Implication of the fit between Airbnb and host characteristics: a trust-transfer perspective

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ABSTRACT
Airbnb is the peer-to-peer accommodation website and one type of sharing economy. Airbnb has a growing trend in the world. It is important to understand why guests (buyers) build trust in Airbnb and trust in the hosts (sellers). Grounded in the fit theory and trust transfer, this study investigates which characteristics of hosts and the platform have an impact on the trust in host and trust in Airbnb through guests’ perceived fit. This study will collect from a sample of the Airbnb users and analyze the data using structural equation modeling. The findings will bear implications for the researchers as well as for practitioners.

CCS Concepts
Applied computing →Electronic commerce →Online shopping

Keywords
Peer-to-peer accommodation; Sharing economy; Trust transfer; Fit theory; Perceived fit

1. INTRODUCTION
The sharing economy, one of peer-to-peer (P2P) marketplace, continues to grow at a surprising rate. The terms of the sharing economy are described in collaborative consumption, P2P economy, or on-demand economy [2, 38]. The sharing economy is defined as “the peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services [15]”. The reason for advent of sharing economy is an alternative solution from the global economic recession, an environmentally-friendly trend, and changes in consumer desire trend based on the information technology including social network platforms [3, 28, 39]. PwC, the accounting firm, estimates that the revenue of sharing economy will increase from $15 billion in 2014 to $335 billion by 2025 [31]. According to the Airbnb [1], one of P2P accommodation, more than 60 million people are joined this website and they try to have unique travel experiences in more than 34,000 cities and 190 countries.

This phenomenon is especially in tourism and hospitality industries [13, 39]. Those sharing economy platforms include accommodation (e.g., Airbnb), tour guide service (e.g., Vayable, myRealTrip), and transportations (e.g., Uber, Zipcar) [2, 9, 39, 42]. In tourism and hospitality areas, the users of sharing economy platforms aim to get economic benefits, to experience authenticity and to socially interact with a host [2, 13, 39]. These economic and social benefits motivate tourists to participate in the P2P accommodation. To keep up with such a trend, prior research is carried out to verify participation intention [15, 20], its impact on the diversification of tourism product [42], and travel patterns [39] in sharing economy.

In sharing economy platforms, the products or services are traded with strangers [2, 9]. Consumers (i.e. guests) buy to access accommodations of strangers (i.e., hosts) and then, guests contact with hosts in a host’s accommodation [9, 39]. In comparison to previous P2P products or services, risks in sharing economy include monetary and additional risks including a reduction in whole travel experience and a life-threatening situation [9]. Therefore, the majority of research in the sharing economy has emphasized on trust building [9, 20].

In the online transaction, three parties such as the seller, the buyer, and the intermediary (platform) are involved [40]. In particular, the seller-peer is also pivotal in sharing economy trading [15] because the buyer-peer makes a deal with the seller on the P2P platform. The impact of sellers is important as much as the impact of the intermediary [40]. In terms of trust in the P2P accommodation, the types of trust comprise trust in the platform and trust in sellers. Trust in the P2P platform also transferred to trust in sellers [17, 30]. However, previous literature related to the P2P accommodations rarely seems to focus on two types of trust and trust transfer.

Meanwhile, prior studies pointed out that a user’s outcomes such as attitudes, perceptions, responses, and trust are influenced by the perceived fit [7, 18, 19]. According to some literature regarding electronic commerce (EC), the proper fit with products or services, its systems (platform), and its buyer-users are needed for prosperity of the system [18]. In line with this, the P2P accommodation also need for the match with products or services, its system, and the guests. Compare to the traditional EC products or services, the hosts’ characteristics are more important because a host’s accommodation is traded and staying decisions and experiences also include communications and social interacts with the hosts [2, 39]. Therefore, there is a need for examining the perceived fit between the characteristics of hosts and the platform for trust building in the P2P accommodation.

