AALBORG UNIVERSITY
CULTURE COMMUNICATION AND GLOBALIZATION
Master Thesis

Pre – trip planning and decision making process
Case of AirBnB

Master Degree in
Culture, Communication and Globalization
Market communication and consumption

Author/s:	Karolina Fetingyte
Assignment:	Master thesis
Supervisors:	Karina M. Smed
Characters:	103 360
Submitted:	31 May 2016

Abstract

The development of information technologies has brought new travelling concepts on the market. Automatically the tourism industry is affected by this revolution of technology and both tourism destinations and enterprises have to adopt all innovative methods in order to enhance their competitiveness among others. One of them is AirBnB. This is a collaborative consumption concept of accommodation where private people are encouraged to share their properties with tourists. Therefore, the focus in this study will be only on the pre-trip planning process.

Hence, the objective of this research is to explore and understand how tourists acquire knowledge in pre-trip planning stage in order to book an accommodation through AirBnB and what kind of influence it gives to their decision making process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is the understanding of pre-trip planning of tourists, who has an access to AirBnB, and how they choose the accommodation by using all the sources. This will help to further understand the complex process of decision making process which is influenced by the new Information technologies.

During thematic analysis of seven in – depth – interviews with tourists who have been using AirBnB services, it appeared that there are four major factors tha is influencing these tourists desicion making process in the pre – trip planning stage. The influential factors are the following: socio-economic, concept, purpose of the trip and personal characteristics. Previous researches have also emphasized on the frist three influential factors and they are stated in the theoretical framework of this study. However, the final influential factor was constructed to the findings only during the process of thematic analysis.

Due to the fact that the study was based on qualitative data and only seven interviewees participated in data collection process, there is no possibility to generate more specific and concrete findings that could be adapted to the majority of the tourists. However, the findings and the information that was gathered during the process of this study can show valuable confirmations in regards to the decision making process that is under the influence of the development of information technologies.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Traveling has been playing an important role in people's lives since as long as we can remember. From the times when traveling meant exploring the world in the ancient times looking for new lands and cultures until now when people travel for their leisure time, business meetings and education. Currently, travel and tourism are taking one of the highest priorities of world's industries and has an important economic impact on the global as well as on the local level (Werthner and Klein, 1999). As well as other industries, tourism is developing very fast and new trends are being applied in order to improve the availability of information and tourism products as accommodation, different activities and etc.

In this industry, knowledge is factor of quality of the travelling experience, therefore information search is one of the crucial steps when tourists start planning, booking and being on vocation (Steinbauer and Werthner, 2007, p. 65-76). During the last few years, Information Technologies (IT) has been strongly affected by changes and especially the Internet. It became accessible to most of the people due to several factors like becoming smaller, portable, easier to handle and generated various functions. The current hardware, software and network are developed with a high degree of innovation and even though all technologies are becoming more powerful and complicated, the final product is becoming more user-friendly and less expensive to consumers. Therefore, this enables more consumers both in Business to Business and Business to Consumer to take advantage of the new technologies. Tourist rely on various websites and mobile applications to plan their holidays and organizations in this industry relies on the new technologies to communicate their message and reach tourist through as many channels as they can in order to market their products and build the relationship with current and potential customers (Poon 1993). Therefore, the Internet became one of the most effective and efficient ways for tourist to seek information, plan and book all the products they need for their vocations. (Werhner and Klein, 1999).

If we look back to information search process, people always had different channels and they tent to use a combination of several information sources in order to plan their trips and make decisions (Snepenger, 1990). Therefore, the trip planning process can start from talking with family or friends, reading various literature, consulting with travel centers and travel agents (Kendall and Booms, 1989). Hence, it can be argued that multiple tourism information sources were used during the process of decision making in travelling. During the last few years, this rather static way of trip planning have changed due to the new technologies wich opened up more dynamic possibilities and tourist do not need to rely on other people to plan their trips.

Automatically the tourism industry is affected by this revolution of technology and both tourism destinations and enterprises have to adopt all innovative methods in order to enhance their competitiveness among others. If looking to the demand side – travelers – become familiar with the new technologies very fast. These consumers are knowledgeable and demanding all about the new ways of searching for information. It has to be fast and easy. Therefore, companies have to put great effort to be on point and catch the consumer's eye at the right time in order to get his attention.

As one of the technological outcomes the new phenomenon has emerged – sharing economy. Currently, this phenomenon has several names, such as "collaborative consumption, "product-service systems" or "access-based consumption" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Molt, 2002; Botsman and Rogers, 2010). According to Rachel Botsman, who together with her co-writer, Roo Rogers popularized sharing economy with the book "What's mine is yours" (2010)," the space is getting blurry and the definitions are being bent out of shape to suit different purposes". Further, Botsman (2010) argues that some of the definitions might have different meanings as "collaborative economy" is just an overall term, and it can be defined as an economy which is build on distribution of networks that are connected by various individuals or communities in opposition to centralized institutions. This transforms production, consumption, financing and learning. "Collaborative consumption" could be seen as a sub-category or an economic model which is based on sharing, swapping, trading or renting products and services.

Further, Belk (2014) has another, easier definition, which is able to sum up the whole essence of this rising new phenomenon: "collaborative consumption is people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation" and the ground that "collaborative consumption" is able to occupy is rather a middle ground in between of sharing and creating a market place.

The attention of consumer researchers to several groups of businesses and consumption practices of "collaborative consumption" corresponds to the rise of for-profit and non-profit businesses that are booming and all thanks to the rise of this phenomenon. As an example of businesses that fit the description of "collaborative consumption" are AirBnB, YouTube, Facebook, Uber and Twitter. In a broad perspective, the Internet itself might be defined as a place filled with shared content that could be accessed by anybody in any place of the world who has the Internet connection.

Therefore, in order to be more specific about what "collaborative consumption" actually is, there is a necessity first to dismiss two miss-specifications. Felson and Speath (1978) define collaborative consumption as "those events in which one or more persons consume economic goods or services in the process of engaging in joint activities with one or more others". This could include examples of speaking on the telephone or drinking beer with friends.

When going back to tourism industry, "collaborative consumption" is starting to adopt both for-profit and non-profit organizations and it is currently spreading all around the world. Specifically in this industry, "collaborative consumption" is flourishing and companies like AirBnB, Homeaway and Uber are developing scalable business models and platforms that empowers private people to distribute and share the access of accommodation or transportation with others. However, in this study I will focus only on one "collaborative consumption" concept - AirBnB as a tourism product - accommodation.

The beginning of this significant transformation in the tourism accommodation sector started in 2007, San Francisco. It all started from an idea of two recent graduates to create a simple website to advertise their apartment because a huge conference was held in town and there was a great demand of accommodation. The website was names as "AirBed and Breakfast" and it promoted their apartment. After it was a success, they felt that a great business idea is in front of them and decided to recruit another friend in order to turn a

website into a service for more people who wants to advertise their apartment or rooms for tourists. Since 2007, AiBnB has grown extremely fast and now is booking millions of rooms or apartment all around the world (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Still, AirBnB as business concept is relatively new and there is a lack of academic research done about this phenomenon which is increasing its significant service. However, given its potential, Airbnb's rise is of great significance for the traditional tourism accommodation sector and opens up new travel planning options for consumers. Tourists have new and more dynamic platforms to choose their accommodation which can be placed in any part of the city or region. This kind of concept opens up more possibilities to experience something new every time.

All the new technologies have created these latest concepts of accommodation and expanded the ways of how people search for information. Therefore, the information search process is representing initial steps in the decision making process for the most of the travelers (Molina and Esteban, 2006). This has an important role when it comes to the influential factors for tourists' purchases, decisions and behavior. Now people have even more ways of where to look for information, how to look it and when to make a final decision. As it is relatively new concept, marketers need to know how consumers find information now in order to be in those places at the right time.

In this study, the focus will be on the pre-trip planning stage. It is a very complex process requiring travelers identify, filter, evaluate and select a massive amount information (Fesenmaier and Jeng, 2000) in order to develop a travel plan and specifically in this study - choose the accommodation. The understanding of pre-trip planning of tourists, who has an access to AirBnB, and how they choose the accommodation by using all the sources, will help to further understand the complex process of decision making process which is influenced by the new Information Technologies. It could be argued that travelling stages cannot be separated and has to be analyzed together, however, I believe that in this case, when the accommodation issue is being analyzed, the greater importance is only on the pre – trip planning. This is the stage where people decide and usually purchases the accommodation.

Hence, the following problem statement that will be studied in this thesis is:

How the accessibility of Airbnb in influencing tourists' decision making in the pre-trip planning process when purchasing accommodation?

Therefore, the objective of the study is to explore and understand how tourists acquire knowledge in pre-trip planning stage in order to book an accommodation through AirBnB and what kind of influence it gives to their decision making process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is exploratory and designed to investigate and generate a new level of understanding about relatively new phenomenon.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the impact that accessibility of Airbnb has to pre-trip travel planning process in this chapter I discuss various studies and theories relevant to the topic which are providing a framework for data collection and analysis. Therefore, the question is: which theories should be included in order to answer all the questions of this study. As Costley (2006) stated "a theory is an orderly, integrated set of statements that describes, explains and predicts behavior". The theories that are chosen in this study not only guide the research (for ex. Interview questioner) it is also easier for me as a researcher to keep focused and stay on the right path while conducting the further parts of the study.

Moreover, the framework helps me to have information about the topic, what is already known and what are the further possibilities that could be explored. Therefore, theoretical framework could be explained as a lens which gives the meaning to what we see (Costley, 2006).

The theoretical framework of this thesis is used for its descriptive and explanatory function and variety of studies and theories have been used to grasp the complex process of consumer travel behavior and decision making process in the stage of pre – trip planning.

The main perspective of the theoretical framework is based on the concept of consumer behavior in tourism and will be as a connecting link in the further studies and theories. There will be three other branches out from the consumer behavior that are closely related 1) tourism product; 2) information search; 3) decision making process.

