S T A N D A R D   F R O N T P A G E

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Subjects: (tick box)	Project	Synopsis	Portfolio	Thesis x	Written Assignment

Study programme:	MA in Tourism		
Semester:	10 th semester		
Exam Title:	Master thesis in Tourism		
Name, Date of birth/ Names, Dates of birth of group members:	Name(s)	Study number	Date of birth (not CPR number – only 6 numbers: dd/mm/yy)
	Moldoveanu Bogdan		29.05.1990
Hand in date:	31.05.2017		
Project title /Synopsis Title/Thesis Title	**Couch surfing and the Tourist Experience Value of its members**		
According to the study regulations, the maximum number of keystrokes of the paper is:	192.000		
Number of keystrokes (one standard page = 2400 keystrokes, including spaces) (table of contents, bibliography and appendix do not count)*	110.740		
Supervisor (project/synopsis/thesis):	-		

Couchsurfing and the Tourist Experience Value of its members

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Institution: AAU Master of Tourism

Date: 31.05.2017

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I. Introduction

1.1.Background

Couchsurfing is a social networking platform which offers the service of hospitality. One can access the services and benefits by logging in to Couchsurfing.com. (Ye et al. 2009) This website is managed and operated by Couchsurfing International Inc. (Skog, 2012) The whole basis of operation and interaction of Couchsurfing is the provision of a platform upon which registered members can travel and live or stay at a stranger's house (Xie et al. 2011). Members can also host other travellers, interact and meet new people and participate in events organized by Couchsurfing or members themselves (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015).

Couchsurfing operates on the gift economy whereby as opposed to other hospitality providers, there are no financial expectations by either party (Skog, 2012). The hosts do not expect to get any form of compensation for their hospitality and neither does the guest make any attempts to reimburse the hosts for the duration of stay (Ildiko et al. 2014). The major driving force behind Couchsurfing is sharing of available space while at the same time consuming available resources communally or in a collaborative manner(Sztompka 2003).

1.2Getting started on Couchsurfing.com

Becoming a member on Couchsurfing is absolutely free (Xie et al. 2011). New applicants are subjected to a verification process to mitigate against risk and increase user acceptance and confidence. New applicants are required to fill out a profile in which they disclose personal information which they deem necessary to other members (Skog, 2012). The profile page is not a custom profile like those seen in other social networking sites like Twitter. The level of detail is higher in the Couchsurfing case (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015).

When staying with someone new, the visit and stay is sure to have greater benefit and experiential value for both the host and the guest if they share certain similarities (Ye et al. 2009). New applicants are required to disclose their passions, hobbies, interests, peculiar skills and occupation. They also reveal the kind of music they love listening to, whether they do read or play any instrument (Skog, 2012). Besides revealing personal information, members are required and

advised to upload their own personal photos. Other members feel at ease with members who have a face to show (Sztompka 2003).

The experience of meeting new people should be enhanced through all means possible and sharing personal photos may increase trust in a person (Ildiko et al. 2014). Members looking to host others are also encouraged to post photos of their lodgings. Since members are seeking to have a new experience which can be optimized by the right environment and people, seeing where one will live is advisable (Skog, 2012). Conversations are a key part of Couchsurfing. Discussions on living quarters are sure to generate quite some feedback (Xie et al. 2011).

1.3Interacting with other Members

Interactions between members are driven by factors such as level of trust between two parties, desired result from the Couchsurfing cultural experience, ease and comfort of using Couchsurfing.com as the platform of choice, over and above other similar sites (Skog, 2012, Xie et al. 2011). Members are free to exercise any of these preferential selection criteria as all members are listed on the basis of geographical location, openness and availability for hosting, gender and age. Members are free to choose from a wide range of options (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015). This paper will seek to interrogate Couchsurfing's perceived dominance in its sector of hospitality (Skog, 2012).

Once a member has made his or her selection, he or she sends a message to whoever they would desire to chat with, meet or stay with (Ildiko et al. 2014). On the other hand, Couchsurfing offers members the option of placing a public post on the website, detailing their travel itinerary and wait for interested members to offer accommodation (Sztompka 2003). The ease of operation is surely set to increase the experiential value of travellers (Skog, 2012).

Couchsurfing has a policy which encourages members to exchange something as a memento and reminder of friendships created online and in the fullness of time in person (Ye et al. 2009). This aspect is very interesting as it is a method which encourages cultural interaction on an advanced level. Since members will usually exchange something of value, it is as they share a piece of themselves with new members whom they meet (Skog, 2012). Spending time with hosts and guests is advised (Sztompka 2003). Members are encouraged to teach each other an aspect of their world in a bid to foster cultural exchange and understanding.

Couch Crashes are common large city gatherings which seek to enhance the Couchsurfing experience. Members organize joint events in which travellers can meet and interact on various issues besides knowing and exploring their location (Ildiko et al. 2014). Couchsurfing is run on a digital platform. Online hangouts are common as members and travellers interact and communicate with each other (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015).

1.4. Couchsurfing Reference System

Due to increased cases of human delinquency, distrust is on the rise (Skog, 2012). Necessitated by the rise in distrust, Couchsurfing offers members the option of rating their experiences during a stay, hosting or event (Xie et al. 2011). A traveller can make comments pertaining to his or her experience with a host on the host's profile page and vice versa. Comments made cannot be modified or discarded but are kept as a catalogue of one's interactions and resulting experiences which are quantified in the comments. Members are encouraged to gauge their hosts and guests based on these comments (Ye et al. 2009).

1.5. Couchsurfing as an Online Dating Platform

In a bid to improve integrity, confidence, acceptance and basically trust, Couchsurfing has a very explicit policy on dating and soliciting for sex (Xie et al. 2011). The policy states: "Don't contact other members for dating, or use the site to find sexual partners. We will consider this harassment." (Skog, 2012) In line with the intentions of this research, this policy is very important in increasing the experiential value of travellers. However, members do meet their spouses online, prompting some to call it an online dating service (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015).

1.6. Motivation for choosing this subject

The world is increasingly becoming an interconnected village. Citizens of one locality can interact and even visit others living in far flung areas (Skog, 2012). Information technology has had an immense impact in the way we interact and travel (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015). Couchsurfing is smack right in the center of this digital revolution as it seeks to connect travellers with hosts free of charge. Pietila asserts in his (2001) work that Couchsurfing has attained the top position in the hospitality exchange sector in terms of geographical coverage, total number of active members and the range of services and activities on offer (Ye et al. 2009).

Couchsurfing has become the number one choice for travellers seeking to maximize the value of their experience while travelling at the same time saving on scarce resources by taking advantage of free accommodation (Xie et al. 2011). Proper selection of hosts and guests has been shown to foster relationships and even promote peace, as alluded to by Bialski (2007,p.6) while discussing Bob Luitweiler, the pioneer of the non-profit and volunteer-run Servas Open Doors in 1949.

Due to the recent explosion in travellers who are do not desire or cannot afford to live in hotels and traditional hospitality providers, Couchsurfing boasts of a membership of 14 million from over 200,000 cities across the globe (Ildiko et al. 2014). This is a major trend which is only catching up, and it behooves us to study and interrogate the underlying workings and machinations of this trend in hospitality. What makes Couchsurfing the website of choice for the millions of users, what strategies it employs to gain mileage over its competitors, whether the website and hence organization have any methods through which the value of a traveller's experience can be increased, enhanced and ultimately optimized are the questions acting as the motivation behind the research into Couchsurfing (Xie et al. 2011).

1.7. Author's experience

Also, my personal experience with this community is a major motivator for tackling this subject. First time I heard about this website was in 2009 when I was traveling around the USA and was running out of money. I still had an ambitious plan ahead of me to visit some of the most expensive cities in the country. I found out about the possibility of "surfing a couch" from some other travelers that I have encountered in my journey. Being in California at that time, I thought that it might be something related to the literal surfing beaches that the state is known for. I only though that this could be a solution for me when I travel to San Francisco. And so, as soon as I got ahold of internet connection and a computer, I searched for the website that I found out about. Little did I know, even at that time, Couchsurfing.org had tens of thousands of members across hundreds of cities. I completed my profile superficially and started looking for a host in San Francisco. Even though it was my first time using it, I found the members to be friendly people and quite open-minded, and so I had no trust issues. At that time, for me, it was more important to find free accommodation in order to save money. After sending tens of messages to hosts from San Francisco, I received a positive answer from a person that was living alone in a one-room apartment. Needless to say, I did not care about the conditions of accommodation, since I now had

the possibility to visit San Francisco. My host turned out to be a very friendly person. He was willing to share his room and his bike. We even had a night out where he introduced me to some traditional food. All in all, Couchsurfing not only made my trip possible, but it gave a very personal and friendly touch to my experience as a tourist. After that, I started using the platform for other big cities as well, like Chicago and Washington. It became, not only a money-saver but it also enriched my experience value and made a lot of international friends. So, having already so many positive and ,some, negative experiences with this platform I would know what issues to stress on, and on what aspects should I focus more. I would know, more or less, what are the positive and negative aspects of using this website. It would also be an inspiration for my future travels, as I am planning to take a trip around the world on a budget with Couchsurfing playing a major part in this. As a personal benefit, I want to learn from other member's experiences in order to use it in my travels. Nonetheless, I want this research to be a "stepping stone" for those that have never heard or used Couchsurfing before. I want them to have the perspective of experienced hosts and guests from this platform.

II.   Literature review

Since the advent of non-profit and volunteer-run hospitality services, the sector has undergone great transformation. This chapter intends to interrogate literature relating to Couchsurfing in a bid to know how best the experiential value of travellers and users of Couchsurfing can be enhanced and optimized (Skog, 2012). For the purposes of this paper, the literature review will be discussed in four sections: the tourist experiential value of members, building trust amongst members, offering free accommodation in return for cultural exchange and the aspects that endear Couchsurfing to members, over and above other similar service providers.