To fill the gap in the literature, this study intends to understand the two types of trust (i.e., trust in Airbnb and trust in hosts) of the P2P
accommodation based on the fit theory and trust transfer. This study, in particular, is focused on P2P accommodation platforms such as Airbnb. The detailed purpose of this study is as follows: (a) to figure out the characteristics of a sharing economy platform and guests; (b) to examine the influence of these characteristics on the perceived fit; (c) to verify the effects of the perceived fit on both trust in Airbnb and trust in hosts, respectively.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Fit theory

The goal of the P2P accommodation is to provide an electronic system that a transaction of accommodation between hosts and guests will satisfy their needs, wants, and requirements. In information system research, the concept of fit is used to better understand its usage and outcomes. Goodhue and Thompson [12] introduced the task-technology fit that is defined “the degree to which a technology assists an individual in performing his or her portfolio of tasks (p. 216)” They argue that the fit between the functionality of technology and the task requirement of users is required for the technology’s performance. This task-technology fit is widely used for the adoption of information system [21, 24]. In addition, the literature on the EC argues that a fit between EC system characteristics, product characteristics, and user characteristics is essential [18]. In summary, the fit or congruence represents consumer perception whether it is similar or not by their own standard [33]. For this study, the perceived fit is defined as the extent to which guests perceive that host and Airbnb characteristics will fit for the P2P accommodation experience.

Prior research on the perceived fit indicates that perceived fit influences consumers’ outcomes such as attitude, responses, trust, and behavioral intention. For example, Deitz et al. [7] investigated the role of the perceived fit in sponsorship response and found that perceived fit acted as a mediator between sponsor attributions and sponsorship response. Rifon et al. [33] also argue that the fit between a company and its cause such as motive attributes affects the trust building and positive attitude. People tend to confirm the attributes of an object and to judge the match with previous perception [7, 34, 37]. In other words, the fit between an object’ characteristics and own standards means its capability of handling some tasks [26]. In turn, they are inclined to have a favorable attitude toward the object or to increase its trust result from positive evaluations [7, 33].

In line with this, numerous studies confirm the role of the fit to understand user outcomes in EC systems. Jahng et al. [18] posit that the user outcome is affected by the fit among EC system, products and user characteristics. Wagner et al. [41] understood consumers’ attitudes and intentions toward Internet-enabled TV shopping with views from the task-environment fit and task-technology fit. The fit between users and the platform has also been an important concept of the P2P accommodation platform. Its platform makes a great feature of a place which enables people to trade between peer-sellers and peer-buyers. Especially, in the P2P accommodation such as Airbnb, guests should contact with hosts to choose their accommodation decision-making online and then, interact with them on-site while they stay at the hosts’ houses. The fit between users and hosts also a crucial concept.

The guests with the high fit of Airbnb sites and hosts more perceive their capabilities to provide P2P accommodations. That is, guests tend to form trust about them in the transaction of P2P accommodation in compliance with their level of the perceived fit. Thus, primarily focusing on the perceived fit, this study posits that the Airbnb platform and host characteristics facilitate the fit between users and Airbnb, which will induce to their positive outcomes such as the trust.

2.2 Trust Transfer

Trust is defined as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (p. 712) [25]”. Trust leads to the formation of relationships, attitude, decreasing privacy and security concerns, purchase intention, and loyalty [4, 8, 17]. The concept of trust has served as a crucial factor in the EC context because the products or services on the internet have a high degree of uncertainty in the purchase [17]. Furthermore, consumers in the sharing economy are unfamiliar enough the products or services as well as the sellers. Therefore trust is paying more attention in a sharing economy [9, 20].