All these topics together should provide a framework that gives me a deeper understanding about the research topic. The following figure illustrates the main parts and their interaction with each other.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework
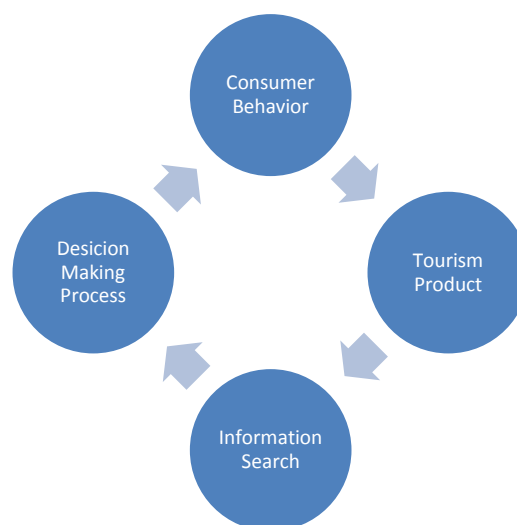
Source: Own production

2.1. Consumer Behavior

In the current times, we can see a lot of changes and especially in the new emerging technologies such as Internet. Therefore, the methods and tools of doing business are changing. One could argue that currently the Internet could be considered as one of the technologies which have the biggest influential impact to the consumers' behavior. Hence, this is making it a crucial factor when it comes to understanding of consumers' behavior and new perceptions. It is needed in order to first recognize, then captive and finally retain the customer in the internet based businesses in the travel industry. Therefore, in this study I focus on analyzing the factors which are influencing the consumer behavior while making decision about their travel accommodation choices.

When looking into relationship between online tourism services and consumer behavior, previous studies have conducted theories that are basically developed in order to have a better understanding of consumer's decisions and behavior. They all have the same goal to find out the main principles that guides consumers' behavior and help to follow those practical implementations. All of it is done in order to give advices and create predictions of the influences that are caused in consumers' behavior (Kroeber-Riel & Weinberg, 1999). After looking into consumers' behavior in tourism, it could be seen that electronic distribution of tourism related information has a huge impact on consumers' behavior. Currently, a lot of tourists are using websites, applications and other tools in order to collect information and purchase various services that are offered in online tourism industry (Nedelea & Alina 2010).

According to Solomon (1996), consumer behavior involves certain decisions, ideas, activities or even experiences that might satisfy their needs and wishes. In other words it could be said that consumer behavior is "concerned with all activities directly involved in obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services, including the decision processes that precede and follow these actions" (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995, p. 4). Therefore, it is clear that consumer behavior is covering a lot of ground and it is a process that involves individuals who buys and uses various products and services in order to satisfy their needs and desires (Solomon, 1996). It is complicated processes and it is even harder to uncover consumers' behavior in a complex industry such as tourism.

There were many models and theories developed since 1965 that analyzes all the steps that consumers are making in tourism industry. One of the earliest models of consumer behavior in tourism was proposed by Andreason (1965). His model highlights the importance of information in the consumer decision making process. In addition to this, it also recognizes the importance of consumer attitudes even though it fails to consider attitudes in relation to the repeat purchases in consumer behavior.

When looking into other consumer behavior theories in tourism, one of the most often mentioned is the Howard-Sheth (1969) model of buying behavior. The main features of this model is that it emphasize on the significance of inputs to the consumer buying process and suggests ways in which consumers orders these inputs even before making the last decision. However, as no model or theory is perfect, there is some criticism to this model too. This model does not elaborate on all buyer behavior.

Therefore, most of the recognized models of consumer behavior in tourism are relatively old and based on old – fashioned ways of travelling; in this case some adaptations will be done in this study. In order to collect and analyze data, I will focus on the model of Travel – Buying – Behavior by Mathieson and Wall (1982). These authors suggested a five-stage linear buying behavior model. It allows seeing consumer behavior activities that can allow me to see each step of the process.

Figure 2. Travel – Buying – Behavior model
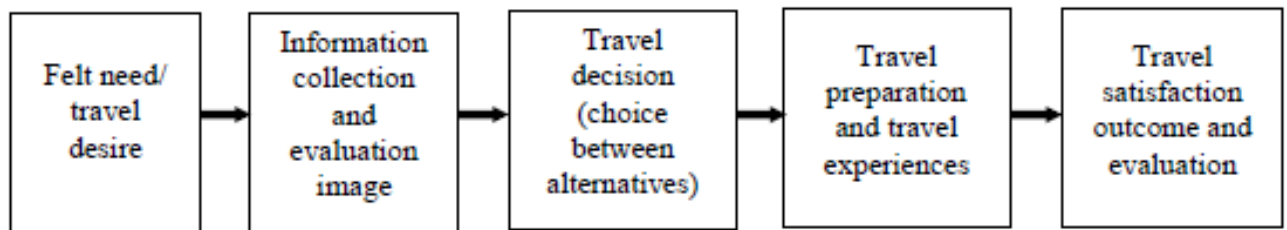
Source: Mathieson and Wall, 1982

When looking into the figure, we can see all five stages of typical buying process in tourism. It is believed that consumer passes all five different stages beginning with a desire to travel and ending with the travel outcomes. As it can be seen in this model, the buying process starts much earlier than the actual purchase and has influence and consequences afterwards (Kotler, 2000, p.178.) In this study only the processes involving pre- trip travel behavior will be analyzed in the process of data collection and analyses as the purpose of the study is to find out the influence of Airbnb to tourist pre-trip planning process. Therefore, I believe that it is important as a researcher to understand all parts of the theory in order be able to produce qualitative interviews and analyze the data collected.

Further, I would like to discuss aspects of all five stages of the model, however only the first four stages (Felt need/travel desire, Information collection and evaluation image and Travel decision, travel preparation) will have a deeper use in this study.

1) Felt need/travel desire

The buying process starts when the consumer recognizes a problem or a need. The need can be triggered by internal and external factors and from this point a consumer starts its travelling planning process.

2) Information collection and evaluation image

When the consumer becomes interested and feels the need to travel, the information search about the product such as destination or plane tickets starts. In this stage, two types of arousals can be separated: 1) heightened attention and 2) active information search. At the first stage a person is becoming more open to information about the product he or she is interested and at the second stage a consumer is interested in gathering all information possible about that product.

Therefore, the information sources have an influence to the final purchase decision. Kotler (2000) argues that these information sources can fall under four groups: personal (friends, family etc); commercial (agents, advertising etc); public (media, review sites etc) and experiential (former use of the product, examining the product etc.) The amount and characteristics of the sources used relies on the personal characteristics of consumer and the type of tourism product.

3) Travel decision/choice between alternatives

This stage is the most complicated and there is no specific process that would apply to all consumers in the purchasing situations. It could be said that there are several stages that are considered in decision making. First, the consumer wants to satisfy his/her need and then secondly, he/she is looking for a concrete benefit from the product solution. Then the consumer is able to see various attributes in different products that would be able to deliver that he/she is looking for. All those factors might vary and it depends on the product. For example when the consumer considers hotels, the decision factors might include location, price, atmosphere (Kotler, 2000, p.180).

4) Travel preparation/travel

This stage includes the rest of the preparation work needed in order to take the trip such as visa arrangements, packing, and information approval about the destination like weather conditions and etc. However, the amount of time that has to be invested in this stage of the planning might vary depending on the several factors like type of destination, how experienced the person is, how long the trip will last (Kotler, 2000, p.181).

5) Travel satisfaction and outcome

The final stage is after the person has purchased the product and is able to evaluate how satisfied or dissatisfied he/she is. Therefore, marketers have a possibility to evaluate the customers' actions after the purchase and the post purchase use of the product and the marketers' job is not finished after the product is sold (Kotler, 2000).

However, in this study I am focusing all the attention to the pre-trip planning stages (the first four stages of the model) due to the fact that I want to investigate the influence of Airbnb accessibility to tourists' decision making process. In addition to this, I am aware that the model was conducted before the new technologies such as Internet had an impact on travel behavior, and I will see if there are any inconsistencies or the model is also suitable with new ways of travelling.

As travel planning is a specific type of consumer information search and can be considered a fundamental component of trip experience in that a traveler often needs to obtain a substantial amount of information in order to develop a travel plan. It can be seen in various researches that pre-trip planning process helps people to make decisions and therefore build expectations for their travels (Gretzel et al., 2006; March and Woodside 2005). In addition to this, these researches are indicating that the information that is available to individual travelers actually has a major impact on different aspects of the decision making process. (Gursoy and McCleary 2004; Bieger and Laesser 2004).

In this case, in order to create an understanding of how travelers have adapted to the Internet and how the availability of new accommodation concepts such as AirBnB is influencing their decision making process. Therefore, travel planning serves as a lens which helps to understand a wide range of travel behaviors.

In this research on travel planning when people are able to use Internet I want to identify the characteristics of the consumers, their process of planning, their information sources, strategies of information search and how do they process all the knowledge and the factors that is influencing the specific behavior to use new platforms of accommodation sources.

2.2. Tourism Product

Tourism as an industry is very complex as it is and has various tourism products and processes that is involving many decisions that consumer has to take and therefore generates diverse and interdependent characteristics. Therefore, in this study I am only focusing on a specific part of this industry – pre – trip planning process and even more specific accommodation. I am interested in finding out what kind of influence AirBnB (Internet technologies) has on tourists' decision making when planning their trips and looking for a suitable accommodation. In order to have a better understanding on how tourism products work, I am looking into a five generic tourism product model which helps to define the different products in tourism industry (Smith, 1994).

This model discusses the relative importance of each element that tourism products have, however, they might vary depending on different types of products and the importance of each of the five elements are diverse but they all incorporate all five. The success of the product might be established by meeting the needs of tourists and how well each element is integrating with others. In order to make the process more clearly, tourism product is not just a simple grouping of all those five elements but rather the result of interaction among those elements.

