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THE IMPACT OF THE SHARING ECONOMY ON TOURIST ACCOMMODATION PREFERENCES: A CASE STUDY OF SPAIN

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Abstract. This study aims to examine tourists’ preferences between traditional hotel accommodations and rental options like Airbnb, Vrbo, and HomeAway in Spain. The research will explore the key factors shaping these preferences within the framework of the sharing economy, focusing on aspects such as cost-effectiveness, convenience, location, safety, and overall experience. Ultimately, the research will contribute to the broader understanding of how the sharing economy is reshaping the global tourism industry, offering both opportunities and challenges for traditional and alternative accommodation providers. Additionally, it will assess the impact of cultural and regional differences, shedding light on whether international visitors and domestic tourists prioritise different aspects when selecting accommodations. The study’s conclusions may also inform marketing strategies, tourism infrastructure development, and regulatory policies aimed at balancing the needs of tourists, local communities, and service providers in an increasingly competitive and diversified marketplace.

Key words: sharing economy, C2C, accommodation, Airbnb, Spain

Introduction. The rise of the sharing economy has brought notable transformations to the tourism industry, especially in the accommodation sector. Platforms such as Airbnb, Vrbo, and HomeAway have challenged traditional hotel markets by providing tourists with alternative lodging choices. This study aims to explore these shifting preferences and their impact on the tourism industry within the sharing economy framework. Spain, known for its developed tourism infrastructure and innovative approaches, serves as an ideal setting for this research. The findings will offer valuable insights to guide tourism strategies in other countries, particularly Uzbekistan, in creating a more dynamic and competitive tourism sector.

Dolnicar, S. argues that the exchange of goods between non-commercial individuals (“ordinary” people) is not a new concept. Historically, people used public notice boards or classified ads in local newspapers for such transactions. Today, the internet has become the preferred platform, significantly improving the efficiency of these exchanges. Among these, the online trading of space has garnered the most attention. However, this is not “sharing” in the sense of the “sharing economy,” as buyers are paying for temporary access to someone’s space. Likewise, it is not “collaborative consumption,” since no joint effort or collaboration is involved in the process [4].

Gössling, S., & Hall, C. M. note that in recent years, digital platforms have become key players in the global sharing economy, transforming corporations like Airbnb, Booking, and TripAdvisor into intermediaries that control and profit from most transactions. This paper focuses on the accommodation sector and conceptualises the sharing economy in relation to the broader collaborative economy.

It examines the social, economic, environmental, and political impacts of both models, particularly in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. The study concludes that while the sharing economy has significant potential to contribute to sustainability, it is increasingly being supplanted by the collaborative economy, which accelerates and extends neoliberal economic practices [5].

Basic theoretical and practical provision. Tourists are not merely passive elements within their environments; rather, they are active participants who shape and create their social experiences. As co-creators of their individual journeys, the value they perceive arises not from a specific product or object, but from the experience of consumption itself. This concept of co-creation is grounded in service-dominant logic, which posits that value is realized only when consumers engage with the service that a product is intended to deliver, as mentioned by Amore, A., de Bernardi, C., & Arvanitis, P. [2].

According to Zhang, G., Cui, R., Cheng, M., Zhang, Q., & Li, Z., if consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions develop into relationships, their impact on consumer behaviour could be significantly deeper. Additionally, individuals possess varying motivations, personalities, interpersonal skills, past experiences, and other personal differences that can influence their travel behaviour and participation in activities. This highlights the importance of the social dimension in examining tourist behaviour [16].

A significant portion of growth, as noted by Hall, C.M., Prayag, G., Safonov, A., Coles, T., Gössling, S., Koupaei N., in the sharing or platform economy is fuelled by peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation providers like Airbnb. Existing literature presents arguments for both the positive and negative socio-cultural, economic, and environmental effects arising from tourism and hospitality businesses reliant on Airbnb and similar online platforms. These impacts include competition with traditional business models (such as hotels, motels, and bed-and-breakfasts) and their influence on tourist and visitor flows. Additionally, the spatial effects of these accommodations have led to considerable community opposition against Airbnb in certain destinations [8].