P2P consumers have two types of relationship with EC [17]. The one is the relationship between a buyer-user and a seller-user. The other one is the relationship between a buyer-user and the intermediary (the platform). The concepts of two trusts interpret differently. For example, a buyer may have faith in the corresponding person of a transaction and/or in the care of a transaction [40]. In other words, trust in the platform is defined as the consumer’s perceptions of the trustworthiness in the platform formed by its regulations, guarantees, and assurance in the transaction [40]. The trust in sellers refers to the trustworthiness regarding all sellers in the platform [40]. Therefore, previous literature regarding P2P platforms such as Airbnb suggests that the trust includes trust in the platforms and trust in sellers [17].

Meanwhile, trust is transferred from one target to another target, which is defined as trust transfer [17, 35]. This is because that a person draws an initial trust in another target from trust in related other target, or a related context [35]. The process of trust transfer is cognitively formed [23] and is confirmed in the EC related literature [17, 23, 30]. For example, Pavlou and Gefen [30] found that the trust in intermediaries increases the trust in sellers because the trust in sellers is closely related to the intermediary. Hong and Chou [17] also examined trust transfer in an EC context and found that trust in intermediary positively influenced trust in sellers.

This trust transfer could be found in the sharing economy platform. The P2P accommodation platforms enable people to purchase products or services while sharing and negotiating their opinions with hosts. In terms of trust, buyers in the P2P accommodation may form not only trust in the platforms but also trust in sellers. Therefore, this study draws on trust transfer to be regarded Airbnb as the place people can build two types of trusts and to examine the influence of trust in Airbnb on trust in hosts.

2.3 Airbnb and host characteristics

Guests consider a complex set of factors (i.e., price, location, facilities, and etc.) to select an accommodation for their vacation [22]. In the P2P platform, the purchase of an accommodation also considers the complex elements and need an amount of cognitive effort. In other words, the guests are under the characteristics of Airbnb platform and hosts.

The online auction such as eBay and Yahoo is considered as one type of P2P website [45]. In the related literature, the quality of service characteristics is stated as a key determinant for consumer satisfaction, intention to use, and long-term relationship in the online auction [45]. In particular, the service quality is divided into the platform and the seller side [45]. The transaction of P2P is
perceived as a more complex process than a traditional online transaction because the buyer-peers and seller-peers hardly know each other [45]. To understand P2P users’ activities, it is crucial to consider both system and seller characteristics is crucial [45]. Prior research has explored the sub dimensions of service quality based on E-S-QUAL and E-RecS-QUAL suggested by Parasuraman et al. [29].

For instance, Yen and Lu [45] explained the three dimensions (efficiency, system availability, and privacy protection) for website quality. They also used contact, fulfillment, and responsiveness as sub dimensions for the sellers’ quality. Chiu et al. [6] consider dimensions of Yen and Lu [45] adding to the compensation and contact for the platform and to the compensation for the seller. Built on these studies, this study identifies the characteristics of Airbnb as a platform and hosts as the sellers. In addition, a traditional P2P transaction such as eBay transfers a permanent ownership of products, but the transaction of sharing economy such as P2P accommodations is to offer services and to allow temporal access to services [9, 27]. In terms of interaction with hosts, the transaction of P2P accommodation offers rights to stay a host’s accommodation for a certain period time, includes from the online purchase to offline experience, and co-creates experiences with a host and a guest. Thus, this study extends the characteristics for hosts to reflect on-site experience for the guests.

According to the Parasuraman et al. [29], the characteristics of Airbnb platform consist of five dimensions: efficiency (the extent that guests easily and quickly access the Airbnb website), system availability (the extent to which Airbnb’s correctness about technological functioning), perceived security (the safety of Airbnb about its ability to protect guests’ information), compensation (the extent that Airbnb compensates guests for the problems they face), and contacts (the extent that Airbnb assists through telephone or online). As the Airbnb transactions are done online, efficiency, system availability, and security are considered as the basic and important qualities. In addition, all issues related to the payment are recommended to be done within the Airbnb site because the transactions are done with strangers on Airbnb [1]. Airbnb provides their own contact information and also operates various measures to resolve disputes between the host and the guest [1]. Accordingly, such compensation can also be considered to be one of the characteristics of Airbnb.