Figure 3. The Generic Tourism Product

PP = Physical Plant   FC = Freedom of Choice
S = Service   I = Involvement
H = Hospitality
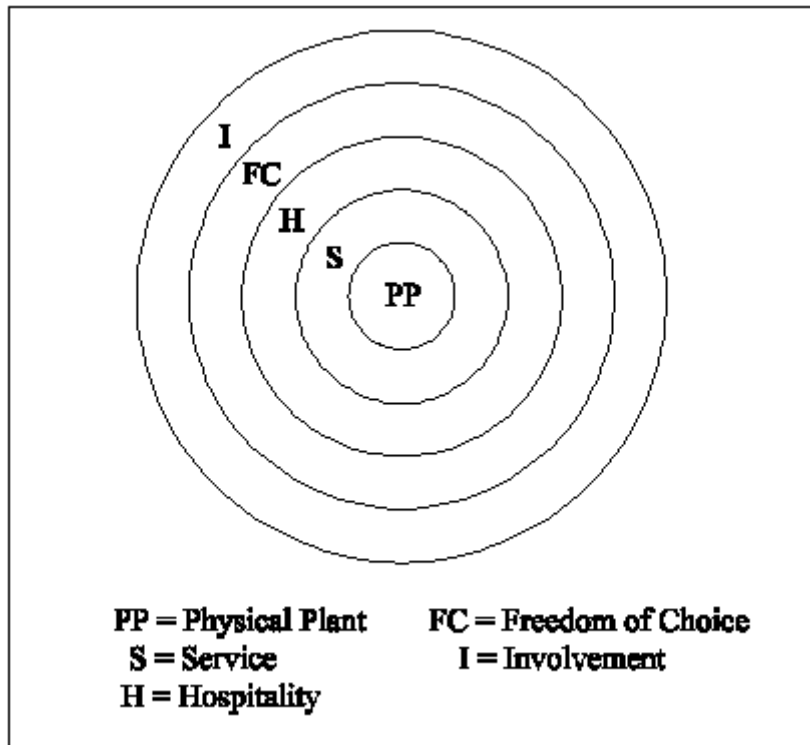
Source: (Smith, 1994)

In the following paragraphs I would like to discuss each of the elements in the generic tourism product.

- Physical Plant

The heart of mostly all tourism products is the physical plant for example a specific site, natural resource, facilities like waterfall, wildlife, resort or specifically in this case the accommodation – apartment/house/villa/room that is possible to rent through AirBnB. Therefore, physical plant might also refer to the physical environment for example weather, infrastructure of tourism conditions, how crowded the city is and etc. Therefore, in order assess the quality of this element, we could look how the design is enhancing the user's positive experience or makes the product accessible to different tourists (Gunn, 1972).

- Service

The second element of the tourism product is the service. Each physical plant requires some kind of service that would make it useful for tourists. In other words it could be said that service is specific tasks that are required to do in order to meet the needs of the tourists who are using the product. For example, a hotel needs management, housekeeping, caterers and receptionists in order to have a functional hotel. In this case AirBnB needs people who rent their properties, website management and maintenance in order to function.

- Hospitality

However, do have great experience, service quality is not enough. As Clemmer (1991) states, consumers now mostly in every field are expecting "something extra" and it is called – hospitality. In order for the product to function it needs various services but in order to create a positive experience those tasks has to be performed with a special attitude and style. In the case of AirBnB, tourist might expect to be welcomed by local people (owners of the place) and introduced to their community, culture, get inside information about the place they are staying.

- Freedom of choice

This element is important for tourists in order to have different options to choose from in order to plan the experience that they would be satisfied with. The need of variety depends on the type of the trip; whether it is for business, pleasure or possibly combination of both. Other factors like budget, knowledge or previous experience also influencing this element. However, despite all of these factors, any tourism product should include several choices for the tourist.

- Involvement

When considering involvement, tourists are participating in the delivery process of product services (Silpakit and Fisk, 1985). Therefore, in order to have a successful participation by consumers in producing specific tourism product there is a need to combine all elements – physical plant, good service, hospitality and freedom of choice and only by doing this people can be involved in travel experience physically, intellectually and emotionally. People have a need to not only be physically involved but also generate the sense of engagement.

As it was mentioned before, not even the industry of tourism is complex but also the tourism product itself and its processes. The whole process starts from choosing a physical plant which is controlled by the planning process. Further, other elements of service, hospitality, freedom of choice and last but not least is personal involvement by the consumer are added in order to generate a successful tourism product. Therefore, in the final analysis, the tourism product itself and the process of getting to that point are inseparable. Therefore, there is a need to understand the nature of the tourism product that is being analyzed in order to have input regarding development of the consumer behavior knowledge.

2.3. Information Search

Travel information process plays an important role in supporting decision making process and product choice in many industries as well as tourism (Bettman 1979; Hwang, Gretzel, and Fesenmaier 2002). In addition to this, travel information is influencing individuals and their decision making and in today's competitive market, and marketing has an objective to provide tourists with right information and at the right time on which they could base their decisions (Crompton 1992; Crotts 1999; Bettman 1979).

In the resent studies, online information search has been discussed as one of the most important determinants and the study of Xiang and Gretzel (2010) states that currently more and more travel specific websites like Tripadvisor.com are becoming more popular among consumers and is providing online travel information. As technologies are changing rapidly, various new possibilities of the Internet are emerging too. Therefore, it is becoming easier for people to generate content and consumers are becoming more powerful in terms of being more freedom of using information. New technologies provides an opportunity for consumers to reach a lot of information by social media, various blogs, review sites in order to collected other peoples' personal experiences about the specific product they are interested in (Xiang & Gretzel 2010).

Therefore, it is stated that the popularity of the Internet has revolutionized the purchase decision making process by improving information search and making it available to the masses (Fodness and Murray, 1997) and it makes it possible for consumers not only to look for information but to compare it as well.

Therefore, in order to understand a complex process of information search, a model of the tourist information search strategy process will be considered in this study (Fodness and Murray, 1999). This model is based on previous consumer researches done by Beatty and Smith (1987), Bettman (1979), Newman (1977) and Moore and Lehman (1980) and etc. This model proposes a framework of information search process that is involving free main forces: contingencies, characteristics and outcomes of the search (Fodness and Murray, 1999). Additionally it provides information search strategies: spatial, temporal and operational (Fodness and Murray, 1998). Therefore, I believe that travel information is a very complex process and there is a lack of academic research done in order to have a full understanding of it. Therefore, this model also has limitations of its own and the links between the concepts of information search behavior are not necessarily in the same order as it shows in the figure. Moreover, there are many various sources to look for information and there is no concrete evidence if it is processed similarly and has an affect on the decision making process.

Figure 4. A model of the tourist information search strategy process
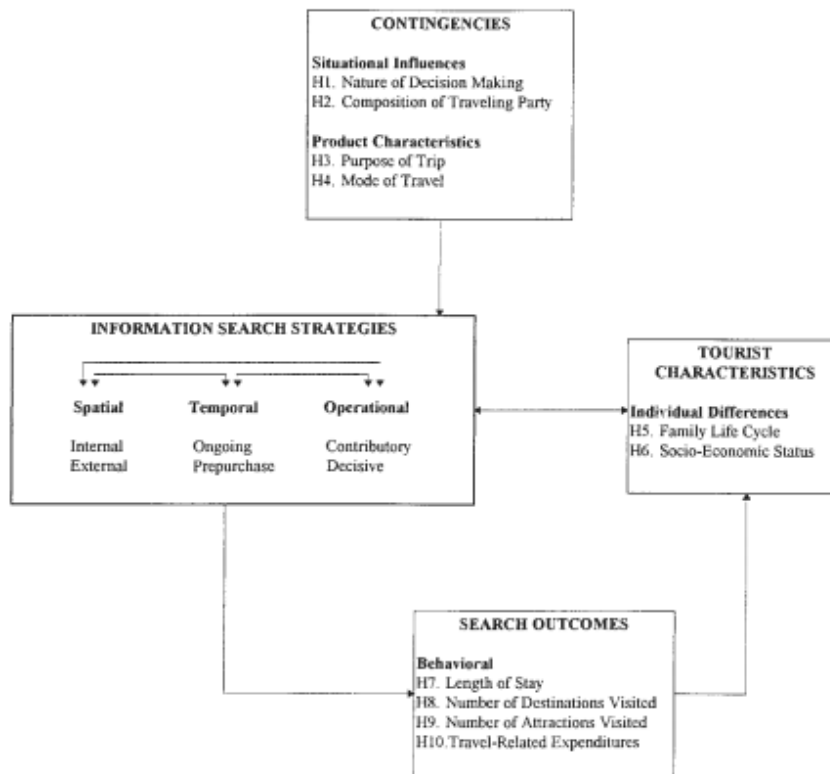
Source: (Fodness and Murray, 1999)

As it was mentioned before, the model suggests three information search strategies. The first is *spatial* dimension. This dimension represents the situation of the information search activity. There are two different ways: 1) Internal – by using current knowledge and the memory and 2) external – looking for information from the environment (Internet, books, people etc.). The second dimension is *temporal* and it represents the timing of the information search activity. It could be an ongoing process. During this process a consumer is collecting the knowledge in advance for not specific future travel decisions. Another one is pre-purchase process and the information search is done in order to solve a current purchase problem.

Finally, the third dimension is *operational*. This dimension is reflecting on the types of information sources used. The contributory sources are a mix of different platforms used in order to collect information such as brochures, travel agents, personal experience, relatives and etc. while the decisive is when only one source of information was used in order to decide of where to go and what to do and etc. (Fodness and Murray, 1999). Therefore, this framework is filling a research gap by incorporating three forces that are driving individual consumers to develop information search strategies that would lead to decision making: contingencies, characteristics and outcomes of the search (Fodness and Murray, 1999).

- Nature of decision making

Consumers might reach a decision of the need to travel simple from the routine of the life, various problem solving behavior (Moutinho, 1987). Therefore, the length of decision making process depends on complexity of the trip.

- Traveling party composition

The social settings and the type of travel (alone, with family, with friends) also influences the type of information search as well as consumer behavior (Stayman and Deshpande 1989). In other words it could be said that consumer behavior is influenced by travelling party and all the activities are influenced by people who travel together (Chadwick 1987).

- Purpose of the trip

It could be argued that the purpose of the trip possibly has the biggest influence on the consumer behavior in tourism (Morrison, 1996). Therefore, four main categories can be separated: business trips, visiting, other personal business and trips for pleasure (Chadwick 1987). However, it can be seen in some researches that mostly the travel purposes are split in two major groups: business trips and leisure trips (Morrison, 1996).

- Mode of travel

The type of travelling is also influencing the travel behavior and therefore requires different types of information sources.

- Family life cycle

Several researches have shown that the family life cycle is related to the consumer behavior are people have different needs in different cycles whether it is a couple, couple with small children or possibly grandparents with grandchildren (Wilkes, 1995).

- Socio-economic status.

