relationships (3), Family (4), Accommodation (5)	Hobbies (1), Family (2)	Active Individual (1), Social Person (2)

*Last name removed to protect privacy

Source: Own elaboration, 2017.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Figure 1. Thematic Network.
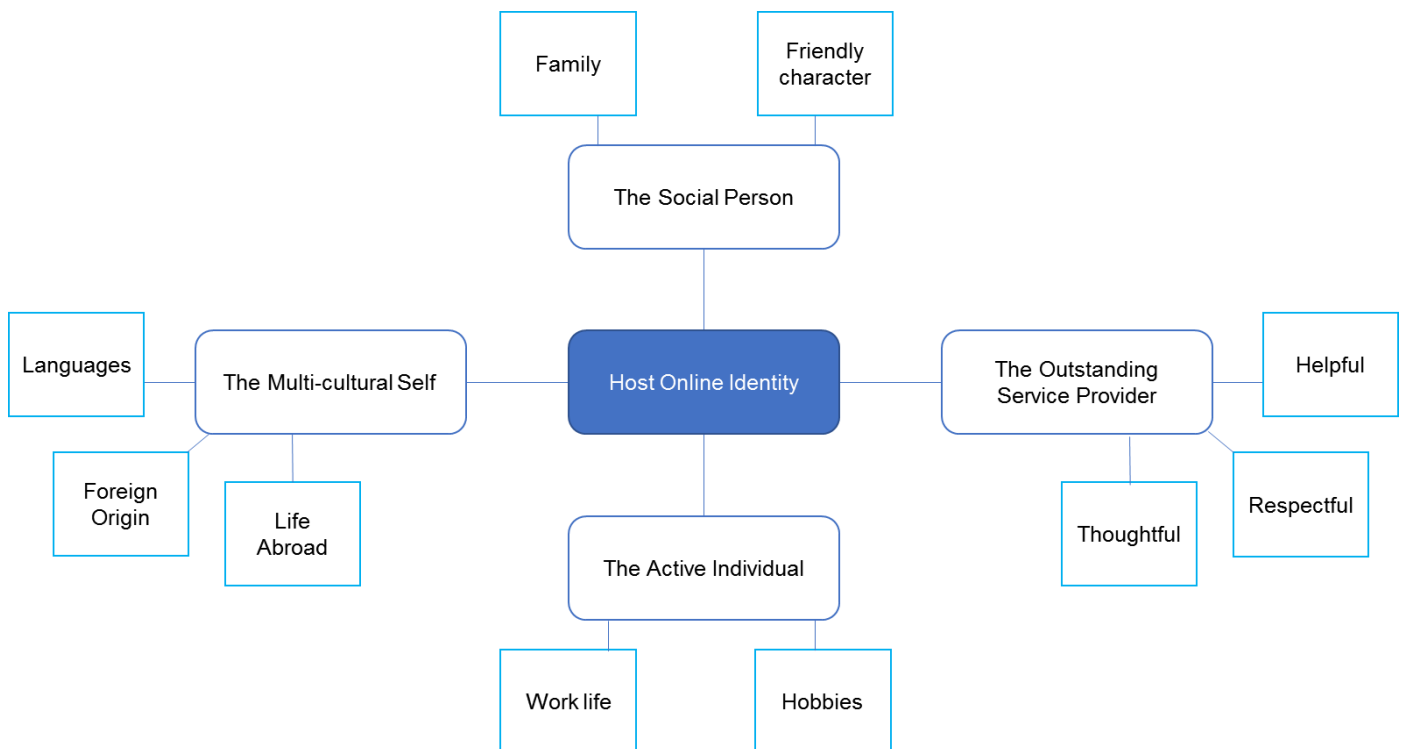
Source: Own elaboration, 2017.