On the other hands, the sub dimensions of the hosts’ characteristic include contact, fulfillment, responsiveness, compensation, contents, and authenticity. The online sellers should indicate their contact information, meet the requirements and make a response the buyers’ questions. Hosts provide contact information such as email address, the number of cellular phones, and Facebook on the Airbnb website. Guests check the availability for accommodations or ask questions through contact information. Responsiveness is defined as the extent how such contacts of guests are effectively processed and responded to and is also considered very crucial in P2P transactions [6, 29, 45]. Fulfillment is defined as how well the host fulfilled the promises made online (e.g., size and location of the accommodation, amenities provided by accommodation, check-in and check-out time), and when these processes are verified by the guests on site, the accommodation experience is completed based on the information.

If there was a problem with the experience of the accommodation, the hosts must present an appropriate compensation in order to improve the trust and reputation and this is defined as the compensation of the host [6]. When choosing the accommodations, Airbnb guests are able to obtain information about the accommodation that the host has entered in. Therefore, the content provided by the host is an important factor that affects the perception of the guests. Accordingly, this study seeks to define how sufficiently the contents are provided to the guests with useful, understandable, interesting, reliable, complete, and up-to-date information according to the prior study [36]. Furthermore, unlike existing online products, Airbnb service includes the on-site and authentic experiences as part of the accommodation service. Many tourism literature also have dealt with the authenticity as an important concept [32] and authenticity is defined as “unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional (p.2) [16]” experience. When the guests are staying at the host’s accommodation, the authenticity of the service provided by the host is also an important factor forming that experience [13, 39] and guests have a desire for staying like local people to seek an authentic experience [13, 44]. Therefore, authenticity can be defined as the level of authentic local experience provided by the host and this should also be considered in accordance with the characteristics of the host.

3. RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

3.1 Research model

This study explores the impact of Airbnb characteristics and Hosts characteristics on the trust in Airbnb and the trust in hosts via forming perceived fit in the sharing economy. The theoretical framework is based on fit theory and trust transfer to achieve our research goal. Figure 1 presents our research model. Two characteristics surrounding guests (i.e., Airbnb and host characteristics) are shown to as determinants of perceived fit in the sharing economy. The perceived fit also influences trust in Airbnb and trust in hosts. Lastly, trust in Airbnb transfers to trust in Hosts.

![Figure 1. The research model.](image)

3.2 Airbnb Characteristics, Host characteristics and Perceived Fit

When guests are using Airbnb, they are under its characteristics because website plays a role of the main communication channel between consumers and the website [43]. On the contrary, the accommodation on Airbnb is realized through the characteristics of the property posted by the host and communication with the host. When the transaction is achieved, the accommodation experience of the guest is formed which includes the interaction with the host during the stay at the accommodation. This study adopts characteristics of Airbnb and hosts based on the studies of Yen and Lu [45] and Chiu et al. [6]. Efficiency, system availability, perceived security, compensation, and contacts are regarded as the
characteristics of Airbnb. In addition, the characteristics of hosts are comprised of contact, contents, responsiveness, fulfillment, authenticity, and compensation.

The perceived fit is defined as the level of the match between Airbnb and host characteristics and the user’s standard [19]. Researchers examining the relationship of the characteristics and the perceived fit have addressed that perceived fit is affected by the attribute or characteristics of associated objects. As people try to perceive characteristics of a certain object and situation [7, 34, 37], they judge whether something matches their own existing perception. In addition, a specific work needs the functionality of a specific technology [12]. The smaller the gap between work characteristics and functionality required by the characteristics of technology becomes, the smaller the fit level becomes [12]. In accordance with this, Lu and Yang [24] extended this concept adding developed the concept of social-technology fit for understanding use of social networking sites and found that the characteristics of task, technology, and social affect the perceived task-technology fit and social–technology fit. Deitz et al. [7] address that the influence of the sponsor attributes on customers’ response is mediated by their perceived fit between the sponsor and the event.