The last influencer to information search process in this model is socio-economic statuses. Many studies have proven that people from different social classes have different preferences on the types of travelling, tourism products and activities (Kotler and Armstrong 1995; Morrison 1996).

As in this study, the focus is on the pre-trip planning process of choosing the accommodation, the most relevant stages of this model is the strategy of the information search, contingencies and tourists characteristics as those are the influential factors towards decision making process. In the following chapter I will further discuss the theory behind decision making process when in tourism industry.

2.4. Decision Making Process

Tourism as an industry is very complex and the purchase decision making process is even more complicated due to the fact that it might be strongly influenced by external factors, other people, and change in circumstances and so on. Therefore, simple definitions would not bring us to understanding of these processes and it requires having some academic theories and models in order to analyze this kind of process. However, most of the theories and models used in order to analyze decision making process in tourism have been influenced by other studies that are done outside the tourism industry such as Theory of Planned Behavior or Reasoned Action theory.

Therefore, decision making theories and models that are used in tourism are being criticized by several researchers and they are trying to challenge their assumptions by arguing that because the decisions in this industry comes from unique contexts and those models are not able to capture and unravel this complex process (Hyde and Lawson, 2003). The whole complexity comes from the factor that these decisions involve multiple elements are can be made prior, during the travel (Hyde and Lawson, 2003). Looking in general, most of the consumer behavior in tourism theories and research are based on simple and classic buyer behavior theories where decisions are evolving in simple steps: needs, problem recognition, and search of information, evaluating the alternatives and making a decision to buy a product/service and then generate post-purchase evaluation (Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell 1973). There were several researchers who were inspired by this framework and generated decision making models that suggested the ways of how to uncover the general dynamics of both internal and external factors that is influencing the decision making process that tourist have to take (Moutinho, 1987; Woodside and Lysonki, 1989).

Therefore, there is no unifying theory or model that has been agreed by scholars that would be able to fully explain this complex process of decision making in tourism. But I would question myself, is it possible to grasp some meaningful explanations of consumer behavior in tourism just in a single model or theory? In addition to this, most of the best know theories and models are based on old fashioned factors and are at least fifteen years old. This is a major limitation for a dynamic industry as tourism which is constantly evolving due to technology changes such as the rise of the use of the Internet or even increased popularity of impromptu trips where people make decisions fast and last minute.

However, some of the researchers suggested that decision making process as rational process which is involving multiple stages (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). Many scholars were representing this principle in their studies that was based on the original models proposed early in the tourism research history by Howard and Sheth (1969), Engel et al. (1968) and Nicosia (1966) and these three studies were considered to be the grand models of consumer behavior, therefore, many of the later models were based on their findings. For example Information – processing theory has connected several consumer behavior models and developed a theory of decision making process which includes five main stages: 1) recognizing the problem; 2) searching for information; 2) evaluating alternatives and selecting; 4) selecting outlets and purchasing and final step 5) post-purchase process and evaluation (Gabbott and Hogg, 1994; Hawkins et al., 1995; Bettman et al., 1998).

Even thought his model represents hierarchical process of tourists' decision making and it might seem an easy way to look into it however, people are more complex and it is more probable that they would skip some stages, change order of them due to factors such as previous travelling experience, various social influences, level of involvement to the trip and so on. Therefore, due to these factors I believe that it is almost impossible to explain decision making process by models like these. On the other hand, it creates a better understanding and overview of the field that is being studied.

However, in order to create a more clear understanding of decision making process in this study I will look into a framework Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) which was first presented by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) and was further developed by MacInnis, Moorman and Jaworski (1991). This framework suggests that decisions that people make can be mainly influenced by three factors: their motivation, opportunity and ability. In this study I seek to focus on identifying factors that influence consumers' decision making process that leads to renting an accommodation through AirBnB and by applying knowledge from this framework I expect to structure the main influential factors in decision making process. Therefore, the following paragraphs will discuss all those three aspects in more details.

- Motivation

Motivation is one of the factors that are influencing consumer decision making process and the direction of tourist behavior (Bettman, 1979). In order to analyze the motivational factors scholars have used different approaches such as Maslow hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) or expectancy value theory by Lewin (1938) and all those approaches have developed various insights into human behavior. When it comes to motivation, it could be understood as some kind of force that drives people towards specific objective. And in the context of this theory motivation addresses willingness, interest and the desire towards the process of decision making for travelling purposes (MacInnis et al., 1991). Therefore, the higher motivation the more tourists are willing to invest time into information search that has a lot of influence on specific decision making to book an accommodation. In addition to this, it is at high importance to analyze the factors that motivates people to take specific travel decisions in order to be able to sustain customers and businesses.

- Opportunity

The second element in this framework discusses different situations that can either improve or hinder the tourist decision making process. Situational factors such as amount of time, number of distractions, personal economic situation can set the conditions for an individual enables people to take the travel decision and in relation to this study, rent accommodation through different housing platforms.

- Ability

The ability is a factor which determines whether the person has relative skills and proficiencies to perform specific actions in order to solve the problem (Rothchild, 1999). In other words it could be said that the consumers ability is the extent to which they have the necessary resources (for example money, knowledge) to find and use different platforms of accommodation.

In this study, ability is a relative knowledge about the concept of AirBnB and individual freedom to go through travel planning process on their own without a travel agents' help.

During the process of this study, I am aware that this is an extremely complicated process and as Decrop (1999) proposed, tourist are becoming less rational and their information search process is less concentrated and more random, therefore situational variables are in greater importance when analyzing their decision making process. Actually, it can be argued that consumers are enjoying a particular level of risk (Hyde, 2004). To support this, Decrop and Snelders (2005) states that it is possible that there are several decision making processes involved. For example, travel related decisions can be made in several time lines: before the trip (typical decision processes related to the purpose, destination and etc.) and decisions can be made during the trip (where to eat, what to see and etc.). In addition to this, people are very unpredictable and as well as various travel situations and people have to adapt very fast and adapt their decisions for example canceled booking or canceled flight.

3. Methodology

This chapter covers the methodological considerations of this study. It will discuss the philosophy of science as well as the research design and methods for data collection and analysis.

3.1. Philosophy of Science

As it was previously mentioned, the primary goal of this study is to understand and explore the nature of decision making process in tourism industry under affection of accessibility of

AirBnB. According to Guba, (Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1994), a paradigm is "a basic set of believes that guides action" in research. Therefore, the most important part of having a paradigm of the study is not choosing the right one, but the process of following the guidelines of the paradigm that sets your believes (Candy, 1989; Pitman and Maxwell, 1992; Punch, 1998). It could be defined in other words, I would express a paradigm as how people see and interact with for example a specific group of people or action as a researcher. Therefore, this study will be guided by the *constructivist* paradigm. In the following section of this paragraph I will discuss my own approach towards constructivism. Also, in the next part I will elaborate further on different aspects of a constructivist paradigm. In addition to this, I will explain the link of how this paradigm contributes to this study and how constructivism is affecting it.

According some more authors (Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Young and Collin, 2004; Caruana, 2007) a perspective of constructivsm is "a way of interpreting different aspects of social life as they were constructed and given meaning through social processes." In addition to this Caruana (2007) argued that in order to collect knowledge of how people are consuming something, how and why they do it in specific way, there is a need of constant dialect between people.

Therefore, traveling consumption in this case is seen as a social construction, assuming that more than one decision, meaning or purpose is involved in the action of consumption. Consequently, I consider it is most relevant to examine the meaning that people assign to the decision making process while planning their trips from constructivist point of view. In this way, diverse pallet of personal information can be gained which allows me to create a deeper understanding of the research topic. Since I believe that understanding of society and knowledge is build upon social and cultural constructs, this study will be guided by a social constructivist paradigm (Derry, 1999; Young and Collin, 2004).

As the concept of AirBnB is a familiarly new phenomenon, I believe that before introducing specific marketing strategies or public policies, people must understand why and how people plan their travels and how they make decisions regarding accommodation choice. Therefore, social constructivism allows me to create a fuller understanding of people's habits and the influencers on their decision making process, as knowledge is a subject to the social cultural context (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Therefore, by having interviews with people who have used AirBnB services and are familiar with collaborative consumption models I am able to contribute to my existing knowledge and create more. In addition to this, by having people from all over the world, the gathered information contributes to a wider range of meaning and therefore a thicker description of knowledge than including only people from one country and/or within one age group.

3.2. Ontology

When looking into ontological stances of the research it is important to know what it stands for. Ontology itself is questioning what the nature of reality is and what is knowable. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) ontology is "the human being in the world". At the same time Guba and Lincoln states that ontology is what there is that can be known. It could also be said in other words, how do I as a researched see and understand "the reality" that is around me. And natural researchers are ignoring the simple fact that people think and act and are active in constructing their own physical and social realities (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). In opposition to the natural research, the ontological stance of this study is *relativism*. Relativism considers that multiple realities are existing and they are socially constructed (Guba, 1990; Patton, 1990).

Therefore, one could argue that a person is constructing his/her own reality. They are doing it "in relation to his/her beliefs and attitudes" while understanding and experiencing the world Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Guba, 1990). Similarly, Kim (2001), Kukla (2000), Polkinghorne (1989) and Krausz (1982) argue that social constructivists believe that realities are constructed in the course of human activity and as a result, no ultimate reality exists. Furthermore, researchers are discussing that reality can only exist and can be understood after it was constructed by other members of society.

Consequently, there is no wrong or right answer because all understandings might differ from one person to another (Kukla, 2000). Therefore, in this case when research is about travel planning, tourists' lives and behavior can be seen as constructions of multiple realities, where travelling is used as a means to construct their different realities.

In relation to this study, I believe that there cannot be such thing as ultimate truth in people's actions, decisions, meanings and beliefs in regards to their travel planning experiences. Each person can have his or hers own idea about the actions they take when they plan their trip, which can even imply that the same action can take place based on very different motives, intentions and purposes (Denzin, 1983). Hence, in this study I want to explore the possibility of multiple realities that underlie travel planning behavior which hopefully display diversity of meanings. Therefore, the reality in this case can be interpreted in many ways and it is influenced by socio – cultural dimensions (Guba, 1990). In other words, both me as a researched and interviewees that I have been studying in this research are a part of the constructions of these multiple realities. Moreover, different realities are constructed through the whole process of the research and they are caused by cultural and social inequalities, and the interaction between me and researched people.