2.1. Tourist Experiential Value of Members

Members using CS often quote various motivations for using the system. As Ayers-Greenidge (2012) found out after extensive research, the motivation to be a traveller and to see new places far outweighs people's desire to be tourists. He further points out that CS members are greatly motivated by the desire to save money while on their travels. However, travellers usually have a certain innate desire for comfort, luxury, indulgence, personal growth, development and pleasure, which the author defines as the experiential value of a traveller or tourist. (Ayers-Greenidge, 2012)

Trust is critical to what the Ayers-Greenidge (2012) calls intimate tourism. For a tourist or traveller to have a certain level of experiential value from his or her travels, trust is a critical factor. Bialski & Batorski (2010) further attest to the importance of trust in ensuring optimal experiential value for travellers when they correlate trust with familiarity in CS circles. The authors front that travellers' experiential value increases when they are hosted by familiar people. The authors go further to define the three stages through which CS experience generates trust. These stages are: the pre-selection of users, website and profile navigation and offline contact. These stages lead to familiarity, which in turn plays a very critical role in forming trust between members. (Bialski, 2007)

Members of CS travelling to foreign lands may face the barrier of being outsiders. Bradbury (2013) proposes that CS communities help travellers overcome this barrier, in addition to internal systematic barriers and barriers limiting participation. In addition Bradbury (2013) maintaining

that orientation of new travellers can increase the value of their travel experience, Cherney (2014) details how this value can be increased by overcoming these barriers and fostering an environment of familiarity. The author advocates that reviews and feedback provided by the network of CS community members are more useful in evaluating people than self-presented information. He asserts that most members prefer hosting guests with a single negative review to hosting one who has two or more. Skog (2012) reiterates that careful pre-selection of members for interaction is a sure way to increase the value of the experience of any traveller or host.

Whereas most online communities often show a great tendency of similar minded people flocking together, CS according to Cook et al. (2009), does not exhibit similar high levels of homophily. The authors attest that a traveller's past experience with a certain host or guest will impact their perception of that individual's trustworthiness. Due to the creation of robust local communities spread across the world, members of CS need not look for people of similar tastes (Ildiko et al. 2014). Ildiko goes on to affirm that the platform gives members the opportunity of maximizing their travel experiences and optimizing the value.

Germann Molz (2013) has a different perspective. He maintains that CS offers members an alternative form of tourism. He goes on to assert that due to unconventional nature of CS operations, systems, software design and search algorithms, members are able to participate in the platform knowing that it is a moral economy based on the tenets of human value and dignity. Members can enjoy greater benefits while travelling due to the provisions made by CS as Liu (2013) observes. The author further observes that quantitative data analysis from CS members prove that users are driven by their desire to experience the best of what is out there, over and above individual descriptions, photos and profile insinuations.

In a bid to explain how comfortable members get on their travels, Molz (2007) uses the phrase "being at home in the world". He views members in full enjoyment of their travels due to the structure and mechanisms that CS has put into place. Rosen et al. (2011) writes that members who have low familiarity with others have low sense of belonging. Upon increased involvement, these members show greater degrees of acceptance and belonging. Shapiro (2012) provides quantitative research detailing how CS members show strong self-identification predictors as global citizens. Members of CS have shown to exhibit greater familiarity with global citizens and issues compared to traditional travellers. The proof of greater experiential value in their travels in undeniable. (Rosen et al. 2011)

2.2. Building Trust amongst members and connecting guests with locals

The Couchsurfing (CS) system is an exhibition of a platform based on high levels of trust according to Piotr Sztompka (2003). He intimates that trust is directly intertwined with the future which tends to be unknown. This he asserts is an important strategy for handling uncertain events and those which are beyond our control. He further asserts that there are three types or levels into which trust can be categorized. The first level is the individual level, which relates to trust as a personality trait. The second is trust at an interaction level, or simply put, trust as a quality in a relationship. Lastly he categorizes trust at a social level, in a cultural format and considered to be the rule. Sztompka (2003) views trust as an outsource of emotional security. Members of CS are therefore prone to trust more in times when they have proper emotional security.

Pure internet contact is not sufficient to provide an environment in which people can freely trust each other, as observed by Philip Pettit (2004). According to Ildiko et al. (2014), this standpoint has been proven inaccurate by the advent of CS. Ildiko et al. (2014) goes on to state that interactions over the internet must be propelled by an "extended level of trust" among the members. Nissenbaum (2001) goes on to observe that although one may be averse to the risks posed by other individuals, there are other risks which the member will face. Risks such as fraud and malicious attacks on the system are a reality. To add onto this list of risks which the member has to overcome inorder to enjoy the benefits of CS, Jarvenpa-Tractinsy (1999) front that the lack of face-to-face contact has created an avenue for "opportunistic behavior".

Owing to the new nature of CS and similar platforms, users cannot draw from their experiences to navigate through. McKnight-Chervany (2002) contend that users have to ditch their experiences and rely on "their general disposition to trust". Ildiko et al. (2014) quotes various researches showing that novelty in e-commerce generally indisposes consumers to exercise interpersonal trust on whoever is interacting with them. This view is supported by Gefen (2000).

Indisposition to trust is a critical factor in the success of CS as stated by Ildiko et al. (2014). The author further asserts that previous researches into online interactions have focused majorly on "trust as a quality of relations and trust as a cultural rule" Ildiko et al. (2014, p.38). Trust as an indisposition has not been given enough consideration. Further study into this area is required.

The level of trust exhibited by others in an organization or individual cannot be underestimated (Ye et al. 2009). The authors further observe that high levels of trust and positive online feedback can greatly increase a business' turnover and an individual's reputation on CS. Further trust is created when an individual discloses their information to other members, increasing their credibility among online users. (Xie et al. 2011).

Although many researches have been done fronting the importance of online reviews and feedback, Kerstetter-Cho (2004) confirms that individuals who have high levels of information regarding a certain destination, individual or event will have very low levels of trust in online reviews and feedback. CS seeks to increase users levels of trust by aggregating and availing all past information relating to an individual, event or destination. Ildiko et al. (2014) The author further asserts that the CS community has maximized on the "user-generated information" to increase trust levels among members.

CS and other "web-based social networking sites" have put in place several measures and policies to guarantee trust in place of traditional methods. (Ildiko et al. 2014) Ryan (2004) lists endorsement and digital photographs as examples of third party controls used by CS. Molz (2013) sees full disclosure profiles as a way in which CS have harnessed the power of third party controls. CS has gone further to incorporate mechanisms which enhance trust by optimizing on members past experiences, their personalities and character. (Sherchan et al. 2013) "Trust dissemination" structures have also been put into place, to augment mechanisms which seek to enhance interaction and association of users. (Canfora-Visaggio 2012)

2.3. Choosing CS instead of other similar websites for its practicality

Although CS is a dominant player in the hospitality industry, this does not mean that it does not have competitors (Skog, 2012). Airbnb is one of its top competitors, but CS is still miles ahead. (Steylaerts & Dubhghaill, 2012) Whereas most other hospitality networks have a fee, CS is free as Skog (2012) confirms. He goes on to state that this has been one of the greatest motivator for new members when choosing it over other websites. He goes on to list the ease of using the platform and confirms that this is a master stroke in beating off competition. The author observes that saving $150 per night when travelling in Europe or the US is a big factor for most travellers.

Skog (2012) further attests that Couchsurfing is head and shoulders above its competitors like Airbnb due to the fact that travellers are able to experience and view a city through a local's point

of view. Tran (2010) contends that due to the formation of interpersonal trust among members depending on familiarity, hosts take their guests around the town or country, showing the most critical and vital areas. Introductions to other people are also common as travellers increase their experiential value as Skog (2012) intimates. Having a local as a tour guide is a sure security due to that individual's familiarity with the terrain and people. (Tran, 2010)

CS allows members to make their own choice regarding their preferred location (Skog, 2012). Unlike other similar websites and hotels, members of CS have the luxury of choice, without incurring extra expenses. (Vaicekauskas, 2010) The author further attests that levels of trust can be predicted from the prevailing national levels. This correlation, he asserts, is crucial for a member's selection of location. He however notes that CS members do exhibit higher levels of trust and acceptance than the general public.

Due to the unlimited number of options, CS members cite the platform's availability of interesting people from diverse backgrounds as an important reason why members are locked in. (Skog, 2012) The level of trust exhibited by CS members also increases their reliance on the system, as users do not have to do extensive background searches. (Vaicekauskas, 2010) The author further points out that network information regarding an individual's reliance and integrity is very useful in making pre-selections. The ease of making these decisions is a key pointer on why more users prefer CS and why it is more practical in comparison with its peers. (Yannopoulou, 2013)

Yannopoulou (2013) observes that in comparison with Airbnb, CS has better quality "user-generated brands". After employing visual analysis coupled with discursive analysis, Yannoupoulou (2013) found out that CS user images and brands have greater levels of authenticity and inter-personal interactions. As Zhang (2004) confirms, familiarity of systems, mechanisms and users have a direct impact on trust. He goes on to state that websites and platforms eliciting the highest levels of trust and creating better environments for familiarity are due to win the battle for members. CS has proven this true. (Vaicekauskas, 2010)

Zhu (2010) goes on to cite CS extensive social capital and resulting trust as a critical factor in its dominance. Due to the high level and ease of interaction between members, CS is able to aggregate vast quantities of social capital. This large amount of social capital has in turn attracted more users who engage in more interaction, resulting in greater growth. (Vaicekauskas, 2010) Since most members have no prior internet experience and expertise, Zhu (2010) observes that many users may not make necessary provisions regarding information received from online communities. He

goes on to affirm that the practicality and ease of use and access to information exhibited by CS is one of the reasons why it is the market leader in its category.