Adamiak, C. notes that there have been high expectations for the sharing economy to establish a new business model centered around peer-to-peer (P2P) exchanges of underutilized assets. This model was anticipated to greatly contribute to sustainability by creating new entrepreneurial opportunities, promoting more sustainable resource use, and fostering consumer cooperation within tight economic networks. However, in recent years, digital platforms have emerged as the dominant players in the global sharing economy, transforming corporations like Airbnb, Booking, and TripAdvisor into intermediaries that control and profit from the majority of transactions [1].

According to Baute-Díaz, N., Gutiérrez-Taño, D., & Díaz-Armas, R. J., the digitalization of the economy has reduced the distance in economic exchanges between service providers and their users, significantly impacting value and supply chains, capital structure and concentration, and the associated market power. This transformation has also altered the nature of service provision [3].

Travelers are motivated by a desire for deeper social interactions with locals and unique experiences in authentic environments, leading them to travel more frequently, extend their stays, and engage in a greater variety of activities. Additionally, lower accommodation costs enable travelers to explore destinations, trips, and tourism activities that would typically be beyond their financial reach. The study also offers insights for tourism planning and management [13].

Guttentag, D mentioned that the principles of disruptive innovation are applied to analyse Airbnb's innovative business model, which leverages modern internet technologies. Airbnb's unique appeal lies in its cost savings, home-like amenities, and the opportunity for more genuine local experiences. However, despite its increasing popularity, many Airbnb rentals violate short-term rental regulations and are therefore considered illegal [7].

Instead, paid online peer-to-peer accommodation trading involves a non-commercial provider (host) offering space for short-term stays directly to an end user (guest). While numerous companies have tried to effectively facilitate this type of trading, only three—Airbnb, HomeAway, and Booking.com—have emerged as major global players in the market, as discovered by Gutiérrez, J., García-Palomares, J. C., Romanillos, G., & Salas-Olmedo, M. H. [6].

According to Phua, V. C., regardless of how it is defined, the rise of globally dominant platform-based intermediaries like Airbnb, Booking.com, and Uber has fundamentally transformed interactions and relationships among participants in the tourism system. This shift has been notably disruptive, with Airbnb frequently regarded as having one of the most significant impacts on the accommodation sector and various destinations [10].

Attitudes towards peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation can be categorized into two groups. The first group views P2P accommodation as a threat to tourism. This perspective is generally supported by the accommodation sector and governments, which criticize P2P models for creating unfair competition, undermining job security, evading taxes, and posing safety risks (Juul, 2015). Conversely, start-ups and travelers tend to have a more positive outlook on P2P accommodation, emphasizing its potential to create employment opportunities, offer affordable lodging, and encourage longer stays for tourists, as noted by Salar Kuhzady, Siamak Seyfi & Luc Béal. [12].

Quattrone, G., Kusek, N. & Capra, L. A., note that despite its benefits, the sharing economy faces several challenges. Trust and safety concerns can emerge when strangers engage with one another and share personal spaces or services. Regulatory compliance is another issue, as the sharing economy disrupts traditional industries and frequently operates in a legal grey area. Additionally, it has been criticized for worsening socio-economic inequalities and potentially displacing certain workers and businesses [11].

Evaluation of research results. The research was conducted over several months in 2024 in Spain, covering cities such as Girona, Lloret de Mar, Calella, Mataro, Barcelona, Sitges, Salou. Respondents were selected based on several factors, such as being active travelers, age, cultural background, geographic location, and so on. The main target of the research was people aged over 18 years old, who frequently travel and visit new places, and who are familiar with the concept of the sharing economy. Respondents were provided with an online survey. Hypotheses of the research are as follows: Tourists' preferences between traditional hotels and rental accommodations in the sharing economy are shaped by a combination of factors, including cost, convenience, flexibility, cultural preferences, and perceived authenticity. These factors vary across demographics such as age, income, and nationality. Peer-to-peer platforms, like Airbnb, are increasingly favored due to their adaptability to diverse tourist expectations, especially in terms of personalized experiences, accessibility, and sustainability. For some respondents, printed surveys were provided for added convenience. Approximately 400 surveys were distributed, and 300 responses were received. The research is based on these 300 responses. The questionnaire consisted of the following sections: The first part included demographic questions. The next part focused on travel habits, such as how often respondents travel, the duration of their trips, and the purpose of their travel. The following section asked about preferred types of accommodation and the factors influencing their choice. The subsequent part explored the influence of social media on accommodation choices. The closing section included questions about the sharing economy and its usage. A special section was added for respondents' comments and suggestions, which were used to formulate recommendations at the end of the research.