Consequently, how people are planning their trips and accommodation and how it is affected by AirBnB might be a consequence of cultural, social and technological influences. The interaction between the researcher and the researcher in relation to constructions of knowledge will be discussed in the next chapter. In addition to this, the knowledge of the informants about their travel planning processes is interpreted by me and indirectly my beliefs, opinions and academic knowledge. As a result of the interaction between me and the interviewees, the gathered knowledge is created with meanings from both sides.

3.3. Epistemology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) epistemology is questioning "the nature of the truth". In addition to this, Guba (1990) has framed it as "what is the nature of the relationship between the knower (inquirer) and the known (or knowable)". If we put it in simpler definition it could be said "how do I know the world?"(Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

In the further literature, Packer and Goucoechea (2000) argued that epistemology is simply the systemic justification of knowledge. It means that we are giving grounds for how we know the reality. If looking into positivist paradigm, it is linked to a subject-object dualism. Whereas, "a constructivist paradigm is associated with an interactive monism that is relating to the subjective position" as it is in this study (Lincoln, 1990). Further, Lincoln (1990) elaborates on the interactivity. He recognize the interaction between researcher and the researched, and this lead to the teaching and learning process and knowledge can only emerge from this interaction between people. As a result, both I as a researcher, and the person interviewed become part of this construction of knowledge about the travel planning behavior. Therefore, my thoughts, emotions, knowledge, experience and that of the participants will have an influence on all the stages of this study and will finally influence the end result (Lincoln, 1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Bryman, 2008).

In this study, qualitative research is an instrument in order to collect the data; it is rather difficult to detach the influence of researcher to the data collection process and its interpretations. However, as a constructivist, I do not see it as my goal to exclude this influence from the process. I as a researcher see knowledge as a construction between me and the people who participated in the process of this thesis.

Therefore, I believe that researcher and the researched in this study are not two separate entities but rather both are participating in the study process and therefore are constructing and building the knowledge together. During the interviews the knowledge is created by the informants expressing their experience and beliefs about travel planning and all this information is interpreted by me. Therefore, as a result of this interaction, the knowledge that is gathered is created with meaning from both sides. One could argue that this kind of processes would make it impossible to generalize the findings, and it is true. However, it is not my goal of this study to generalize decision making process of tourist while choosing the accommodation. In this study I seek to explore people's understandings of their reality in order to deconstruct this complex process of decision making in tourism and create a diverse knowledge about the meaning people create regarding travel planning under the influence of new accommodation search concepts.

3.4. Methods

Methodology is discussing more practical stances of the study and is concerned about the question of "how should the inquirer go about finding knowledge?" (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994'). Therefore, in this study the ontological relativist standpoint meaning that multiple realities are existing and they are socially constructed. Also, the epistemological subjectivist stance when knowledge is created by both me as a researcher and researched people. These both stances are influencing how I approach methodology and how I collect the information. Therefore, in line with social constructivist paradigm and exploratory aim of this research, the qualitative study is conducted.

On one hand Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue that qualitative research might have different meaning in various points of the history. On the other hand, they also provide a quite general definition that is able to describe in detail all the steps followed by such an inquiry: "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of interpretations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

Furthermore, Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that qualitative methods can also be used in order to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about "which little is yet known". In addition to this, they state that qualitative methods can provide complex details about the phenomenon that would be rather difficult to obtain using quantitative methods. Therefore, in this study, qualitative methods are generating a better understanding of people's experiences while planning their travels and explore the influential factors on their decision making process.

3.5. Data Collection

One could argue that data collection process is the base of the whole research as it plays an important role of gathering the necessary knowledge. As this study is based on qualitative methods, the data collection process relies on in-depth interviews. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) states, this type of interviews would be more comparable to informal conversations. Therefore, during these conversations, mine as a researched task is to uncover the interviewees' views while respecting the way of how they frame and structure their responses (p. 101) by exploring few general topics. In addition to this, Kvale (1996) is suggesting that these types of interviews are like a daily conversation between people that aims to learn about small pieces of the surroundings, about the world.

When having this in consideration, it might seem that interviewing requires no special skills or tools in order to conduct this type of qualitative interview. Nevertheless, in order to conduct interviews that would provide relative and useful information and to do it in an ethical way is not the same as a small talk with your friend or neighbor. It is important to choose the people, who would be able to uncover the issue that you are studying, have relative experience. For example in this study, I needed people who has a passion to travel and are into new concepts of doing it, specifically that they would have tried AirBnB services. In addition to this, me as a researcher need to generate topics and questions for discussion that would encourage interviewees to feel free and talk about their experiences in the way that I would be able to cash details related to the research question.

The main advantages of interviews are the ability to respond to people and their answers in order to get to know more details, uncover their opinions and understand their way of thinking. In addition to this, among the advantages are the quality of the data due to the possibility of immediate follow up and clarifications. However, interviewing includes some limitations and weaknesses (Marshal and Rossman, 2006, pp. 101-102). One of the limitations of the qualitative interviews could be participants who might not be comfortable of sharing the points what I as interviewer intends to explore or even might not be truthful.

Furthermore, in contrary to quantitative research methods such as questionnaires or surveys, qualitative methods are able to give me a possibility to examine why people behave the way they do (Gorman and Clayton, 2005). And in relation to this study, I tried to create and interpret the knowledge through qualitative interviewing and uncover the decision making process of planning the accommodation for participants travels and how AirBnB is affecting their travelling habits.

The interview guide was conducted with 16 main questions that were separated in three stages of interviewing: travelling, trip planning, accommodation (Airbnb) (see Appendix 1). I have formulated the questions in a manner that it would help to encourage the interviewees to feel and speak freely; I guided them through an interview with just as little prompting as possible. In addition to the main questions, follow up questions like "Why?" or "Why not?", "Could you tell me more about this…?" and etc. These questions and follow up reactions to what people said were addressed in order to get more knowledge and uncover their true meanings.

However, these questions are not in the interview guide due to the fact that they occurred during the conversation and it differs from person to person but they could be found in the transcripts and recordings of the interview conversations. Furthermore, in some interviews, I have changed the order of the questions so it would fit the participants' directions of discussion as I wanted to uncover the participants' view of the topic with as less as possible influence of mine perspective. However, the order of the three stages of the interview sections was kept throughout all interviews.

In addition to this, while conducting more interviews over time of this study, more relevant knowledge was created and a continuous process of redesigning the interview guide was kept in order to ask the most relevant questions from other interviewees. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) argues that qualitative interviewing is an iterative process and each time when the researcher repeats the process of gathering data, analyzing and filtering it, the researcher comer closer to a clear view of the studied topic (pp. 46-47).

The selection of participants was a hard process during this study as the criterion was that all the individuals studied have used accommodation platform Airbnb. The access to those people was gained through an online platform trustpilot.com. Trustpilot.com is consumer review platform, which enables people to review any kind of business and it is a core idea of this concept. These reviews help people to be informed and make decisions when shopping or booking online. Therefore, I was able to find reviews of people who have booked accommodation via AirBnB and commented not about the platform itself, but the service they got.

The participants were selected based on the amount of reviews they had and people contacted all had more than 5 reviews. This was needed to know if they are active users of Trustpilot.com. It was expected that they will reply in a short period of time due to their active memberships on the platform. Another reason was that I assumed that they would be able to communicate their experiences due to their personal interest in traveling and detailed reviews provided for AirBnB services.

The first contact with reviewers was via private messages on Trustpilot.com. There were 193 reviewers contacted with a message that included details on the topic and purpose of the study along with an invitation to have a Skype conversation. In total only 19 people responded and 11 of them were able only to answer my questions in regards to this topic via email and 8 people confirmed that they would be able to have a Skype interview. As the purpose of the study is to explore and understand a complex process of decision making, only participants who agreed to have Skype interviews were further taken into consideration. I believe that written Interviews would not provide a necessary in-depth knowledge in regards to this topic. Also, this type of interview would not allow me to have an immediate follow up to interviewer's answers. However, only 7 interviews were conducted after successfully confirming the final details of the interview: dates, Skype ID and hour.

It is discussed by several authors (Kvale, 1992, Bryman, 2008; Baker and Edwards, 2012) how many interviews are enough in order to have a sufficient amount of data.

How many interviews should be conducted is discussed by several authors (e.g. Kvale, 1992; Guest et al., 2006; Bryman, 2008; Baker and Edwards, 2012). Kvale (1992: 19) suggests to

"interview so many subjects that you find out what you need to know". Looking from constructivist point of view, where people are able to construct their own realities, it means that every person is unique and it contributes with knowledge to the research topic.

Therefore, my aim is to not have a specific amount of interviews conducted but rather conduct as many as I can in order to explore the travel planning process when it comes to accommodation search. In the table below, you can see an overview of the interview participants.

Table 1. Interviewees' overview

Name	Demographic information	Occupation
Amelia	27 years old, lives in Vienna, originally from Slovakia	3rd year Psychology student, Makeup artist.
Andrew	30 years old, British, London	IT consultant
Camil	29 years old, British, Liverpool	Public Relations
Christina	25 years old, Danish, Horsens	Project Leader
John	30 years old, British, London	Architect
Maria	28 years old, Russian, Moscow	Project Manager
Neta	27 years old, Spanish, Aarhus	BA in Global Nutrition and Health; Blogger

Source: Own production

Because of the fact that most of the participants were situated in different parts of the world, Skype was considered to be the most suitable way of conducting the interviews. Bryman (2012) stated that "such development would make the online interview similar to a telephone interview, in that it is mediated by a technology, but also similar to an in-person interview, since those involved in the exchange would be able to see each other" (p.699).