2.3.1.Websites Similar to Couchsurfing

BeWelcome is a hospitality site that allows the members to meet and share the experiences during the course of their traveling. The site offers the members with an opportunity to host travelers, welcome people into their events and stay in the member's homes. It is run by volunteers and unlike Couchsurfing, the company running the website in a not-for-profit organization (Cherney, 2014). The advantage of this site is that it is purely free and there are fewer members in the website. This ensures that the hosting and the travelling is more secure since those who join the site are interested with the sharing of accommodation and culture. The negative side of having fewer members is that it is hard to find accommodation in some of the cities where the networking site is less common (Adamic et al., 2011).

Servas is a hospitality website that allows the members to share accommodation expenses during their travel. Unlike Couchsurfing, the applicants of Servas have to pass in an interview before become active hosts of getting accommodation in the members' houses. This is advantageous because it regulates the membership to the people who really have an interest in traveling and have an acceptable security record for the sake of the hosts (Bradbury, 2013). The physical interview ensures that the site eliminates robot accounts that could allow an individual to increase the number of positive references and mislead the travelers. The negative aspect of the site is that it takes a long process to register and get a working account with Servas. There are, therefore fewer members in the site since the long joining process discourages the travelers seeking to be members of a hospitality website (Zhu, 2010).

Hospitality Club is another travelling website formed in 2000 by Veit Kuhne. The website allows the members to share the economic impacts traveling (Zhu, 2010). Members contact the volunteers directly and it is forbidden to discuss the personal data of other members on the public forum. This site is different from Couchsurfing because it includes the sharing of personal data as an important aspect of personal security. The travelers can interact on a public forum in Hospitality Club, but the site restricts any sharing or personal information. This is advantageous because it

prevents the undesired interaction between members who may not be willing to have their information in public platforms (Bradbury, 2013). The actions of the site that offers it strength in security are its major weakness because the site has limited personal interaction. With such a high level of security, there is little sharing and the development of trust takes a longer process compared to the process in Couchsurfing. Limiting the access to information makes it harder for the Couchsurfers to decide on the best approach to interact with other members on the website (Cherney, 2014).

GlobalFreeloaders allows members to send messages and seek accommodation from the members. The communication is more personal than Couchsurfing and there is limited information sharing between the participants on the website. It is less popular than Couchsurfing and it is challenging to get references of the participants (Zhu, 2010). The interactions on the hospitality website allow the members to have access to the critical information about the previous records of the other members' interactions. GlobalFreeloaders limits the access to references and interrupts the continuity of interactions between the members on the website. With no contact of sufficient information, the members on this website have limited access to interactions with others and the level of trust between members is insufficient (Zhu, 2010).

Staydu is a site that offers options where the members can decide on the type of accommodation they need from the host. Some members offer accommodation in return for help, others need money, while other accommodations are free for the travelers. This site has an advantage for the hosts because they can choose the kind of members they would prefer to meet. Participating in the activities of the locals increases the contact with the culture, while paid accommodation compensates the hosts for their services. The limitation of the site is that the travelers may have to pay a cost for their interaction and sharing with the locals (Zhu, 2010).

2.4. Offering Free Accommodation in return of Cultural Exchange

The internet has brought a wave of interactions among cultures which were alienated from each other. (Canfora-Visaggio 2012) Due to the expanding global village, individuals across the globe have access to varying choice of people and products for satisfying certain unique needs and preferences. (O'Regan 2009) Although the expansion of the global village should instill trust, Canfora-Visaggio (2012) observes that online communities and virtual marketplaces are riddled

will mistrust and suspicion. Ildiko et al. (2014) enunciates that the mistrust observed in online marketplaces is driven by the absence of a uniting factor, similar experiences, lack of prior knowledge of each other and the lack of any potential future interaction. Varying cultural backgrounds besides diversity in geographical origins and backgrounds can lower the degree of trust according to O'Regan (2009).

CS' policy of enhancing and maintaining high trust levels have circumvented the challenges faced by traditional online marketplaces (Ildiko et al. 2014) The author observes that CS seeks to link up members based on their personal preferences, cultural backgrounds, interests and skills. Jarvenpaa and Leidner fronted much earlier (1999) that variances in trust levels are observed in virtual communities when their initial trust levels are compared with their latter trust levels. CS has put measures in place to ensure high levels of cultural exchange, according to Canfora-Visaggio (2012).

Ildiko (2014) observes that groups of individuals which exhibit high levels of initial as well as later trust are people who cope better with uncertain situations, complex problems and high expectations. CS users are mainly single persons predominantly students, who are out to have a good time travelling. (Canfora-Visaggio 2012) The authors further note that due to the age demographic of CS users, they tend to have a high passion for life and meeting new people is a standard way of life.

Users of CS tend to reveal more details regarding their lives while ineracting with other members than when talking with face-to-face friends. (Bialski 2007). Bialski calls this tendency intimate mobility. He explains that CS users are at greater ease of interaction with online users and hence lead to greater exchange of cultures due to the short timeframe of the communications and the setting of conversation. Bialski goes on to front that CS leads to greater cultural exchange due to the comfortable setting of conversations and interactions, which tend to happen in the host's home. (Bialski 2012) He observes that the guest is usually at ease due to the home setting and this cause him or her to divulge even more information on his or her own culture, while gobbling down aspects of the new culture. (Bialski 2012)

CS has been credited by Cook et al. (2009) for creating numerous localized communities in over 150,000 cities around the globe. These global communities are organized into two distinct groups as Cook et al. (2009) go on to elucidate. The first group is composed of members who are on average hosts while the second is composed of members who are more often than not guests. These

two groups lead to a great deal of cultural exchange as Cherney (2014) divulges. The members who are primarily acting as hosts get to meet guests from all over the world, while guests who travel the world get to meet hosts from around the world.

Bradbury (2013), states that the provision of free accommodation to guests has enabled members to overcome the barriers posed by being an outsider. The outsider is welcomed by locals who he has already established some form of contact in the past, and has as Cherney (2014) puts it, has built some trust based on information accessed in the CS website profiles. Due to the initial trust exhibited in and by the host, the guest is free to interact and learn new aspects of the foreign country. (Bradbury 2013)

Germann Molz in his 2013 analysis of Couchsurfing noted that CS was built as an "economy of alternative tourism". He went on to assert that "Couchsurfing, like many other alternative tourism initiatives, is defined by a specific moral agenda." (Molz, 2013). Further discussions on the importance of alternative tourism as provided by CS were led by Liu (2013). Liu noted that the availability of free accommodation was in the top three priorities which caused a member to choose a certain host. Molz (2007) had earlier observed and affirmed that CS had turned into a cosmopolitan society in which members travelled with the notion of "being at home in the world" He went on to note that just as Pultar & Raubal (2009) had noted while studying CS in the context of Location Based Social Network, free accommodation was a great motivator and enhancer of cultural exchange.

While analyzing travelling patterns and behaviors exhibited by CS members, Pultar (2011) offers quantitative survey data that shows CS travellers travel itinerary greatly affected, influenced and optimized by the host. Pultar (2011) observed that members who had the greatest experiential value had been hosted by very hospitable hosts who had gone on to make their stay one to remember. In support of this analysis, Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova (2015) offer very descriptive analyses of members' experiential value of visits with regard to varying hosts. The users cite experiences shared together, values and items exchanged as the highlights of their visits. (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015)

2.5. Research gap:

Analysis of literature pertaining to online market places and online communities shows a certain short fall. Whereas every study and research interrogated has had profound insights into the origins of e-commerce, its application, risks and benefits, no single study has solved the pertinent questions under study in this paper. (Zhu 2010, Zhang 2004, Yannopoulou 2013) Most researches have focused on one aspect of CS operations and legacy, without coming up with a master-theory of sorts, which will be all inclusive. (Tran 2010, Skog 2012) As Vaicekauskas (2010) attests, each researcher has a limited focus on which that individual has to apply themselves to the full.

In light of this, it has been apparent that no single research has captured the essence and gist of the CS platform in one theory. No research has been able to aggregate the background information, functionality, application and repercussions of building trust amongst its hosts and guests, provision of free accommodation in exchange of cultural insights and enlightenment, in addition to CS position in the market as the most practical among its peers, in relation to the enhancement and optimization of the tourist experiential value of the members (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015). It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to bridge the gap. This paper seeks to interrogate how trust can be built among members in an effort to optimize the experiential value of travellers and hosts (Skog, 2012). This paper will also analyze how the provision of free accommodation is an incentive for cultural exchange among members. It will also seek to explore how this facet of CS can be used to increase the experiential value of members. Analysis of how CS practicality and ease of use have enhanced its acceptance in the online community and how CS practicality can be used to improve tourist experiential value will be the third facet of this study.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

Couchsurfing has proven to be a big hit with the online travelling community (Skog, 2012). Members seek to experience as much of the outside world as they possibly can, with the least resources possible, while meeting and making many new friends (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015). Tourist Experiential Value is the gain or loss incurred due to expenses incurred during a trip, ease of access to personal interests and preferences, level and ease of interaction with locals, practicality

of travel itinerary preparation and informing prior to trip, personal expectations and assumptions about the website and other users (Skog, 2012). Every user on CS has a certain expectation of the experience of travelling before the due date.

Experiential value is crucial to every tourist on his travels. This paper seeks to interrogate how building trust among CS users can optimize the tourist experiential value. It further analyzes how offering of free accommodation motivates members to engage in cultural exchange in order to increase the tourist experiential value. Lastly, this research will interrogate the reasons why CS is more practical for users and how its practicality and ease of use contribute to increasing tourists' experiential value (Skog, 2012).