As mentioned before, the objective of this research was to explore how host online identity was constructed on Airbnb. Different aspects of the personal and social identity of the host could be identified in the self-presentations and reviews articulated by host and peers. Four global themes that describe defining characteristics of the host on the online context are presented in this section: the social person, the outstanding service provider, the active individual and the multi-cultural self. They can be observed in the thematic network represented on Figure 1.

Theme 1: The Social Person

Family was an important component of the group of relationships and interactions that contributed to the global theme of the host as a social person, and was mentioned in host self-presentations and peer reviews alike. Talking about family reflects something of the cultural shaping of identity by sociocultural factors. Family relationships were marked in the discursive means by the use of words such as 'couple', 'children' and 'married'. Individuals on Airbnb provide details about their family members to introduce their peers to the other people that resides in the property being listed on the website. Information about family members includes names, occupation, age and personal interests. This seemed to be a way to provide cultural cues previous to a possible face-to-face encounter.

> *"Hi, my wife & I are pleased to satisfy our guests and love to make them happy. New here but have been successfully renting for several years through other websites and many happy customers, some come back every year. Best wishes…"*
>> *- Host self-description in Airbnb*

Sharing responsibilities of catering for the needs of guests with other members of the family, resulted on direct contact of the visitor with more than one person. On these cases, guests referred to their interactions with the family which offered a view of the host as a group and within a group and not only as an individual.

> *"… We love ur [sic] family Maria, you guys are really warm and welcoming and made us feel like family the moment we stepped in.. Thank u [sic] very much for the Binnasalem Vino[sic]... And how can we forget the Tortillas Patata [sic]... Super delicious Espanyol Omlette…[sic]"*
>> *- Guest review in Airbnb.*

Here, there is an explicit reference to the family of the host with an implicit reference to sharing the same attributes that generated satisfaction on the guest. This seems to be in line with the existence of a social identity as discussed earlier in the literature review section, which is reflected by the host association with a wider group of similar individuals, in this case family members.

Along with family relationships as a sub-theme of the host online identity as a social person, friendliness was also constructed in the discourse as part of the social disposition of the host. This is a personality trait that reflects amicability and a personable nature. Assertive techniques of impression management include the use of emotive adjectives like 'easy-going', 'open-minded', and 'nice' to describe character. The word 'friendly' itself was the most common adjective used by hosts to describe themselves. Social interaction was one of the main three reasons for host to share their dwellings found by Karlsson and Dolnicar (2016). In fact, meeting people and the love of sharing seemed to be the arguments behind this driver.

> *"Open and tolerant person. Always willing to meet new people and exchange life experiences and interests. I love learning languages and as well, music and sport. The most important thing for me is to enjoy and learn from what life can teach you."*
>> *- Host self-description in Airbnb.*

Being a service provided by peers to peers, the nature of the guest rapport with the host is an important factor in their evaluation of the accommodation service (Heo, 2016). Service marketing literature establishes that customers express strong preferences for the level of friendliness they want from every particular service encounter, which is subjective and varies from person to person (Goodwin & Smith, 1990). According to peer reviews, guests find high levels of friendliness from hosts which is translated on positive feedback.

"…Anna is even more lovely as I imagined her to be: very welcoming, open, sunny - I would have loved to spend more time with her. I can highly recommend her place and would have liked to take her and her friends back with me to Barcelona, thanks for everything!"

- Guest review in Airbnb.

The image of the host as a social member was configured through hosts and guests' impressions. Hosts classified themselves in social groups as married people or parents to put across their familiar status while they used unique attributes to describe their affable personality; guests also recurred to adjectives to validate the hosts' open disposition.

Theme 2: The Outstanding Service Provider

Previous studies about host reviews have found them to be extremely positive when comparing them with those on traditional accommodation rental websites such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com (Zervas et al., 2015, Ert et al., 2016), expressing high levels of satisfaction with the properties and the hosts. Nevertheless, a closer examination to the peer references suggested that 'satisfaction with the host' did not only mean 'excellent and perfect service'. Rather, the notion of an outstanding host was constructed in the discourse as synonymous with a 'helpful', 'respectful' and 'thoughtful' service provider.