Based on the above researches, if Airbnb platform provides guests with efficient and functionally accurate information, high-quality security, quick access, and proper compensation for troubles guests face, it will match the standards of guests who procure shared lodging goods. In terms of the characteristics of the host, the more hosts explain their accommodations in detail, provide a number of contact channels, perform suggested conditions exactly, respond quickly to questions and contacts of guests, react quickly to troubles, and deliver truthful experiences, the higher fitness between treatment of hosts and standards of guests. In other words, the characteristics regarding Airbnb and hosts may lead to a greater congruence in the sharing economy. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Airbnb characteristics positively affect the perceived fit.

H2. Host characteristics positively affect the perceived fit.

3.3 Perceived fit and two trusts

In Airbnb, guests try to form two types of trust. One is trust in Airbnb and the other is trust in hosts. This study defined trust in Airbnb as the guests’ perception that Airbnb is trustworthy, reliable, and dependable. Trust in hosts is defined as the guests’ perception in the honesty, dependability, trustworthiness, and reliability of other hosts in Airbnb. Such users’ trust in the platform and trust in hosts are influenced by the perceived fit. The perceived fit is one of the determinants in users’ outcomes such as attitude, perceptions, responses, and trust [7, 18, 19]. In line with this, Johar and Sirgy [19] interpret that the fit between the product’s attributes and consumer’s self-concept positively affects consumer’s attitude because they positively assess its value when a product has a high level of characteristics. In the study of sponsorship, the perceived fit also is considered as a determinant for forming credibility [33]. For people who make their purchase of an accommodation product on Airbnb, forming trust is difficult. Thus, detailed information about the host is provided, or for the trust of trading on the platform, their own standards for maintaining trust are provided in detail.

The guest-users of P2P accommodation platform may determine whether Airbnb and host characteristics fit or not with own criteria [7, 34, 37]. The increase in their level of perceived fit means that the prior expectations of the guests are being satisfied. This in turn means that Airbnb and the hosts possess sufficient ability to provide the guests with accommodation experience [26]. Guests increase the level of trust in the platform and in hosts [33]. Hence, the greater the perceived fit, the more trust in Airbnb and trust in hosts will be. The following hypotheses are suggested based on the above argument.

H3. Perceived fit positively affects the trust in Airbnb.

H4. Perceived fit positively affects the trust in hosts.

3.4 Trust transfer

The trust related literature argues that trust in one domain has an effect on trust in another domain [17, 23]. In this study, the trust transfer is defined as the cognitive process in which the trust in Airbnb transfers trust in hosts. Existing research represents that the trust in the platform transfers to the trust in sellers in the EC context because trust in sellers is associated with the platform [30]. For example, Hong and Cho [17] found that trust is transferred from the intermediary to the sellers. The transactions of P2P accommodation are made with unique and each different details products or services. In particular, a buyer-user makes a purchase decision on an unknown host’s accommodation [2, 9]. According to the trust-transfer argument [8, 35], such trust in hosts may transfer from the trust in Airbnb. To prevent distrusting hosts in Airbnb, Airbnb operates standards that threatening or unresponsive hosts and hosts who have a low - quality condition of the accommodations, breaking commitments, or low ratings are prohibited in the participation of Airbnb community, which means the efforts of deserving the uncertainty in the transaction [1]. If a buyer-user believes that Airbnb tries to reduce uncertainty of transaction in P2P accommodation more, they will believe that Airbnb hosts are well managed and Airbnb is operated based on the reducing uncertainty, and in turn they incline to form a trust in all sellers. Hence, greater trust in Airbnb should generate greater trust in hosts. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. Trust in Airbnb positively affects the trust in hosts.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