Independent
Variable

Intermediary Variable

Dependent
Variable

Building Trust

Couchsurfing

Offering free
accommodation for
Cultural Experience

Enhance

Tourist

Experience

Value of

Practicality in
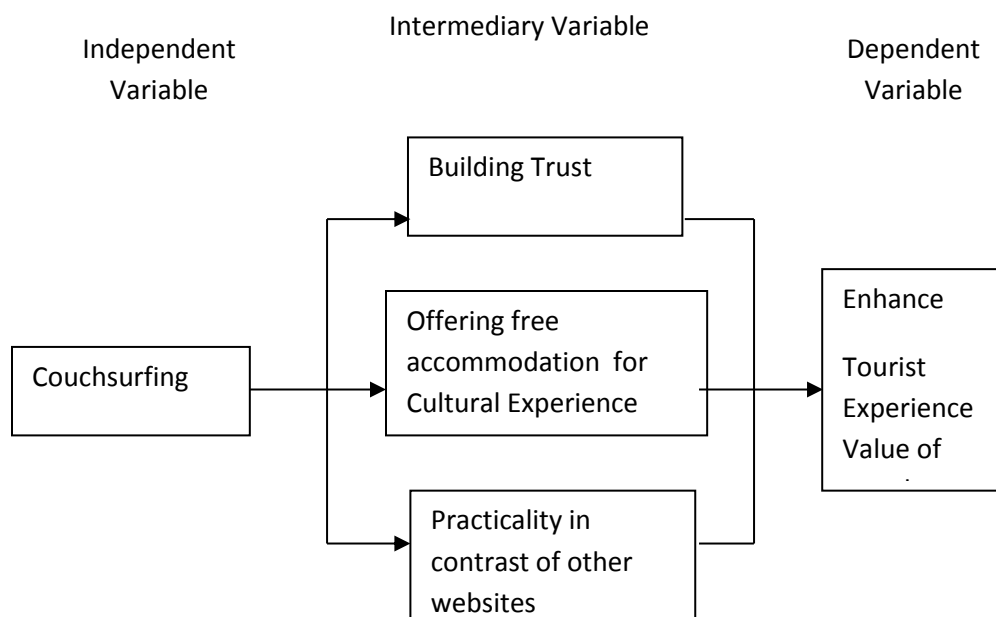contrast of other
websites

Figure 1. Own adaptation of Skog (2012)

Independent Variable

The theoretical framework of this research recognized as the only independent variable. This is occasioned by the fact that it is the only input which does not rely on the rest of the variables in that it is independent (Yannopoulou, 2013).

Variables

The theoretical framework shown above shows two sets of variables; the intermediary variables and the dependent variable. The intermediary variables are inputs which are active in the process under study. Their levels influence the outcome of the process. The three intermediary variables in this framework are trust, free accommodation and practicality of CS website (Skog, 2012). Tourists' experiential value is the only dependent variable in the framework. The value of tourists' experience is dependent on the intermediary variables and the independent variable, and it is the end product of the above process (Yannopoulou, 2013).

Trust is the first intermediate variable as it is crucial to the operation of this process. This paper seeks to establish whether when trust is absent or in low levels, users are unlikely to have a good experience as they will either shun off the journey all together, or be inhibited during their travels due to fear(Tran 2010, Skog 2012). We further seek to know how and whether in fact low trust leads to low interaction and hence low cultural exchange, leading to low value in the tourist's experience. The reverse will also be studied. Option such as how members can build trust through referrals from familiar friends since third party reviews carry more weight in the CS community (Yannopoulou, 2013). First time members can also improve their trust levels by being more open to change and uncertainties. Sharing of personal information on the site with interested members can also increase trust and eventually increase the experiential value of the journey.

Free accommodation will be studied as the second intermediary variable. Free accommodation has been cited in literature above as a key contributor to cultural exchange and increased tourist experiential value (Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova 2015).

The practicality and ease of use of the CS platform has been fronted as an important reason for its dominance in the hospitality sector (Skog, 2012). This variable has a huge impact on the tourist experiential value, as the measures set in place by the firm ensure that his or her stay is comfortable. The large number of members, ease of communication and interaction are also some of the

practicality reasons cited by members. These have a direct impact on the tourist's experiential value, which is the dependent variable (Yannopoulou, 2013).

Research Gap and How this Framework will solve it

Analysis of literature pertaining to online market places and online communities shows a deficiency. Most researches have focused on one aspect of CS operations and legacy, without coming up with a master-theory of sorts, which will be all inclusive. (Tran 2010, Skog 2012) As Vaicekauskas (2010) attests, each researcher has a limited focus on which that individual has to apply themselves to the full. No research has been able to aggregate the background information, functionality, application and repercussions of building trust amongst its hosts and guests, provision of free accommodation in exchange of cultural insights and enlightenment, in addition to CS position in the market as the most practical among its peers, in relation to the enhancement and optimization of the tourist experiential value of the members (Skog, 2012).

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to bridge the gap. This paper seeks to interrogate how trust can be built among members in an effort to optimize the experiential value of travellers and hosts. This paper will also analyze how the provision of free accommodation is an incentive for cultural exchange among members. It will also seek to explore how this facet of CS can be used to increase the experiential value of members. Analysis of how CS practicality and ease of use have enhanced its acceptance in the online community and how CS practicality can be used to improve tourist experiential value will be the third facet of this study (Skog, 2012)

2.7. Problem Formulation

Case of study (hypothesis): CouchSurfing.org offers a great Tourist Experience Value to its users, making it the biggest, most active community of its kind.

Problem statement: How Couchsurfing.org keeps its members active by enhancing their Tourist Experience Value?

Research Questions:

-        How does building trust amongst Couchsurfing members increase the Tourist Experience Value?

-        Why Couchsurfing is more practical and offers a better Tourist Experience Value as

opposed to similar websites?

-        How does Cultural Exchange contribute to the Tourist Experience Value when it comes to members' motivation in offering free accommodation?

Research objectives:

-        To find out how important is trust for the Tourist Experience Value of the members

-        To identify the reason why people prefer to use Couchsurfing and not other similar websites and to connect this with the perceived Tourist Experience Value

-        To connect Cultural Exchange, as an Tourist Experience Value, with members' motivation to offer free accommodation

III. Methodology

"The purpose of the methodology chapter is to give an experienced investigator enough information to replicate the study. A research design is used to structure the research and to show how all of the major parts of the research project, including the sample, measures, and methods of assignment, work together to address the central research questions in the study. " Barbara (2010, p 52)

So, in the light of the explanation above, in this chapter, I have described the plan that me, the research, have taken for the completion of findings related to the subject of CouchSurfing website and its relation to the Tourist Experience Value. . It is important for me to have this chapter so that the reader can follow the process of data collection step by step. By following an organised structure and reasoning, I could be sure to answer my research questions and reach my research objectives, which will be elaborated further in this chapter, by using the appropriate type of tools of collecting data. Following Saunders' (2012) "layer plan", I start by defining my research philosophy. This allowed me to choose the approach I want to have on my research. After this, I chose the methodology approach that fitted with the philosophy chosen. According to the approach I choose the right strategies for data collection and the time horizon in which the process took place.

Even me, the researcher, have been participating in the CouchsSurfing experience as guest several times and this can be seen as a strength to the research of this project. This advantage is due to the fact that I know how the system of searching for a host is. I know how the interaction with the host is prior to the face to face meeting. I know how the experience of being a guest of a local is like, which will help me emphasise with the experiences that will be described by the participants.

3.1 Research philosophy

Given Saunders' (2012) plan, the following subchapter will discuss the research philosophy whistch "deals with the source, nature and development of knowledge" (Bajpai, 2011, p 101)

I have chosen the pragmatist researcher philosophy because it allows the actions of 'the observed' to be significant and fundamental for a study.(Patton, 1990) Since my study focuses on the actions of members from Couchsurfing.org, than it is appropriate to have a pragmatic approach towards my research. The pragmatism is traditionally association with the mixed method of research . (Morgan,2008).

Complementing the quantitative and qualitative methods, there is the mixed methods research that has been established as a third possibility of method for research. (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009)

Guba (1994) claims that the mixed method was not possible because there was no paradigm compatible with the methods underlined. In order to deal with this problem, Taskhakkori (2009) developed three categories of approaches. One of them is the one that claims a single paradigm can accommodate both qualitative and quantitative methods. In my case, that single paradigm is pragmatism which I will aim at answering the "how" and the "what" of my problem statement that refers to the activity of the members from CouchSurfing and its connection to the Tourist Experience Value. The advantage of using this paradigm is that is it problem-centred and is oriented towards real world-practice. (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) . This will allow me to achieve my research objectives which will be elaborated in the next subchapters.

3.2.Research Approach

For my research, I have chosen the Deductive approach. There is not much research done according to this approach, however, Khaled Yassin (2014) has elaborated on the concept of "deductive pragmatism" in one of his researches.

He states that " deductive pragmatism is a research method aiming at helping researchers communicate qualitative assumptions about cause-effect relationships , elucidate the ramifications of such assumptions and drive conclusions from a combination of observations from different sources." (Yassin, 2014, p 32)

Deductive approach implies moving from a general idea to a more particular one. I have chosen this method because of the ideas outlined in the first chapter. The ideas were withdrawn from observing other researches and members experiences, including my own experience in the Couchsurffing community. So there is enough information available on the subject to draw a general hypothesis of this research is "CouchSurfing.org offers a great Tourist Experience Value to its users, making it the biggest, most active community of its kind".

In order to test this hypothesis , I have created the research objectives based on discussions from the literature review. These will be followed through the data collecting process. First research objective is to find out how important is trust for the Tourist Experience Value of the members. Second is to connect Cultural Exchange, as an Tourist Experience Value, with members' motivation to offer free accommodation. And the third is to identify the reason why people prefer to use Couchsurfing and not other similar websites and to connect this with the perceived Tourist Experience Value.

Following the results of my research, there can be a 'valid' or 'invalid' deductive argument. In case the argument is 'valid', the conclusion must be followed form the premise. It can be the case that the premise, or the "qualitative assumption" may not be true, for example, the activity of the members may not be, mainly, due to the Tourist Experience Value, but there can be a valid argument these two are connected in some way. In order to have a valid deductive argument, everything in the conclusion must also be present in the premises. (Stanley, 2014) In order for a deductive argument to be 'invalid' the conclusion must contain something wholly new and independent from the variables mentioned in the premise of the argument. For example, Couchsurfing could be successful and active because it connects people with similar interests and enthusiasm for alternative traveling. This conclusion distinguishes the social experience of the members from that of the tourist experience which I intend to research.