Due to the technological improvements, an application software Skype was developed and it benefits in many ways. However, as any other invention Skype has both its strengths and weaknesses. The best advantage of this software is that it is free and it removes the costs of travelling to the site in order to conduct the interview. In addition to this, it is able to provide a possibility to talk face – to – face and communicate with people in person. When it comes to interviewing, Skype provides a possibility for me as an interviewer to interact with participant, to explore what participant is saying in words but also in their non-verbal behavior. Another big advantage that the participant can have this interview from home, which provides them more comfort and makes them feel more relaxed and open.
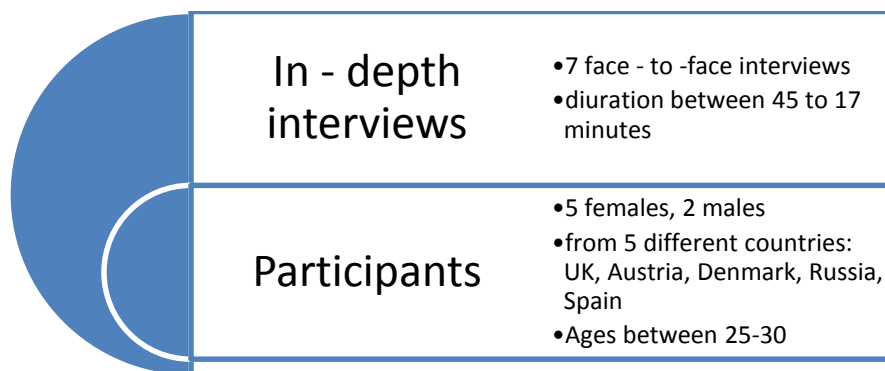
As I have mentioned before, there are several disadvantages to this technology. First of all, the quality of conversation is influenced by the technology – internet connection. Therefore, poor connection can influence the quality of the discussion in a negative way. This was the case with a participant John from London.

During this interview we had a poor connection and it resulted in interruptions and constant setbacks in the flow of the conversation. Nevertheless, all interviews provided useful information for the analysis.

The interviews were conducted between 18th and 30th April 2019. They lasted between 45 minutes (the longest) and 17 minutes (the shortest interview). Also, each participant was asked if they would be comfortable to have Skype interview using a webcam and be recorded. In the beginning of the interview I have presented myself and introduced the topic of the research and its purpose. I have also obtained their verbal approval for audio-recording for analysis purposes and using their personal data (such as name, occupation, demographic information) in the study or they would prefer to stay anonymous. Only after all of this information was covered I asked for their details such as age, location, study background and occupation. The reason why I have asked for this personal information in the beginning of the interview was because I wanted to get to know participants from the beginning of the interview.

All the interviews were conducted in English and they were fully transcribed. Even if it might be time consuming, this detailed transcription of the interviews was a great way for me to have a clear understanding of what was said even after a longer period of time. The figure below shows the main characteristics of the interviews that were conducted for this study.

Figure 5. General information about the in – depth interviews

| | In - depth interviews | • 7 face - to -face interviews
• diuration between 45 to 17 minutes |
| | Participants | • 5 females, 2 males
• from 5 different countries: UK, Austria, Denmark, Russia, Spain
• Ages between 25-30 |

Source: Own production

3.6. Data Analysis

In order to analyze qualitative data there are various methods and techniques such as content analysis, discourse analysis and etc. However, analyzing qualitative data could be an art (Babbie, 2007, p.373) and it states that "there are no cu-and-dried steps that guarantee success". Therefore each researcher has his/hers own ways of analyzing the data in the most suitable ways. However, there are some set down rules of how to do it in order to have control over the analysis process and result in more efficient outcomes.

Therefore, following the data collection, in this study I used Thematic Analysis. This method enabled me to analyze classifications and present themes related to the data and deal with diverse subjects via interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998). Therefore, this type of analysis helps me to understand and explore the research topic by interpreting collected data and associate it by the frequency of a theme and enhance the whole meaning of it.

By using this type of analysis method, I as a researcher had a possibility to link those various concepts and different opinions of the participants and compare them with knowledge that I have gathered about the research topic. Therefore, there are several steps that has to be taken in thematic analysis after collecting the date through in – depth interviews.

1) Data display – transcription

In order to have a clear data display, I have transcribed all the interviews. Technological improvements now allow researchers to use computer programs to enhance the analysis and use transcription software. And the sole goal of transcribing the interview is to give an exact representation in words of what has been said with no influence of the researcher's interpretation (Saunders et al., 2012).

For this study, I decided not to use any technologies but to manually transcribe the collected data that I have audio recorded. It was a time consuming process, but it made it easier for me to notice different aspects of what was mentioned regarding the research topic. This process gave me a better overview of the whole data.

Furthermore, by using Microsoft Word I was able to prepare and organize the transcribed content into two parts: the document was split in two sides and I had the interview on one side and the other for the comments, codes and categories. In this way, the data was prepared to be analyzed word by word.

2) Data reduction

The first stage of data reduction was reading through the interviews and making highlighting the sentences that might be useful and making comments in order to have a clear vision about the highlights after some time. After that, the interviews and highlights read again and it was broken down into smaller segments – codes. According to Corbin and Strauss (1998) coding involves finding the right word as it conceptually describes what I as a researcher think. However, the code does not refer to any specific word that was said by a interviewee but rather shows the essence of the data. This coding process have strengthened the analytical side as I had already gained much deeper understanding of the material and it helped to break down the data in order to uncover the patterns and trends of what people were talking and described them rather than summarized them.

In addition to this, codes helped to categorize data that would later lead to specific themes. It was done by grouping different codes while still concentrating on the participants views and looking for any connection between those categories. During the whole process, I have kept an eye on the study's topic (during data collection and data analysis) in order get the necessary knowledge that relates to the study objectives.

3) Themes

In the last step, I was looking for the connections between the categories that have emerged during analysis process and grouped them together according to their similarities and providing each group of categories a descriptive theme (Miles and Huberman, 1994). At this moment, as I have mentioned before, it was important to return to the original transcripts and the study question in order to make sure that the connections are related to the study topic.

During this whole process, several categories were dropped as they did not fit the structure of the study and did not provide any relative information in regards to the research question. Therefore, the final step of the analysis will be presented in the next chapter with explanation about each theme and category that would include both the interviewees' meanings in their own words and mine interpretation as a researched (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014, p.13).

4. Findings

When looking into prievious studies, researches have analyzed decision making process from various perspectives for example looking into travel devision making behavior in dynamic decision context or simply describing the overall travel decision making process (Crompton 1992; Hyde 2004; Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Woodside and MacDonald 1994). After conducting the thematic analysis of interviews, it could be clearly seen that planning and decision making can be influenced by accessibility of AirBnB as an additional concept which is able to provide different types of accommodations and these findings shows the most influential factors for people to use this accommodation platform. These findings show different perspective of decision making by looking only into pre – trip planning process when people make decision regarding accommodation. The last few years were influenced by technology a lot and major changes like new concepts of finding accommodation were developed. Therefore, there is lack of research done on how it affects the complex industry as tourism and specifically in this case – accommodation.

After reading all the literature mentioned in previous chapters and generating knowledge about the use and impact of information technologies (specifically in this availability of Internet) within tourism industry, there is very small amount of information about how travel planning is actually evolved and what kind of influences it has on consumer behavior in travel planning context.

Consumers now have a possibility to access an enormous amount of travel related information via Internet. Various search engine tools as Google are providing an instant entrée to this new world of information in seconds. As a result of this phenomenon consumers are becoming increasingly reliant upon it (Xiang, Wöber, and Fesenmaier 2008). In addition to this, there is an avoidable growth of new accommodation search platforms that includes websites such as AirBnB, or Howeaway. In recent years, these concepts changed the dynamics of online travel products and the whole compositions of so called tourism domain

Furthermore, the huge growth of new accommodation search concepts including websites such as Airbnb and Homeaway in recent years has changed the dynamics of online communications and the composition of the so called tourism domain (Xiang and Gretzel 2010). In the later chapters I will argue that travel related websites and specifically in this case – accommodation platforms – has a significant influence on travel planning information search as well as it impacts tourists' decision making process and the way how they interact with travel product – accommodation.

Consequently, in order to analyze the influence of AirBnB to decision making process the analysis is concentrated on four main sections of decision making: 1) Socio-economic factors that influence the decision making process; 2) Attractiveness of the concept 3) The cultural purpose of the trip and 4) personal characteristics that influence the decision making in pre trip planning process when planning the accommodation Each of those parts contains several categories derived from the thematic analysis. The major findings of the study are summarized in the figure below.

Figure 6. Influential factors to use AirBnB services
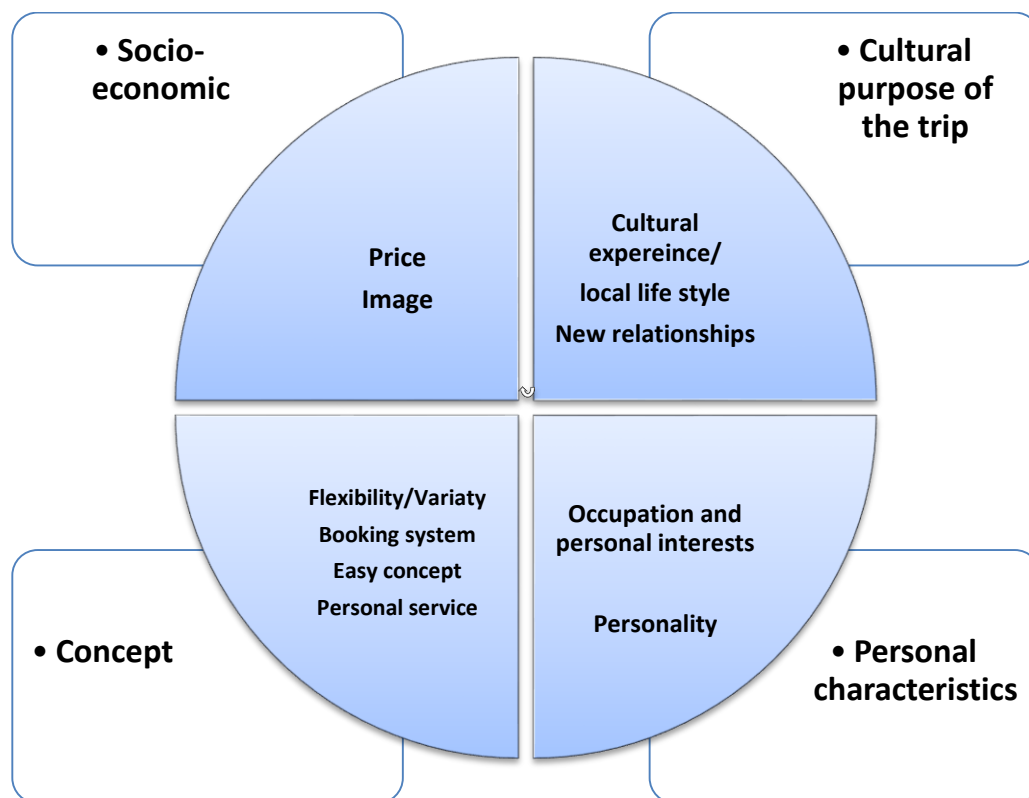
Source: Own production

The first free influencers (Socio-economic, purpose and the concept) derive from the theory that was presented in the previous chapters. However, after starting interview analysis process I realized that there is more to this and a new factor emerged – personality. I have acknowledged a fact that this element in the findings are coming from the data gathered and its importance to the research question will be discussed in the later chapters.