The research aims to explore the factors influencing tourists' preferences between hotel accommodations and rental options within the sharing economy. Initial findings indicate that both men and women favour rental accommodations, with slightly higher preferences among women (61.1%) compared to men (50%). The study also examined how annual income affects accommodation choices. Participants with annual incomes ranging from €20,000 to €80,000 predominantly preferred rental accommodations over hotels. In contrast, those with annual incomes below €20,000 typically chose hotels. Hostel stays were the least popular option, chosen by only 6.3% of participants, all of whom had incomes under €20,000, which aligns with their financial situation.

Further analysis looked at how nationality influences accommodation choices in Spain. Participants from Spain, France, and the UK provided the most responses. Among them, Spanish participants

showed a strong preference for rental accommodations like Airbnb, with 59.6% favouring this option. French participants followed with a preference of 55% for rental accommodations, while UK participants tended to prefer hotel stays, with 50% choosing this option. Age also played a role in accommodation preferences. Participants aged 18 to 55 were more inclined to choose rental options such as Airbnb, which is expected given that younger travellers often prefer these types of accommodations. The only group favouring hotel stays was participants over 66 years old. The duration of stay did not significantly influence accommodation choices, as most participants still preferred rentals over hotels and hostels. However, the amount participants were willing to spend did have an impact. Those willing to pay more than €200 per night generally preferred hotels, while 70% of participants willing to spend less than €200 opted for rental accommodations. Satisfaction levels were notable, with 57% of participants who had stayed in rental accommodations expressing satisfaction. Key factors influencing the preference for rentals over hotels included price, location, kitchen availability, service level, convenient booking, and safety. When selecting accommodations, participants prioritized reviews from other guests, descriptions of amenities, and overall accommodation ratings.

See Fig. 1.

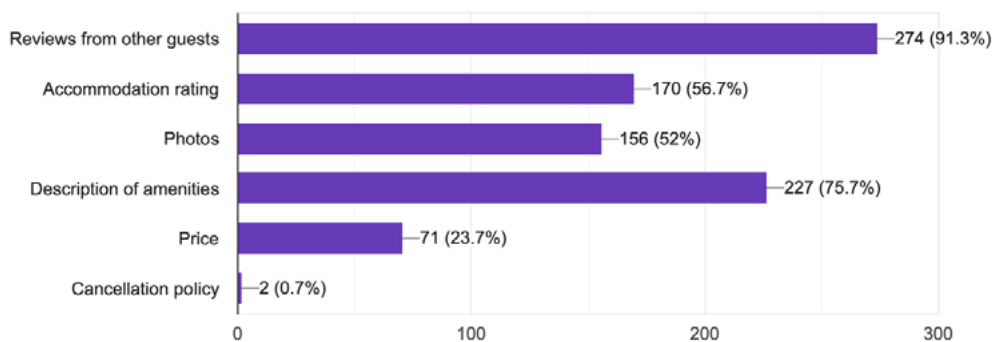


Fig. 1. Information influencing the choice of accommodation (by the authors)

The main question was whether participants, after their experience, would use rental accommodations again or plan to use them in the future. 55.8% of participants (aged 18–55) are willing to use rental accommodations in the future. The other group of participants, aged between 56 and above, shows slightly different statistics. In this group 60.9% of respondents are positively looking towards future experiences.

See Fig. 2.