'Helpful' was the most used word by peers to describe hosts. It was usually followed by references to the host abilities provide great amounts of useful information, to solve problems quickly and accommodate any kind of special request. The efficiency with which hosts answered questions or organized things was also expressed to construct this dimension of host identity.

"Margarita was a great host. The apartment was as described. Nice thing was that it was full of all kind of brochures. Margarita gave us great tips and lot of small details as how to get to the apartment, where to eat, which are the best beaches, where to buy stuff and which are the local traditions (as small markets in the villages around). She sent it to us even before we have arrived there. Very very helpful if you are curious to visit new place and to find out what is typical there. Thank you again, if we come back to Mallorca we will be happy to stay there again."

- Guest review in Airbnb.

Respectfulness referred to the host's capacity to understand when guests needed their own space and respected privacy. Considering the varied personal, economic and psychological risks involved on P2P transactions the validation and reassurance of the host as a mannerly and polite individual result significant for a positive perception.

"David, the host goes above and beyond what is expected. He respects your privacy but at the same time is very easy talk to and relax with in the main lounge. He has exceptional local knowledge, this includes; things to do, places to visit, restaurants and bus routes."

- Guest review in Airbnb.

Regarding thoughtfulness, the disposition of hosts to go 'above and beyond' to make their stay memorable was often praised. Phrases such as 'extra details', 'unexpected', 'pleasant surprised' acted as pointers of this unique host skill.

"Anibal is a very hospitable, considerate, and respectful host. He was very helpful, and even did things that were beyond expectation like make me a traditional Spanish dinner for one of the World Cup soccer matches. While friendly and inviting, Anibal also provided an atmosphere of privacy as well."

- Guest review in Airbnb.

Guest reviews also demonstrated that the host service was at many times being judged against traditional accommodation establishments. Fact that complements the commercial facet of host identity. A typical example is provided by the following review:

> *"Very nice quarters in an old, very nicely renovated house at the central square. But most important Hector* and his family is an exceptional host making the guests feel immediately as part of the family. He offers much more than normally expected from a bed & breakfast establishment."*
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*Last name removed to protect privacy
- Guest review in Airbnb.
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Although host identified themselves as 'responsible' or 'organized' through self-promotion strategies, the identity of the outstanding host responded to the guest expectations of P2P accommodation rentals distinguished by helpfulness, respectfulness and thoughtfulness during the provision of the service.

Theme 3: The Active Individual

The 'active' nature of the Airbnb host was evident in the ideal of activity associated with day-to-day facets such as work life and hobbies. For example, being in contact with nature and participating in sports were featured as activities developed by the host on their spare time. As with family relationship themes, these findings suggest that the identity inherent in activity was related to the hosts' engagement on classification with social groups. In this case to connect to others interested in the same kind of activities and differentiate themselves from people that don't share their same characteristics.

By mentioning occupation and professions hosts let others know social groups that identify them, e.g. 'nurse', 'actor' and 'property manager' and their specific roles on society. Mentioning credentials provides an early indication of which identity is valued, and of the initial positioning maneuvers (Delahunty, 2012). These maneuvers might be aimed to construct an image of capable service provider by the articulating complementing facets of the host.

> *"I am an artist (singer, dancer actress) my husband is a photographer. We have two children and have resided in Brooklyn NY for nearly 20 years together. We love to travel and have been to Europe, Asia, and Central America."*
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- Host self-description in Airbnb
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Hobbies among hosts were diverse but congruency was found around words such as 'outdoors', 'mountains', 'sport' and 'cooking', providing cues on topics of interest facilitates the communication on the online world and the offline world. But undoubtedly, the most prominent interest among hosts was traveling, this topic elicits hosts' feelings which are expressed in emotive language. Talking about travel gives the host an opportunity for to make visible a shared passion with their peers.