3.3.**Research Design**

"The research design section describes the rationale for the application of specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, and analyse information applied to understanding the research problem" (Kallet Richard H, 2004, 122).

Since the research philosophy is the one of pragmatism, it is in my advantage to use the mixed method of research in order to validate or contradict my hypothesis without the limitations of a one-sided method. By combining qualitative data with quantitative data, I will be able to construct arguments from statistical point of view and subjective, descriptive points of view. Also, by combining the quantitative and qualitative data collection, mixed together, I think I can get a more in-depth insight into why members use Couchsurfing, than if I would use only one research strategy.

One of the main reasons, as stated by **Jick** (1990), to use a mixed methodology is that it can give the researcher certain advantages that can overcome the disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative methods separately. That means that, one of the strengths of the mixed method can be that allows me to take advantage of both the qualitative and the quantitative methods. Also, in the light of this matter, **Onwuegbuzie** (2004) says that "the strengths of an additional method can be used to overcome the weaknesses of another by using both in a research study"(p. 21)

As an example of such cases, the quantitative method is not efficient in explaining the importance of circumstances that people may speak of and could not get as much detail on certain reasoning's of the subject's actions. And so, the qualitative method can overweight these kinds of disadvantages. In opposition to the previous example, qualitative methods are considered insufficient by Jick (1990) because, as a researcher, I could make a personal analysis of the data but I would have major problems in generalizing the information into a broader category. And that is due to the limited number of participants.

Hesse-Biber (2010) states that, in using the mixed method, there must be an emphasis on the qualitative method because that can give way for the subjective perspective of the one participating in the research. This is called a "qualitative approach to the mixed method" (Hesse-Biber, 2010. P. 23). This implies the process of data collection in my research, has two steps. First one implies collecting and analysing the quantitative data by using a survey as a method. Second one, I use the data collected to make a qualitative analysis which will help me in creating an appropriate sample and make the analysis of semi-structured interviews. In the end, these two steps should help me create a comprehensive interpretation. I will clarify this process later on in the data collection sub-chapter.

3.4.Strategies of reseach:

In order to answer my research questions I have chosen the Survey as a quantitative data collection strategy, as well as the semi-structured interview for the qualitative data collection.

As I stated the research objectives in the research approach section, now I choose the following three research questions used in order to   reach these objectives:

-        How does building trust amongst Couchsurfing members increase the Tourist Experience Value?

-        Why Couchsurfing is more practical and offers a better Tourist Experience Value as opposed to similar websites?

-        How does Cultural Exchange contribute to the Tourist Experience Value when it comes to members' motivation in offering free accommodation?

3.4.1.The Written Survey:

I chose to have 200 respondents for my survey. All of the respondents had to be members of couchsurfing.org , regardless of age or nationality. Since the website is global, has women and men as members, and has an age limit of above 18, these two demographic statistics were not important for the research. This ensures that all the questions in the survey can be answered from the stand point of a Couchsurfing member that knows how this website works.

I use Written, online survey because it is less time consuming to design, distribute and have access to the respondents much easier. Also it is easy to summaries the results !

Forming the questions:

The questions were formed so that they cover the elements mentioned in the research questions and research objectives. The three objectives are regarding the three elements mentioned in the theory. And so, the survey questions were categorized in three parts. First one is about building trust amongst members, second is about the benefits of free accommodation and the Cultural Exchange, and third is about comparing Couchsuring with other similar websites.

Open-ended questions:

I had only one open-ended question in the survey where, if the respondent could write any other websites similar to Couchsurfing.org that were not on the list mentioned in the previous question. This was a necessary and helpful information to have so that I can get a bigger perspective on the options that are present on the internet for being part of an travel-based community of which maybe I was not aware during my theory research.

Closed-ended questions:

I have formed 4 of these types of questions. The responses will help me rank the most important elements that contribute to building trust on the Couchsurfing platform. One is to rank similar websites that I have described in the Literature Review according to how popular they are amongst the respondents. Another similar question type is regarding the reasons why members think that the Couchsurfing platform is more practical than the other websites mentioned in the previous

questions. And, finally, the last of the questions of this type is regarding the manifestation of the Cultural Exchange that happens when a guest meets with a local. The purpose of this question is to rank elements of the Cultural Exchange according to how often they occur.

One choice questions:

I used this form of question 7 times in the Survey. I , only once, used it to find out how important is trust for the members from "not important at all" to "very important" , to their Tourist Experience Value. The other 6 questions are Yes or No questions which gives me a statistical information on whether members prefer Couchsurfing instead of other websites, if they consider it more practical, if the practical elements of the website improves their Tourist Experience Value, if saving money with accommodation improved their Tourist Experience Value, if they used their extra budget for other activities and attractions and, to express whether they think that the platform's success and popularity is due to improving their Tourist Experience Value.

Tools for data collection

When it came to collecting the data via the internet, I had a couple of options of tools that would gather all the data and create the output of data and also to keep track of the progress of the number of respondents in real time. The options were SurveyMoney, which is the most popular, but it had a limit for the non-premium users to how many respondents I can have and how many questions I could include in my survey! Since I was exceeding both, I had to choose another option that would best suite my needs. Sogosurvey, Polleverywhere and 2ask.net were the next three options but, due to very poor interface, limitations on question types and complicated hand-out options, I decided to look further for a different option. Finally, I have found Surveyrock which also had limitations for respondent and question number for non-premium members, but for a small fee of just 15 dollars, I was able to receive all the benefits needed to easily create and distribute my survey.

This tool allows me to use a link that directs the participant directly to the survey. This way, I could easily hand-out to my potential participants.

In order to attain my sample objective of 200 respondents and make sure that they are all within the chosen characteristics I have followed two steps.

First, I have created a general message that had a friendly greeting towards the members, and explained what I am doing the survey about so that they can decide whether they have the relevant experience to answer the questions, and also copied the link from Surveyrock.

Second, I have found and distributed the message to over 30 groups on Facebook with Couchsurfing members from different cities around the world. These groups had at least 2000 members each and was sure to have members willing to help me with the survey. Also I have posted the message on 60 major groups from the Couchsurfing website. This, turned out to be problematic because some groups were banning these types of posts, and so I got a warning from one of the administrators of the groups to delete the message. After these two steps, I could follow the number of respondents in real time from my account on SurveyRock.com. As part of this process, I also received a feedback from one of the respondents that , in the case of choosing recognizing some alternative websites to Couchsurfing, there was no option for those that didn't recognize any at all. And so, I have adapted my survey with an open-ended question in order to allow the respondents to mention any other website that they might know. It took 2 weeks to reach my chosen sample size.   After I have reached my sample goal of 200 respondents, Surveyrock allowed me to export the results into a spreadsheet Excel document and get the data ready for creating Descriptive Statistics which will be written in the analysis chapter.

3.4.2.Qualitative data collection

Selection process:

Since I have an account on Couchsurfing.org and wanted to look for experienced members, it was easy for me to search them on the platform and send them a message. But before contacting members, I sent a message to the people that used to host me before. I thought that it would be a much more open interview and would get more personal information from people that I have met before.

After that, I have chosen to search by city in the USA, because the language barrier would not be a problem since English is the language used in the interviews. And so I searched cities with the most members. Some of them were Washington, New York, Chicago etc. with tens of thousands of members. I also used the filter to get search results only with members that "are accepting guests", "have references" and "have logged in the past 24 hours". Above this, I chose only

members with at least 10 references from the search results. All of these filters were used so that I can be sure to contact only members that would have enough experience to offer relevant information during the interview and would be active on the platform and respond quickly to my request.

I have composed a standard message to send to all potential respondents due to lack of time resource to personalize for each one. I only addressed the members by their name so it can feel a bit more personal and have a better chance of getting a positive reply.

In the message, firstly, I introduce myself and make it clear that I am studying a Master's in Tourism. This would prepare the potential respondent for the request. Then, I shortly described the subject of my research and the objective of my qualitative data collection, state the reason for choosing to interview him/her.

I have sent this message to over 90 members. Shortly after this process I got around 16 responses, of which 16 were positive and one was a member that I've met personally in my trip to Berlin and was hosted by him for 6 days.

The next step was to clarify to those that responded positively that their full name will not be disclosed and that the interviews will be taken via Skype and recorded for later transcription. As a preparation for the interview, I have asked them for their email in order to send them the question list so that they can prepare for the interview and be more efficient in getting the relevant information during the process.

One big challenge that I've faced during this process was that my Couchsurfing account was suspended because of sending to many messages. By this time I have only exchanged messages with only one person.

And so I had to turn to Facebook once again, in order to search for respondents. So I have created a similar message and posted it on the Couchsurfing groups. This time, the filtering process was more challenging. I had to ask the people interested to participate if they had the required experience in order to answer the questions. Their nationality was not anymore a criterium for selection because I had to "work with what I had", as there were not many potential respondents to choose from as it was when I had access to members directly from the CouchSurfing platform.

As I started getting replies to my message, I started scheduling the meetings. Sometimes it was challenging because, being people from all over the world, we had a time difference of a couple of hours. Also, some of them had bad English, which would be problematic during the transcript phase.

Interview design:

How did I form the question?

At the beginning of the interview, all the respondents were asked to state their name, age and nationality. This is important because it is easyer, when analysing the data, to put in context, the respondent's experience. For example, Ahmed is from Indonesia. Even he mentiones that in his country people are more close to their family and tend to help each other more often. This is clearly a result of the culture in which he grew up. Other countries of origin were Mexco, USA, Ukrain, China, Philiphenes, Germany, Rusia and Argentina. Even though, initailly I wanted to interview only members from the USA, the variety of nationalities will turned out to be a big advantage because I can get a "world view" from different cultures with a broader range of experiences regarding my subject of study.