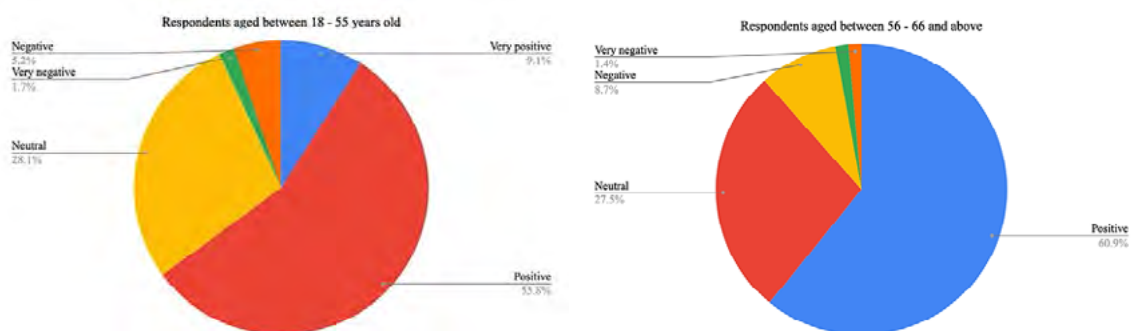


Fig. 2. Willingness of participants to use rental accommodation in the future (by the authors)

As clearly shown in the figure, participants are positively inclined towards C2C rental accommodation options and happy to use them. Based on the comments and suggestions provided by participants during the research, the authors have proposed several recommendations to improve the market situation. These recommendations include:

- Offer multilingual customer service and materials to cater to international tourists.
- Implement a mobile app or platform that provides real-time updates on bookings, local events, and emergencies.
- Encourage guests to participate in a “clean stay” program with incentives for maintaining cleanliness during their stay.
- Invest in advanced security systems, including surveillance cameras and secure access controls in accommodations.
- Collaborate with local law enforcement to ensure a visible presence and quick response capabilities.
- Equip rentals with smart home devices (e.g., smart locks, thermostats, lighting) for enhanced convenience and security.
- Ensure rental agreements include a detailed breakdown of all costs, including utilities and maintenance fees, to avoid hidden charges.
- Provide detailed listings that include descriptions, amenities, and nearby attractions with high-quality images.
- Offer virtual tours of accommodations to give potential guests a realistic view of the space.
- Explore dynamic pricing strategies that adjust rates based on demand, seasonality, and booking trends.
- Encourage guests to share their own photos and experiences, showcasing the reality of the accommodations.
- Establish a routine maintenance schedule for all amenities to ensure they are in excellent working condition.
- Provide options for guests to upgrade amenities (e.g., premium bedding, kitchen appliances) for an additional fee.

Conclusion. This study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing tourists’ preferences between traditional hotels and rental accommodations within the sharing economy in Spain during the summer of 2024. The findings suggest that rental platforms like Airbnb, Vrbo, and HomeAway are increasingly favored by tourists, particularly those aged 18– 55 and those with middle-to-high annual incomes. Key factors driving this preference include cost-effectiveness, location convenience, kitchen availability, and service flexibility, with women showing a slightly higher inclination towards rentals than men. Additionally, Spanish and French participants showed a stronger preference for rentals compared to their UK counterparts, indicating that cultural and regional differences play a role in accommodation choice.

The research highlights the growing importance of peer-to-peer accommodation in tourism, especially as younger generations prioritize authentic, home-like experiences over conventional hotel stays. However, the study also points out challenges that need to be addressed such as safety, service quality, and transparency in pricing. By offering solutions such as multilingual customer support, smart home devices, and virtual tours, rental providers can enhance their appeal and ensure long-term sustainability in the market. These findings are not only relevant to Spain but may also inform tourism strategies in other countries, offering a comprehensive framework for balancing the needs of tourists, local communities, and service providers in the increasingly competitive accommodation sector.

Future research will extend this study to two additional countries, Latvia and Uzbekistan, through similar surveys. The broader scope of this research will allow for a comparative analysis of tourist preferences across different cultural and regional contexts, providing a more comprehensive under-

standing of how the sharing economy impacts diverse tourism markets. This expanded study will offer significant insights into global consumer behavior, helping policymakers and service providers adapt their strategies to meet the evolving demands of both domestic and international travelers.

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