We study the formation of trust to a sharing economy platform and trust to a seller (or a provider, a host) through the perceived fit of the characteristics of users, the platform, and the host. All our measurement items were derived from previous studies. Particularly, constructs for Airbnb characteristics and host characteristics are operationalized as a second-order formative constructs. The five dimensions of Airbnb characteristics are system availability, efficiency, perceived security, contact, and compensation. The items of these constructs are derived from Chiou et al [6] and Yen and Lu [45]. The construct of host characteristics uses six categories: (1) Contact, (2) Contents, (3) Responsiveness, (4) Fulfillment, (5) Compensation, and (6) Authenticity. The items of these constructs were adapted from Chiou et al [6], Yen and Lu [45], Ramkissoon and Uysal [32], and Tam and Oliveira [36]. Scales for the perceived fit were adapted from Deitz et al. [7]. Lastly, this study adapted items from Verhagen et al. [40] for trust in Airbnb and trust in hosts. The responses will be rated on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly agree.

A survey will be implemented by people who have used Airbnb in a previous year via online in September, 2016. Respondents will complete a self-administered questionnaire. For analysis, this study will use questionnaires eliminating inconsistent responses.
To data analysis, this study will chose the structural equation modeling using Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. The PLS technique is a proper method for a small size sample, formative and reflective indicators, and insufficient theoretical support [5]. The research model in this study includes two formative second-order constructs (Airbnb and Host characteristics). Thus, this study will analyze the data using PLS technique.

The procedure of analysis will be as follows: (1) To report descriptive statistics using SPSS; (2) To examine the measurement model for convergent and discriminant validity suggested by Fornell and Larcker [10] and Hair et al. [14]; (3) To evaluate the structural model for describing paths.

5. EXPECTED CONCLUSION
The sharing economy is a phenomenon where the access right to properties of the peers is shared with other peers, and is the most rapidly developing phenomenon. Among them, P2P accommodation is the type where people stay at other people’s houses or accommodations to gain economic benefits of cheap prices, social benefits of communicating with hosts, and local authenticity such as being local people [2, 13, 39]. Since P2P accommodation is traded with strangers, it always tries to build and maintain trust [9, 20].

The main aims of this study are to figure out the consumers’ trust in the sharing economy. This study conceptualized the platform and host characteristics, the perceived fit, and trust in the platform and in hosts from the viewpoints of fit theory and trust transfer. To illustrate research purposes, this study focuses on whether the perceived fit affected by the characteristics of the platform and of hosts leads to trust in the platform and in hosts.

The findings will demonstrate that the user’s perception about the characteristics of host and the platforms have a positive effect on the perceived fit in the experience of P2P accommodation. In addition, the effect of the perceived fit on the trust in the Airbnb and trust in the hosts also may examine. Lastly, our results will confirm the trust transfer from Airbnb to hosts.

Based on the expected results, this study will extend research on the sharing economy theoretically. Though existing researches have emphasized the importance of trust [20], they have tended to focus on Airbnb trust, ignoring trust in hosts. In building trust, they have not dealt with whether platform’s characteristics and host’s characteristics fit their own characteristics. This research tried to reduce such a gap in existing research and applies a theoretical combination of the perceived fit theory and trust transfer, which explains trust building when people are using the P2P accommodation. This study is expected to extend the comprehending of the sharing economy.

Furthermore, this study makes practical contributions for the P2P accommodation. Our findings will suggest that buyer-users’ trust of P2P accommodation is formed when the fitness between the platform and characteristics of seller-users increases. This research predicts that the perceived fit form in such a way will build trust in Airbnb and trust in hosts, and the former will be transferred to the latter. Such predicted findings will confirm the importance of perceived fit. Our findings will imply that not only function of the platform, but host characteristics should be maintained precisely in P2P accommodation. Although this study focused on two players such as a host and Airbnb, other critical factors such as location- and service-based characteristics [11] in accommodation decisions will be considered to understand sharing economy for the future study.

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