> *"I love nature, the sun, the beaches and the forest. I'm loving the sport, bike, run and swim, I like sailing kayak, do windsurf when there are [sic] wind. I have traveled to different parts of Europe and I would like to know the other continents, cultures, people and their habits of life."*
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- Host self-description in Airbnb
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As it can be seen in this reference, hosts deliberately choose to include the activities they engage in to convey their identity to others on the online world. In addition, it is interesting to note how the term 'love' marks strong interest and personal passions. According to these arguments, the definition of the self includes what the host does and not only what the host is, as was briefly mention before in this paper. Reinforcing the idea that identity is moderated by the context and environment.

The alignment as active individuals, is also an important stage in the process of identity formation as it is a positively received and accepted identity by the guests, as it can be observed in the next reference:

> *"Hola, this place is great! The very hard working host, Rosa, is very helpful and sweet. The room is a little small, but it's only for sleeping, if you want to hang out in the apartment the living room is really cozy. The terrace is amazing to enjoy the sky and a*

nice dinner. Rosa gave us good inputs about transportation, Mallorca and good places to eat. The place is very close to everything, and the bus stops right in front of the front door. If you don't speak Spanish, Rosa's English is great, and easy to understand. She definitely made out trip the best it could be."

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-Guest review in Airbnb.

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Theme 4: The Multi-Cultural Self

The final theme contributing to the representation of the online identity of the host was the multi-cultural self. The multi-cultural self related to specific roots, education and life experiences, which in themselves shaped human identity. It was a prominent theme among host self-descriptions and guest reviews and it might easily be related to a self-presentation cluster previously described on Tussyadiah (2016) study: "The Global Citizen". The impression of cultural diversity was given by hosts with foreign origins, proficient in several languages and having lived abroad.

In relation with the foreign origins of the hosts, references to having been born outside of Spain or having parents that come from different lands were thoroughly found within the sources. This condition seems congruent with the adoption of P2P of accommodation platforms as a global phenomenon. Also provides evidence that self-presentation techniques might be used by hosts to introduce themselves as foreigners well adapted to a new culture and prepared to present it to others.

> *"I am half german half french and was born in Mallorca. My parents have been living here for the past 43 years. I used to live in our casita when I was single, now things have changed since my husband Ben and I got three children (5, 3 and 1 year old) and needed more space. Now we live outside a little town close to Port of Andratx, in the countryside. We do not get to travel much this days...but we love to spend time in our garden and go for walks in the mountain with the kids."*

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- Host self-description in Airbnb

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A subtler underlying message of multi-cultural persona is the representation of speaking many languages. The need make reference to the ability of the hosts to dominate multiple languages, indicates a defining and distinguishing characteristic, which can result very helpful in exchanges between people of different cultures as related in the following review:

> *"Jaume speaks English, French and Spanish very well so it is easy to communicate with him, he will show you around, tell you about Mallorcan culture and lifestyle, give you the best advice on what to do or where to eat and is ultimately incredibly helpful and kind. He will do his best to make sure your visit is everything you hoped it would be. I was happy to play tennis on clay courts for the first time, eat paella, cook traditional food and drink homemade liquors, visit a nearby small town, go hiking, see the museum, go to the movies, and eat tapas with the locals."*

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- Guest review in Airbnb.

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Finally, as Airbnb is allowing individuals to commercialize their spare spaces from everywhere in the world. Hosts referred to their previous experiences living in outside Spain to put forth an image of 'global citizen', which comes attached with different social meanings. Indeed, the concept of relocating to other countries and emigrating was suggestive of a broader understanding of cultures. In this way, it spoke of the identity of an adventurous, resourceful and multi-faceted individual.