The age range turned out be small: between 23 and 32 years old. Given that the respondents were not selected according to their age, this can only mean that Couchsurfing.org is , mainly used by young members.

The design of the interview questions has the same logic to its structure as the one used for the survey. There are three part, each one directing the discussion towards the three elements that connect Couchsurfing with the Tourist Experience Value. That is, in the first part, the respondent has been asked about the process of building trust. Further into the second part, the questions refer to the practicality of CouchSurfing in comparison to other websites mentioned in the literature review. And, the third part of the interview is about offering free accommodation and experiencing the Cultural Exchange. All these three parts correspond to each of the research objectives and research questions discussed earlier.

Almost all of my questions were open-ended questions. Mainly, I used the "How, Why and What" to ask for details regarding the respondent's experience.

I used probing questions like "Can you please describe…?" or "Can you tell me more about…?" to offer the respondent the chance to elaborate on their experience in regards to building trust and the Tourist Experience Value or to describe in more details their activity in Couchsurfing, and also to elaborate on their Cultural Exchange that they experienced as guest.

In some cases I used specifying questions after a probing questions so that I help the respondent create an image on what exactly I expect from him. These were almost quantitative questions like "How many times have you hosted?" or "How many times have you been a guest?" which could give me an idea on their experience with a very specific information.

Questions like "What makes you want to…?" were used to get more arguments from the respondent as a follow-up of a previous question. For example, I wanted to find out the reason for which members are so active on the Couchsurfing platform, and so I ask them directly what makes them be active in this community.

In the section where I ask the them about other websites like Couchsurfing, I use a "comparing question". This would give me member's opinion on the other possibilities that exist besides Couchsurfing and if they are as practical. In case they did not know any of the websites, they were asked to describe what makes the website so practical to them. On this same subject, used a "connecting question" that asks the respondent to make a connection between their preference for Couchsurfing.org and the Tourist Experience Value that they perceive to get by using it.

I also used a direct question at the end of the interview in order to sum up the participant's opinion on Cultural Exchange. Even though the questions asks for a "yes" or "no", it is followed by the open-ended question "Why?" which intends to get a descriptive argument of his previous answer.

Tools for data collection: (if you can , please write some referenced arguments)

In order to be able to have an interview with people that live on the other side of the world, I had to make use of the internet. And so, as I mentioned above, I have chose to use Skype as a tool for my interview. Even though, this is one of the most common platforms for online calls, there were a few potential respondents that did now have skype, and so I could not use them in my research.

The interviews were recorded with an application called "Skype Recorder" which was very easy to use as it was automatically recording whenever a call was in progress. Before starting the interviews I made sure that the quality of the sound and registration was good so that I can easily follow up with the transcripts. Unfortunatelly with Ahmed, the first interwievee, the connection was still bad and I had a hard time understanding what he was saying and had to ask him to repeat his sentence many times. However, this was not the case with the rest of the respondents.

The interview situation:

During the interviews there have been some minor issues regrading the strong accent of some of the respondents. This was one of the reasons I iniatlly wanted to select only members from the USA. But, in my case, the benefit of having a variety of nationalities, which i've stated above, has far outweight the ocassional understanding issue. And even so, this issue was resolved with a simple request to repeat the phrase.

 During my first interviews, I noticed that some did not have experience as hosts or guests. In that case, I had to reformulate the question or just skyp it all together. Also, during the interview I was asked to explain more clearly what the Tourism Experience Value is. And so, to make sure that there will be no confusion for the future respondents, I introduced a small description of the term at the beginnig of the questionair.

The participants were asked to read the questions themselves and answer them as they go. I did it this way so that I can take notes of the important information that they give me during their responses. I wanted to focus on extracting the essential from their answeres. In some cases they were asked some aditional questions like: "Can you tell me more about your experiene with that couchsurfer?" so that I can have more relevant information about certain experiences.

In case of Brad, he had a lot of experience with being a Couchsurfer and being a host. He had a enormous amount of information to give me. I could say that he was a little "over-enthusiastic" about some question and I had to step in and ask him to "sum up his answer", or tell him that "it was a fair amount of information" , so that we don't get to far off the topic of the questions.

I also asked each interwieve to give me feedback regarding the questins so that I can make the proper changes and have a smoother process with the rest of the respondents. Most of the concerns

were regarding questions that ask them to describe certain experiences which, they said, they are too broad and don't really know how to answer them. And so, I have managed to add some examples to help the participant have a better answer regarding the connection between their Tourist Experience Value and their prefrence for Couchsurfing. One example was "Couchsurfing offers a valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CouchSurfing as part of your tourist experience". Or, when asked to say "how saving money on accommodation improved their Tourist Experience Value", they also requested to have an example to inspire them to give a relevant answer. So, I wrote the example where you may spend your money on more attractions and activities, which would contribute to the Tourist Experience Value. This was very usefull to start the conversation on the matter. In other cases I've added some support questions to help the respondent give more appropriate answers. When asked about their experience on Couchsurfing.org, they were not sure how to respond. So, I followed this question with basic questions, almost quantitative question about the number of times he/she has received guests or have been guests, or "yes" or "no" questions wether they have been to events or "hanged-out" with other surfers, which is one of the options of interaction on the website.

Transcription

The final stage of the data collecting process is to transcribe all the information from my recordings on a Word document in order to have the information available on top of my notes , for the analysis chapter. In general, the interview recording needs to be transcribed word for word. (Catanzaro, 2001). For me, this was a lot more challenging then I expected. There were a number of issues that caused problems in this process. One of the most difficult aspects was to capture the wording accurately. I've been playing the recorder back several times to increase the accuracy but it took a longer time then expected. Some phrases were not complete by the participant, sometimes they were not clear in the ideas they were trying to express and, sometimes, the connecting was bad and could not reproduce word for word. That is why, some phrases will seem dis-jointed and might make no sense in some situation. In some other cases, the participant was repeating what they have said earlier but I've decided to transcript them anyway because there would be a less chance that I would leave important information aside.   Also, there were conversations of-topic which I decided to let aside while doing the interview. This helped me keep

the useful information and save some time. The transcription starts from the moment they say their name until they finish answering the last question and I make a vocal marking.

IV. Data analysis:

In this chapter , all the data collected comes into play in order to answer the three research questions that I have formulated in the second chapter. I will show how, the answer to these questions will connect all the variables discussed in the theoretical framework. I will draw conclusions as a result of the analysis of the data which will eventually lead to confirming or denying my hypothesis.

The process through witch I made the analysis is similar to the one described in the methodology chapter and it is specific to the pragmatism philosophy of research.

Firstly, I will analyze the quantitative data drawn from the survey. All data was compiled in pie-charts and column charts which were introduced in the Appendix for the reader to have easy access and clear image of the data resulted. The analysis is structured according to the literature review so it is easier to follow the correlations.

Secondly, in order to maximize the use of my qualitative data, I have created three Anova tests that will provide me with additional , quantitative data.

And thirdly, I analyzed the quantitative data which offered me a detailed perspective over the variables studied.

4.1.Quantitative data:

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the questions of the survey were arranged and organized according to the Literature Review. Thus, each set of questions describes aspects of the correlating variables mentioned in the theory chapter. There is the trust issue, the context of other websites and the Cultural Exchange. The analysis of the results were done with the same structure so that it is easier for the reader to follow the parallel with the theory section.

4.1.1.Building Trust on the Couchsurfing Platform:

In the first part of the survey, the focus was on building trust on the platform. I identified some of the elements that contribute to building trust and tested their importance amongst the participants.

And so, the first question of the survey is meant to identify which is the most important element in trust building amongst members. It seems that, according to the respondents, references had a response rate of 61 % (Appendix 3 Q1). This means that the members have a lot of confidence in the reference system. It far outweighs the importance of profile information which is second place with 19% of responses and the first experience or contact sharing, which, together have 21% response rate.(Appendix 3 Q1)

Further into responses about trust it seems that most of the members consider the process of building it to be important and very important to their Tourist Experience Value. This comes as a result of having a 51% answer rate for the label "important" and 38% for "very important"(Appendix 4 Q2). Together, they clearly confirm what I have stated earlier.

First Anova test:

In order to connect the information received so far, I needed to find out if there is any correlation between the specific elements that contribute most to building trust on the Couchsurfing platform and the relevance of trust to the member's Tourist Experience Value. I decided to make an Anova test. The hypothesis tested is: Trust is important to the Tourist Experience Value, regardless of which element contributes most to building it.

After the Anova test, I observed that the F value is smaller than the F critic (Annex anova1), and so the hypothesis is accepted. As a conclusion, that means that, for example, if references are the most important to building trust for the members, it doesn't influence the importance of trust to the Tourist Experience Value any more than the other elements like profile information, first experience as guest or sharing contacts with other members. This information contributes to a more thorough answer for the research question.

I could say, from these result, that the Couchsurfing community is built on trust and the Tourist Experience Value would be very poor had it not been for the elements that contribute to building

it. But, as concluded from the Anova test, these elements, even though one is most preferred from the others, they contribute to building trust as a whole and not separate.

So, to answer the research question more directly from this quantitative data, there are different elements that contribute to the process of building trust and they have a major impact on the Tourist Experience Value and the reference system is a major part of the whole process.

4.1.2.Couchsurfing's practicality and other similar websites:

In order to answer the second research question related to other similar websites and the practicality of the Couchsurfing.org platform i had to go through three steps. I had to "test" the audience's knowledge about this environment first, then, elaborate on the practicality issue, and, finally, correlate these with the Tourist Experience Value.

The third question of the survey asks the respondents to select the websites that they have heard of before. Next question, which I've added later as a result of the feedback I got from my respondents, asks them to mention any other similar websites that they know about. These questions creates the context in which I can compare the Couchsurfing platform with other similar ones from a practical view point.