The following sub chapters will elaborate and explain the major constructs within each section. In order to get the essential meaning of the use of Airbnb services as expressed by the participants in the study, the discussion will be based on the main themes generated in the analysis and will include individual narratives that are followed by an interpretation of findings based on empirical work.

4.1. Socio-economic influence

As revealed by the analysis, the decision making in the pre trip planning process were impacted by socio-economic characteristics that AirBnB represents. Among the characteristics, two additional categories were identified: 1) Price and 2) Image.

- *Price*

One of the most influential factors which influence tourists to look for alternatives for hotels is the economic factor - price. Six out of seven participants indicated in the interviews that the price have played a big role in choosing different sources to look for accommodation and specifically in this case of AirBnB. Majority of the interview participants for example, Maria stated that the main reason she is choosing AirBnB rather than the other sources of accommodation "*...because you can get a very good location for quite cheap price because it would be really expensive to get a hotel lets say in the center of the city, So you would never get a hotel in the city center for the price like you can get in Airbnb*."

Therefore, the decision making process relies a lot on the decisional factor - price. This factor plays a significant role in two decision making stages if we look into Information-processing theory by Bettman (1979) 2) information search and 3) alternative evaluation and selection. During these stages, tourists tend to rely on a number of socioeconomic factors and may use decision rules to evaluate and choose a final service offering; in this case the most suitable solution is related to the price range. Moreover, this economic factor could be one of the motivators in decision making process when consumer is choosing between various alternatives as Neta stated that "*I usually just browse through flights, flight companies and webistes like Ryanair or others and if I find a very good deal on flights then I check the dates and look for a company to go there with me*". Therefore, it can be seen that AirBnB is motivating people to choose their platform by offering more flexible prices and people become more willing and have more desire to be explore this concept of accommodation.

Therefore, this category - price - plays a role as an internal factor that is influencing the pre - trip planning and how people make decisions. One could argue that as in most of the cases socioeconomic status, as defined by income, influences information search.

- *Image*

It is widely known that people from different social classes prefer diverse variety of products including tourism products and activities (Morrison, 1996). However, when looking into consumer behavior researches the social class and image role could be controversial as social classes usually involves more than one variable that is determining it (occupation, income, living standards, family history). In consumer behavior, social class can be also determined by their choices of activities (Boone and Kurtz, 1995). Therefore, this category is closely related to the previous one - price.

In the recent studies of consumer behavior literature, it could already possible to see the ideas that decision making process is involving not only the evaluation of the useful or functional attributes of the tourism product but it also relates to the attribute such as

person's self image. Consumers tend to make decisions under the influence of other people perception on them. As Camil stated in the interview that "*I need to look innovative as I have this fashion blog and I constantly need to try new things in my life in order to be on point, you know. I think this is one of the reasons why I choose also to rent apartments from private people and I can also be a little "hipster" at the same time while using this platform. More people then can relate you know to me*".

This shows that consumers' belief of self image also corresponds to product image. Therefore, in this case, AirBnB is a relatively new concept of accommodation. It has a platform empowering individuals to share access to their properties and gives an opportunity to tourists to have freedom of choice when looking where to stay during their vocation. In earlier stages of the concept when it first started to expand, people did not trust it as much as they trusted hotels and travel agencies and according to the interviewees, it took some time for the brand to create a positive image that they could relate themselves. For example Christina states that "*I found out about it maybe 3 years ago, and at that time I was still a hotel girl, I didn't really trust things like that, because I think it was still a new thing. And for girls, especially travelling alone I think it was kind of dangerous thing to do, but now and I was not sure if we can trust this website like this, but now I can see that it is becoming more popular, and I have tried it few times myself, and I have a good experience and I think it works really good for people like me.*" Therefore, it can be argued that a product image has an influence on the choice of information sources that leads to making the decision in pre trip planning when choosing a proper accommodation.

By using AirBnB as accommodation platform, people from this study can relate their own image to the brand and this makes them feel like their actual self image is also giving a positive impact to their ideal self image that they want to present to the public. These kinds of situations results in a higher consumer satisfaction and becomes one of the influences in decision making process when planning their accommodation. By booking an accommodation via AirBnB interviewees were able to identify themselves with the product they receive and also at the same time reach this emotional state where their ideal self image is motivating them to take specific decisions.

Moreover, from the analysis of the collected interview data, it can be seen that ideal self - image has an influence on how people tend to choose accommodation. For example Camil honestly stated that "*It also is part of my job as a blogger, to be honest. The first time I have used Airbnb it was because it suddenly became so popular and I kind of had to try it out in order to be on the "wave" … well, to be totally honest, I prefer hotels , but I also use Airbnb a lot. "*. Even though that Camil prefers hotels over apartments via AirBnB, she is still trying to use it in order to create her self - image to the public in relation to her occupation and having a trending blog. She feels the need to keep up with the innovation and make society believe of what she would like to be or who she would need to be.

4.2. Concept

During the interviews the participants mentioned a number of factors that have affected their decision making process while planning their trips. One of them was many times mentioned as the attractiveness of the AirBnB as an accommodation concept due to several factors. First of all, it was flexibility and variety of properties as John stated in his interview: "*I really like the variety of accommodation options I can choose from. Flats or rooms there can be very interesting, not like boring hotels where all rooms are the same.*". The second factor is, the easy way of using and booking, and the most important factor was the personal service of the hosts. Therefore, it can be seen that the internet is significantly modifying the way people look for travel related information and as the result it affects decision making process by creating more factors that has to be evaluated. Currently, the consumers have an opportunity to access various new information sources regarding the tourism products and services. By having this opportunity in their decision making process, people had to adapt and learn to be independent information seekers and reduce the importance of travel agents/planners and now they are more than ever able to plan their own travels. As a result of this, consumers have enhanced opportunities, the situational factors of new information technologies, which provided them with various opportunities to choose the most suitable accommodation and always to try something new.

When looking into AirBnB as the generic tourism product all those categories (flexibility, easy concept, booking system, and personal service) shows the personal involvement of the tourist through all five elements and it is able to interact between each other. The actual physical plant in this case is always changing as there are different possibilities and various options to choose from, therefore people can each time try and experience something new. Most of the participants emphasized on this factor as one of the drivers to choose AirBnB services rather than hotel. Andrew, for example, affirmed that "*when choosing AirBnB you never know what kind of experience you will bring back, what kind of host you will get, even what kind of neighbors will next to us, we even met some people through AirBnB and we are friends ever since, for like 3 years now.*". Maria showed a similar interest in choosing AirBnB platform for accommodation: "*…the locations of the Airbnb apartments are very different and you can always choose according to your needs, and AirBnB is more or less…well it is everywehere, you can get a room in any place in the world. Once I rented a room in a small island of Italy, there were like 100 people living there, can you believe it? And I rented a room from AirBnB! It is simply amazing.*".

Furthermore, some of the interview participants declared that they choose this type of accommodation over regular booking platforms because it's easy and understandable concepts and booking system itself. As Camil stated: "*First, it is extremely easy to use, flexible, informative and trustworthy, great website design and pictures, fast consumer service, such as a map with all the flat locations showing prices, well I think it is great new concept.*". Therefore, each client is involved in all parts of the process and they have an opportunity to co-create their experience through this planning and travelling process. It could be argued, that this is one of the main reasons and factors that influence tourists from this study to choose this type of accommodation.

Moreover, the idea of personal service that they receive from the hosts of the accommodation that they are renting through AirBnB was mentioned by five out of seven interview participants of this study. This was argued to be one of the main drivers for choosing AirBnB. The hospitality factor from Generic Tourism Product plays a very strong role for AirBnB hosts. As Clemmer (1991) stated already back in the days that consumers started to expect for "something extra" and this factors plays an important role in creating a positive consumer travel experience. Camil, for example, shared her experience from the trip to Mallorca: "In *Mallorca, we were there for a week, so we could also negotiate the price a little bit and also the host was very friendly and beyond helpful. He was living nearby, so he was helping us every day. And if we needed any travelling advices, also there was a person who injured his leg and he managed to help him and het the sticks or how you call them… (Crunches).*".

It appears that every participant had similar drivers and factors that influenced their decision making process and chose AirBnB as the platform to look for accommodation and it was the attractiveness of the concept itself. Their recollections of their previous travelling experiences revealed different levels of involvement in this tourism product. And it is argued that the means of successful participations by tourism consumers in producing any tourism product is the whole combination the elements (physical plant, service, hospitality and freedom of choice). In the data gathered from interview participants it can be seen that for them one of the influencer is to not only the physical participation, but simply the sense of the engagement. Therefore, by choosing AirBnB as the accommodation platform interview participants had an opportunity to combine the freedom of choice, receive warm and helpful hospitality; expect competent services from both AirBnB as a website as well as services from the hosts and a good and always new physical plant. As Smith (1994) argued, this kind of involvement a quality and satisfying tourism product.

4.3. Purpose of the trip

As it was stated in the theory chapter, empirical studies have proven that due to the rapid technologies development consumers have new possibilities of travelling and therefore, are able to have different purposes of their travels (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). As a result of this, tourists are having new purposes to add to their travel motivational factors. From the data gathered for this study, it is appeared that tourists are choosing AirBnB over regular hotels due to the opportunity that they provide – cultural experiences. When referring, to this influential factor, the interviewees touched on various dimensions that were later grouped into two categories: cultural experience/local lifestyle and new relationships.

As information search theory states, the purpose of the trip might have the biggest influence to the way people look for information and to the way they make the final decisions (Morrison, 1996). Even though that in the most of the consumer behavior in tourism studies, the purposes are split in two major groups of business and pleasure trips, this cultural purpose of the trip might go under pleasure category, but it could also be stated as a new category under trip purposes. Five out of seven participants in this study emphasized on this category being one of the most influential when choosing this type of accommodation and in some cases it becomes the main criteria. Interviewees mentioned

that at some point they unconsciously chose AirBnB over regular hotels due to the positive previous experience of receiving such a cultural experience while staying at this kind of accommodation.