> *"Hello I am Nick and I was born and raised in Mallorca though I am a mix of German and Australian. I have lived in the UK and Australia and love to travel and meet people from all over the world. I work in the building trade and have lived in the pretty village of S'Arraco for over 10 years with my wife and daughter (10 years) and our 3 cats. We look forward to welcoming you into our home."*

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- Host self-description in Airbnb

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Overall, this study found that hosts generally are represented online by host themselves and peers as social persons, outstanding service providers and active individuals with a multi-cultural self according to the themes identified in self-presentations and reviews on Airbnb. These characteristics are similar to how hosts online brand was self-created in previous literature (Tussyadiah, 2016). Among the most

relevant contribution of this thematic network, are the identification of characteristics that seem specially valued by peers and considered defining of host as accommodation providers: helpfulness, thoughtfulness and respectfulness. The nature of the characteristics might lead to infer that first, host-self presentation helps to create reachable expectations regarding service, interaction and friendliness; and second, online textual discursive means generate an identity of host that afterwards is confirmed during service provision.

Finally, considered the four themes identified, the Airbnb host as a social person could be considered as the most distinctive for users of P2P accommodation platforms, based on the strong motivations to meet new people, interact with individuals from different cultures, and share their space with others identified by Karlsson and Dolnicar (2016) also due to the offline-online nature of Airbnb transactions which leads to a face-to-face encounter with strangers and are not implied on other online marketplaces or social networking sites, and the impact that host personal characteristics and behavior (online and offline) has in the satisfaction of the customer with the overall service.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research attempted to explore the construction of host online identity by considering the hosts and peer's contributions made sensible through the discursive means of self-descriptions and online reviews. The results indicate that in P2P accommodation platforms, users continuously structure experience together and establish order in conventions of discourse that allow the identification of shared meanings. In other words, it was found that host online identity is socially formed in the context of P2P accommodation platforms through the interaction of different interested parties. The communication of hosts defining characteristics on personal profiles by hosts themselves and by peers provided a more complete and complex image of the service provider on his different facets that ranged from the most private to the most commercial and suggested a correspondence of Internet behavior with the embodied world. Self-descriptions and reviews made the host personal and social online identities evident.

The author asserts that despite the dominance of positivist research in the field of tourism, the present research provides an example of knowledge generation from the application of qualitative methods capable to derive meaning from patterns in textual discourse without the need to describe the data quantitatively. The thematic analysis performed responded to the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of the object of study: online identity, and to the richness of the data that contained evocative and emotive accounts of self-presentation and interactions between host and guest interactions.

 Among the limitations of the study was the exclusion of descriptions and comments on languages different that Spanish and English, which might have restricted the findings to the impressions of individuals of certain cultures. It would be interesting to compare this results with the analysis of textual representations on other languages to identify the impacts of linguistic constructions on the communication of identity.

In addition, it is considered that the method of thematic analysis although useful to derive knowledge from textual data and identify dimensions of subjective concepts proves to be cumbersome to apply to large amounts of data. Even if the assistance of a QDAS as NVivo 11 facilitated the manipulation of data, immersing into the data through repeated reading of the body of text resulted more difficult in the case of peer reviews than in the case of self-descriptions, which may lead to overlook unique themes contained on the discursive means by peers.

The practical implications of this research for the strategic management of identity for participants in P2P accommodation platforms consists in the evidence that the control of online identity is very limited on the interactive online world. Therefore, online self-presentation strategies need to be congruent with physical personality cues given during offline interactions. Updating the self-presentation on P2P platforms often could help to convey the evolving nature of a person identity and to provide a more accurate image than the one expressed on peer comments or references.

Additionally, it was evident that P2P networks require appropriate identity creation mechanisms as people need information about other users to gain trust and facilitate online communication. In this sense, Airbnb offers descriptions conventions to help information disclosure, which prompt users to share their favorite things such as "travel destinations, books, movies, shows, music, food" with the

network, their style of traveling or hosting and personal information like a life motto on their self descriptions. Although there are useful to express common characteristics, this format could limit the communication of hosts' idiosyncracy. It is suggested that future researches considered the recently launched trust-building mechanism of 'peer references' on the studies of host online identity on Airbnb.

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