So, as a result, from all the websites described in the literature review, BeWelcome and Hospitality Club, together, had a 77% response rate (Appendix 7 Q5) , which makes them the most known. Thanks to the next, open-ended question, I discovered that some people have heard of many other, of which WarmShowers was mostly mentioned (Appendix 6) Even though it was mentioned many times, this website is not based on offering "free accommodation" but rather creates a platforms where bikers can meet and create trips together. This option is also available on the Couchsurfing platform but it is not one of the "pillars" of this community.

After testing respondent's knowledge of other websites, I asked them about the practical side of Couchsurfing in order to create wider context of the influence it has on their Tourist Experience Value.

Next question "tests" respondent's preference for CouchSurfing in the context described above. 89% of them (Appendix 7) said "yes", so most of them would use Couchsurfing instead of other websites. It is fair to put in question the validity of this answer due to the sample choice. Since this

survey was meant to be done only by experienced couchsurfers, it is very hard to generalize the result of this question to a wider population that might include even non-members. The fact that the respondents have a relatively long experience with Couchsurfing, there is no surprise that the answer was in its favor.

Before moving on to the practicality of the Couchsurfing website, I have considered to apply a second Anova test in order to deepen my understanding and interpretation of the results.

Seccond Anova test

I needed to know if, by knowing other websites, the preference for Couchsurfing would change. So, in order to answer the question "Is the respondent's preference for CouchSurfing influenced by their knowledge of any other similar websites?" I decided to make an Anova test between the responses from question 5 and question 3. This test tells me if there is a significant influence between the respondent's preference for CouchSurfing and weather they know any of the websites that we have discussed about in the Literature Review. Since our F value is smaller than the F critic (Appendix 2), we have to accept the null hypothesis. So I can say that there is no significant connection between preferring the use of CouchSurfing and their knowledge of any other website. This means that, even if they know about other websites, they still want to use CouchSurfing. And whether some other websites are more known than others, they won't influence people's preference for Couchsurfing. This information helps me better understand people's preference for Couchsurfing. It creates a more detailed context on which I can base my conclusions and answers to my research question.

After creating the context of "similar websites" for my respondents, I start asking about the practicality. So, question number 6 is directly focused on members' preference for Couchsurfing compared to other websites that I talked about earlier, but from a practical point of view. And so, 91% of the respondents said they consider Couchsurfing to be more practical than the others. This confirms the premise of the second research questions, that the members consider the Couchsurfing platform to be more practical.

The second part of the research question is regarding the reason behind the respondent's preference. So, first, I made a list of four practical advantages drawn from the research done in the literature review: more active members, easy access and registration, easy way to request couch, offers more

options for interaction. Then, I asked the respondents to choose the ones that make Couchsurfing more practical than the other websites. This would create an even wider context, since it gives me an information about Couchsurfing relative to the other websites. The result is that, having more active members got 35% of the responses and offering more options for interaction has 32%.(Appendix 14 Anova no. 2) In conclusion, these are the two elements that are considered to make Couchsurfing a more practical platform.

Third Anova test:

Also, I made the third Anova test so that I can find out if there is any connection between a specific element that the respondent considers to be making Couchsurfing more practical and the fact that they consider the platform as a whole to be more practical than the other specified websites. By exploring this mater, I can better respond to the research question by knowing if there is any specific practical element that influences the choice of Couchsurfing in the context of other similar websites.

 The hypothesis is that there is no connection between the two results. The value of the F calculated is smaller than the F critic (Appendix Anova nr 3) and so, the hypothesis is confirmed to be true. This means that no matter what element makes Couchsurfing more practical, the respondents would consider the platform to be more practical in general, as compared to the other websites. So there is no specific "pillar" amongst the number of active members, easy access and registration, easy way to request couch or the numerous options that the platform offers for interaction with other members that would make a member consider Couchsurfing more practical than the other websites. In conclusion, it is as a whole, that Couchsurfing is preferred for by their members and no other specific element.

The next question connects these elements to how it benefits the Tourism Experience Value. 92% of respondents choose "yes" when asked if the elements that I talked about in the previous question, contribute to improving their Tourist Experience Value. (Appendix 10, Q8)

4.1.3.Cultural Exchange and free accommodation:

The third research question connects the Tourist Experience Value to the Cultural Exchange that can manifest as a result of members deciding to host travelers for free. The 9th question of the survey is related to the way in which the Cultural Exchange is manifested between the host and the guest. I have created a list of four main elements that can manifest as a result of offering free accommodation to a guest. The four elements are: language, food, traditions and perspective on local activities and attractions. Then, I asked the respondents to choose the elements that they think manifested while offering free accommodation. The result was that the first three had a very small response rate range from 21% to 24%. Only the last one has had a few more responses of 33%. (Appendix 11 Q9) This indicates that the Cultural Exchange doesn't manifest specifically in one direction, but is rather homogenic across these four main elements. The fourth element on perspective of local activities and attractions is slightly higher than the rest. Statistically, this difference doesn't allow for a concrete conclusion, but it may pave the way towards interpreting the quantitative data from the interviews. Even so, with the third research question in mind, we can say that one of the main motivators for locals to accept guests for free, is that they get the benefit of a Cultural Exchange which manifests, at least as we know so far, on all of these four planes in a relative equal way. This can only mean that there is a rich experience to be gained from offering free accommodation.

With my next question, I direct the attention towards the respondent's experience as a guest. I have assumed that, by finding free accommodation, they would make savings on their budget, and so, there is a potential to increase the Tourist Experience Value by diversifying their expenses at the location of their stay. Question number 10 directly asked if there is a connection between saving money on accommodation and the improvement of their Tourist Experience Value. 76% of them answered "yes", which mean that my assumption is right and 3 out of 4 people actually felt that their experience was improved (Appendix 12 Q10) I will find out more details about this effect from the interviews as I have an open-ended question regarding the same mater. As part of the Cultural Exchange, I assumed that visiting more attractions and doing more activities in the area of travel, would be one of the benefits of saving money on accommodation. So, next question asks the respondent if they spent his/her extra budget on more attractions and activities. The response

rate was almost identical to the previous questions. They answered "yes' 77% of the time, which means that most of the members from Couchsurfing use their money saved on free accommodation to visit more attractions and do more local activities (Appendix 13 Q11) As a result of these three questions, I can say that the Cultural Exchange is broad enough and activates on many levels, to be a motivation for the host to accept guests for free, and the guests have the benefit of making savings in their budget that can improve their Tourist Experience Value. Further details will be extracted from the interviews as there is more open-ended questions.

And the last question of the survey has the purpose of summaries the overall conclusion of the three research questions. That is, if the respondents think that the Couchsurfing platform is so successful and popular due to the improving the Tourist Experience Value? 83% responded "yes" (Appendix 13 Q12) So most of the members consider it is true that the Tourist Experience Value offered by CouchSurfing.org makes the website popular and successful. This conclusion will make way towards interpreting the quantitative data from the interviews and testing the overall hypothesis of the problem statement.

4.2. Qualitative data:

In this section I will describe the qualitative data that results from 10 interviews. Here, we may find new and, maybe even controversial information regarding the three variables described in the literature review. It is here that we expect to have more descriptive and richer details about the member's experience with Couchsurfing. This analysis should overlay, built on top of or even contradict some of the conclusions drawn in the past section. It is here that we can expect to have more in-depth conclusion. This will get me even closer to confirming the hypothesis or denying it. As the interview was designed to fit the theoretical model, so shall the data extracted. There are three sections, each one addressing the issues specific to their theoretical section.

4.2.1.Building Trust on Couchsurfing platform:

The questions in this section were addressing the issue of trust between members on the Couchsurfing platform and how this can affect the Tourist Experience Value. Some common requirements emerged from the responses as elements necessary for building trust. Most have mentioned that they would check the information on their profile and they would try to find common interests with the other member before thinking to engage in a personal conversation.

There's more elements that are taken into consideration when building trust. Those mentioned in the survey were also mentioned by the interviewees, but there were also additional ones like: the set of pictures on one's profile, how active the person is, verification, honesty and charisma transmitted through their profile description.

As concluded also from the survey, references play an important part in building trust, but not for all respondents. As stated in the literature review, references on member's profile can be considered to be "third party controls used by Couchsurfing", but even these can be misguiding sometimes. Some interviewees actually said that they would prefer to see honesty and critics in the references because that would be closer to reality and would offer more confidence in the interaction, but because some members want to avoid the social pressure that comes with leaving a negative reference, they preffer not to leave a comment at all. This makes the reference system unreliable, for some. Jolie (Appendix 17 notes 1) has described a situation where an apparent perfectly normal member with positive references, turned out to be a criminal that harmed his guests. This is, of course, an extreme case, but it goes to show that this may happen regardless of positive appearances.

There were also concerns raised about safety in relation to gender, and how much you can trust other members. It was mentioned that it is safe for guys but it is less safe for women, which can mean that they would have to travel with another friend if they want to feel safe. But, even if you take all the precautions necessary like reading their profile or references or even talking with them personally, there will always be a risk that something unpleasant will happen. Couchsurfing has even introduced a restriction where you cannot make couch requests unless your profile is filled up to a certain level. Also there is the option to "get verified" by paying an annual fee to the Couchsurfing company, as proof of your loyalty to the community and it is rules of conduct. This is the kind of measurements that are meant to minimize the risk of a negative experience.

After the initial pre-selection, one may intend to contact the other member with a personal message through the platform. As stated by Iegvenia (Appendix 17 notes 1) "getting in direct contact is very important to building trust". It is advised, as explained by others, that the message not be a copy-paste text but rather a personalize inquiry. This would show to the other person that the other member cares enough about their interaction to actually take time and personalize the message.