- *Cultural experience/local life style*

From the discussion with the interviewees it could be seen that in time majority of them changed their travel preferences and now they are looking for more cultural experiences rather than visiting touristic places and getting the feel of the real local life style of the country or place they are visiting. As Maria stated in her interview: " *Now I feel that I am from these travelers, that like to see and feel the culture and I am not going somewhere just for the luxury hotel and stay during my all holidays in the hotel or just visiting the main attraction with all the crowds. It is not for me anymore".* It could be argued that tourist of the study became more free and independent travelers and are able to change their travelling habits from taking vocation packages from travel agencies and receiving very touristic experience and now planning their own travels, by using these new information search sources and generating new and cultural travelling experiences. By using AirBnB services, some of the participants mentioned, that it helps to not only get an accommodation but to taste the real life style of the people because as John stated: "*you not only get a possibility to meet the host, you can give you tips of what to see, where to go, what to eat, but you can actually live among those people, like next door and get the real sense of their life style."* Later in the interview he shared the details of his last trip to Barcelona and his experience with AirBnB: *"You know they have this "siesta" thing and they sleep during the day and then they actually stay up very late, it was so strange to me, to hear little children playing with their cutlery and plates at midnight! I could not believe that children at age 10 or something, at this point of the day have dinner! Even for me it was hard to stay up this late."* Neta also contributed to this category and defined her experience of using AirBnB as "*it is more local. Usually when you rent an apartment from a local person, he could say you maybe the best restaurants where to eat or they could even invite you to their place for a drink or even dinner and encourage to experience the real culture of the city."*

Therefore, when looking into a framework Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) by MacInnis, Moorman and Jaworski (1991) it is clear that AirBnB is involved in all three steps of the framework even in this influentiar factor. AirBnB as a concept itself is motivating people to share their accommodation with others with a possibility to earn extra money and provide people with an opportunity to experience new ways of travelling by living in others people home or even with other people. Therefore, AirBnB provides an opportunity of freedom of choise. Tourist have various options to choose from and it influences their decision making process by having more factors to evaluate and more possibilities to plan the best travelling experience. Finally, this concept and development of information technologies in general, created a new environment where tourist had to adapt and learn new ability of how to be independand travelers who are seeking more cultural experiences rather than superficial experiences of visiting the crowded main attractions.

- *New relationships*

In addition to this cultural experience, interview participants emphasized on the factor which influences them to use AirBnB services is the possibility of generating new relationships. This factor is also influencing an information search process as several tourists from this study have stated that they always try to look for a possibility to find an apartment with a host living there two, as their previous positive experience have brought them new connections and relationships. For example Maria stated that: "*when I was going to visit Denmark for a longer period of time, I for sure wanted to live with somebody who already lives there, as I needed to wait for some time when I could move in into my own accommodation for few weeks, so I got an apartment actually using AirBnB. And then I met my new flat mate and actually we became friends and we are keeping in touch until now. I love when it happens like this; I really enjoy having all these nice people all over the world. I guess it's kind of good in this cosmopolitan world right?".* However, this factor depends a lot on personality if the person is willing to meet new people, if he enjoys company and etc. More about this factor will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.4. Personal characteristics

The last influential factor was found during the process of the interview data analyzes and was not predicted while gathering the literature for theoretical framework. As social constructivist I believe that it is part of the learning process and part of reality construction, therefore, I want to present this influential factor which I believe has a lot of influence on decision making process while choosing accommodation via AirBnB. It could be argued that this factor also might support previous influencers as it was seen from the interviews personal characteristics has a relationship with consumer behavior in tourism. Therefore, as revealed by analysis, the decision making process when choosing accommodation through AirBnB is impacted by personal characteristics. Among those characteristics in this case, there are two different categories identified: occupation/personal interests and personality type.

- *Occupation and personal interests*

One of the personal characteristics that influence the way tourists in this study make decisions while planning their travels and look for accommodation are occupation and personal interests. Camil for example - who is Public Relations assistant and manages her own fashion blog – placed a great emphasis on the innovative and flexible factors of AirBnB as a concept and the fact that one of the reasons using this platform is because of its popularity. Maria on the other hand – who is project manager and each day works and interacts with new people – placed a greater accent on how this platform of accommodation creates an opportunity to feel the culture of the place she is visiting and create new relationships. She provided the richest data for this study due to her communicative and friendly manner as well as commitment to this kind of travelling. Furthermore, John, who relied on AirBnB just as fast provider of accommodation with a flexible location, is travelling a lot for his work as he is an architect.

All the participants in the study were very different people, living in different countries and having various personal and professional backgrounds. During each conversation, each participant reflected on the topic of discussion based on his own experience and knowledge. This results in different influences on decision making process and attached different meanings to similar experiences of using AirBnB services. Their diverse views will be examined in the following section of the analysis.

- *Personality*

Even though, during the interviews, I was not specifically asking questions in order to get a clear understanding of participants' personalities, it still revealed it's aspects and it is possible to guess their personality types and as everybody is unique and have particular characteristics that could be later grouped into specific personalities. Therefore, in this section I will consider the relationship between personality of the participants and their behavior when planning their trips. Also, previous studies revealed that the personal characteristics/personality has a relationship to the tourists' information search behavior and as it states in the theory section, information search method has a significant influence on decision making process.

The types of personality can be described by looking into person's activities, competences and interests. As a result, personality could be seen as a person's concept of themselves and it is likely to have an influence on decision making process in consumer behavior in tourism. Therefore, specifically in tourism, personality can be determined as one's motivations, perceptions and behavior when travelling (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2004). For example, one of the study participants' Maria was very open and communicative person, who has an interested in learning from different people, enhancing various experiences and has a passion of travelling; she has a very open personality. During the whole conversation she was very engaging and communicated her opinions freely: "*Well I think that people should use more AirBnB or Couchsurfing, and would trust people more, and experience the culture. But it depends on what people want, maybe its just me the way I am, but I really enjoy that, I really enjoy even talking about it with you, and I enjoy meeting all these new people to hear all those stories that they have.*". By having this kind of personality, she is feeling freely using AirBnB services and having a lot of contact with other people. Where on the other hand Christina is more a private person, and when she was asked to recall the most important features of accommodation that she is looking for she explained that: "*First, I look for some privacy, that I would have…its like when I try to rent a room where other people live, but I like privacy, I need my space, my own room and bathroom, you know that I could use alone.*". Therefore, even though both of them prefer AirBnB as accommodation platform, but they are both looking for different criteria in the accommodation. It can be argued that people with different personalities, can also use the same platforms and concepts of travelling, however their decision making process can be very different. This factor proofs the complexity of the decision making process in tourism and that each situation is very individual and has various aspects that has to be evaluated.

4.5. Discussion

Therefore, when looking into the Findings section, it could be seen that the first three influential factors (Socio-economic, concept and purpose of travelling) comes from the theory section and it proves the concepts of the literature. It could be argued, that even though the concept of AirBnB is new, the factors might stay the same and be adapted to the new developments. The technologies and Internet is developing rapidly and generated new concepts and platforms all the time, therefore both tourists and businesses are adapting to them fast too. However, what was unexpected and came only during the analysis of the data that was gathered through interviews was the last influential factor – personality.

This factor had strong affection to the research and showed a great influence on how people look for travel information, and how they make decisions. This factor proves all the studies of consumer behavior that stated that consumer behavior in tourism is a very complex process and requires more than one simple model or theory in order to explain and have a clear understanding.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring and understanding how tourists acquire knowledge in pre-trip planning stage in order to book accommodation through AirBnB and what kind of influence it gives to study participants' decision making process by conducting thematic analyses of qualitative interviews. The findings revealed that the tourists' decision making process is influenced by a combination of four influential factors: socio-economic, concept, purpose of the trip and personal characteristics. Most of those aspects were recognized by other researchers, particularly in the cases of tourism behavior. However, an important finding of this study is that personal characteristics such as occupation, personal interests and personality have a significant influence on the information search process and decision making when it comes to trip planning.

Many other researchers have acknowledged the importance of the socio-economic influencers such as price or self image within decision making process in tourism. Therefore, in this study the findings agree with these views. Both price and self – image have proved to have a significant influence on information search process when it comes choosing sources of information and tourists in this study tend to rely on those two aspects. However, this influential factor cannot determine anything on its own when it comes to the complex process of decision making in travel planning.

Therefore, another aspect has played an important role to the participants' decision making – the attractiveness of the concept. Current developments in information technologies opened up more opportunities to consumers when it comes to choice of accommodation and one of them is AirBnB. According to the study participants this concepts provides freedom of choice and flexible accommodation through easy to use website and booking system.

Various studies have recognized the importance of purpose of the trip within travel planning process. This factor has a great influence on information search process as it might determine the final decision. Therefore, participants of the study strongly emphasized on cultural purposes of using AirBnB as their accommodation platform. The study's findings are in agreement with these views of this factors importance as it plays an important role in choosing this specific source of accommodation in order to get the desired travelling experience.

In addition to this, the further research should be done on the fourth influential factor – personal characteristics. As the consumer behavior in tourism is an extremely complex process, further study would be needed in order to get a deeper understanding of this factor as in this study the meaning of it appeared only during the interview analyzes stage.

Moreover, all these findings confirm that the concept of AirBnB is build in a way that consumers have an opportunity to be involved through all five stages of the generic tourism product (Smith, 1994). As the consumers are receiving more personal service from the hosts of the property rather than simply going through mechanic process of booking a hotel. This shows that people are fully immersed in this travelling experience from the moment they start to plan it.

Furthermore, I would like to mention that as an exploratory study, based on thematic analysis of seven qualitative interviews, I believe that the study achieved its goal of understanding decision making process when it comes to accommodation under the influence of the new concept of AirBnB. On the other hand, there is no possibility to generate some firm conclusion on how consumers actually go through decision making process in travel planning but the findings show that all experiences of participants and their way of going through planning processes are different and other opinions and interpretations could be formed. However, I believe that all the information that was gathered in this study shows some valuable confirmations regarding the decision making process.

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