All in all, trust is about managing the risk, not eliminate it completely. As Sofi stated (Appendix 17 Notes1), "Trusting someone you don't know is like taking the leap of faith because you can never be 100% sure about the other person." This is true because people in general can be unpredictable and this may be cause for unpleasant experiences. But, as one of the interviewees mentioned (appendix 17 Notes1) , "couchsurfing is built on trust". In order for this platform to work as it does, trust has to be reciprocal, as both parties take a risk. Manuel (Apppendix notes) states that "you can easily trust members on Couchsurfing because most of them are good people with good intentions". As proof of this, almost all the experiences described by my respondents were positive and encouraged them to further make use of this platform. It means that the potential benefits they get from using it, far out-weighs the possibility of having a negative experience.

As an example of positive experiences resulted from building trust, Sofi (Annex notes1) mentiones that she had very pleasant, unexpected experiences, like going to a nearby village or attending a college party with her host. Others have made life-long lasting friends by building trust "one step at a time" (Annex notes1) and for others, it seemed like the town she was visiting "was more interesting" (Annex notes)

 On the other side, one of the downsides of lack in building trust was that, in the case of Jegvenia (Annex Notes1), she had to be at home at the same time as the host, which can posibly have a negative effect on her overall experience.

One of the most experienced intervees that I had, Jolie (Annex notes), has mentioned that as an overall , her exprinces with Couchsurfing were 70% positive and 30% negative. She specifically mentioned that some hosts have asked to have "intimate relations" with them in return for accommodation. According to Couchsurfing "rules of conduct" mentioned in the literature review, this would be considered harassment and could have been reported to the staff team. Her experience is proof that, because people mistake this platform for a dating website, there have to be strict rules regarding this matter.

All these elements described above have their own impact on the process of building trust. There are a few conclusions we can take from this section. It is clear that the pre-selection of members for interaction is a sure way to increase the value of the experience of any traveller or host. There can be a positive outcome from increasing the familiarity between the guest and the host. Value

can also be increased by overcoming trust barriers and fostering an environment of familiarity, like building trust step by step from the pre-selection phase to the personal contact and spendig quality time together. Past experience with host or guest will impact the member's perception of trustworthiness with others. Also , as drawn from the literature, we can identify the three categories of trust:trust as a personality trait, trust as a quality in a relationship and trust in a cultural format.

4.2.3.Couchsurfing's practicality and other similar websites:

In this part of the interview, I am discussing the elements that make Couchsurfing practical, how and why the members prefer to use this platform when there are other options available as well. It is true that some of them never heard of any other platform that can offer the same services as Couchsurfing, but this may also be due to the fact that they never actually needed to know about other options, since the current one fulfils all of their need as travelers.

As in the previous section, the elements of practicality mentioned in the survey have also emerged from the interviews. Needless to say, there were also other reasons for which couchsurfing is preferred amongst members.

First, the interviewees were asked to describe in which way they are or have been active on the Couchsurfing platform. The answers ranged from having tens of guests and/or hosts to just attending meetings. Some were even guide tours in their own city and made use of the "hang-out" option that the platform offers. Older members, with more experience said they organized events for couchsurfers in their local town. So, it appears that members make use of every opportunity that the couchsurfing platform offers them, according to each one's level of commitment towards the community.

Next questions has the purpose of describing their motivation to being so active in the community. One of the most common motivators is that they have the chance to meet new people, or simply put, "networking" , as mentioned by Ahmed (Annex notes2). Meeting new, like-minded, open, friendly people offers the chance of sharing their own life experience, knowledge about the local culture, showing them a good time or enjoying the town they visit from a local point of view or their own town from the visitor's point of view. Some just like to be active in general and being useful to a visitor is one of the activities they enjoy doing. Olga states (Annex notes2) that "it is

hard to meet locals if you stay in a hotel", so, using couchsurfing , it allows her to fulfill that need. She says that a local "would talk about their every-day life" and, that is a big incentive for her to meet one. Manuel's motivation extends as far as to say that Couchsurfing is "part of my life because I met most of my friends on this platform". Sofi (Annex Notes2) recognizes the community as being a "global village" where people "know and respect each other regardless of sex, age or nationality". This wide range of motivations, from one as simple as meeting new people, to being part of their life, shows that the Couchsurfing platform has a definite extent into people's real lives, out from its digital boundaries.

In order to test the member's knowledge about other websites, they were asked to compare Couchsurfing with some other communities that may offer the same opportunities. The practicality was the issue discussed through these questions.

First of all, AirBnb was mentioned by some respondents. But, as mentioned by them, it , in many fundamental ways, different from the couchsurfing platform. First of all, AirBnb offers accommodation opportunities in exchange for money. And so, on this website, people's main concern is to find a nice place to accommodate, which implies that they see pictures of the rooms they intend to rent. On Couchsurfing, members' first concern is the person they will be accommodated by. It was mentioned by one of the respondents that she uses Airbnb only when she is with friends, because it would be harder to find a host that receives more than one person. Other websites mentioned were BeeWelcome, WorkAway, Hospitality Club and Trusroots. These platforms have the disadvantage of not having enough members, having to work in exchange for accommodation or poor interface. As opposed to the couchsurfing platform that has a "smooth, well organized and efficient" interface, limitless search options, wide range of opportunities on a "global level" and it has the option of installing a smartphone application which allows you to search a host "on the go" (Annex notes2) I did encounter a negative feedback about the practicality of Couchsurfing. Olga (Annex notes2) stated that you can only make 10 requests per week, which is not nearly enough if you travel often and look for a host every day. Even so, there are a lot more advantages perceived by members than disadvantages, which makes Couchsurfing the most preferred platform in its category.

In the next question, respondents were asked to give a more detailed and personal answer that would connect their preference for Couchsurfing with the experience they had when using it. The

most common response was that they learn a lot about the town which they visit than if they would stay at a hotel. Interacting with a local would help them see the city through "the local's point of view" , get different insights into the local culture or connect with the "local vibe" (Annex notes2) . And for a host, they can explore their own city by trying to find interesting places to visit for their guest. Brad mentions that "being with a local relieves you of the stress to find the best ways to enjoy the city he is visiting" (Annex notes2). Two quotes that have inspired me from these answers are: Sofi's (Annex notes2) "After years, I remember the people more then I remember the places!" and Jin's "With couchsurfing you are a traveler, not a tourist!".

And this is the kind of mentality that inspires other people, including me, to use this platform as a way o travel.

There are also two conclusions correlated with the literature review that we can get from this analysis: The ease of operation is surely set to increase the experiential value of travelers and Couchsurfing has attained the top position in the hospitality exchange sector in terms of geographical coverage and total number of active members.

4.2.4.Cultural Exchange and free accommodation:

In this last part, I will discuss the respondent's perception of the Cultural Exchange as a contributor to their experience.

First discussion is about their motivation to offer free accommodation to guest. One of the more often responses was that, after being a guest for numerous occasions, they felt like "giving back" (Annex notes3) to the community. Others used this opportunity to help and meet people from across the world, creating a "world network", expanding their horizons and inspiring them to travel (Annex notes3). Manuel phrased it very well by saying that "receiving people from other countries makes you a passive traveler", because of all the stories and experiences that people share while in his presence (Annex Notes3). The same practice is also described by another respondent as "having a piece of the world in her home" (Annex notes3). But, even these words can't be equaled by Andreea's motivation (Annex notes3) . She had guests staying with her grandmother because she was living alone. She said that it is "like therapy" for her because it makes her happy to have guests. And she wrote about this on her profile and so, people requested to stay with her because they though it would be interesting to stay with an elder in the town they visit. Another remarkable

motivation comes from Ahmed, who lives in a small village from Indonesia. He said that people in his village don't know English, and he one of the few people that can interact with guests on a deeper level. So he feels like he is responsible to enrich his environment by introducing the locals to his guests from couchsurfing (Annex notes3). These two, last examples, are strong arguments that show how powerful can a member's motivation be to host someone. It is a mere illusion that they offer accommodation "for free" when, in fact, they are trading it for a much more valuable commodity than money, which is their time and knowledge of the outside world. Even Andreea states that "you pay back by offering attention, respect and friendship". This shows that these travelers can enrich locals' families and close ones, and the fact that they get to have a place to sleep, in return for their simple presence. It is considered more of a "fare trade" rather than "getting something for free". Some even go to the extend where, they actually consider their guests as "part of their family" because they offer them meals, tours, advice and a friendly company as Andreea describes (Annex notes3).

So, now that I know the motivation behind offering accommodation, it is time to "jump" on the other side and describe the experience from the guests' perspective. Next, I raise the question regarding the benefits of saving money. How did, saving money on accommodation influenced the couchsurfer's experience? To some, it was an opportunity to travel more, visit a crowded city where accommodation expenses would have made it impossible for them to stay there. Andreea even had the brilliant idea to offer to do chores for accommodation when she wanted to stay in New York which is, as she stated, "a very competitive environment for guests" (Annex notes3).

Some more common improvements came from the fact that they could spend their money on more attractions, buying their host a special gift from their country, taking their host out for a meal or drink which would create a tighter bond between them, take part in more adventurous experiences, renting a car to travel to the surrounding areas and, to no ones surprise, more alcohol for more fun.

In relation to the literature review, one of the conclusions from this question is that travelers seek to maximize the value of their experience while travelling, and, at the same time, save on scarce resources by taking advantage of free accommodation.

In the final part of this discussion, I have offered the respondents the chance to elaborate on their Cultural Experience. This term has proven to have a broad meaning, expanding into more elements

than those enumerated in the survey questions. Language was one of the element present. Some respondents actually learned a little bit of the local language as a result of staying with a host. Eating traditional food and cooking their own specific food for their host was another common element of the Cultural Exchange. Learning about the way of life and the local culture is present in almost all of the experiences. One respondent noted the cultural difference in the way they eat. In the Indonesian culture they were eating by hand, and this was different from all of his guests' traditions. But, some reflected on this and realized that they can have a lot in common with people from all over the world. All these experiences only help them realize how diverse one's culture can be from the other's. One learned the life lesson to "Love your closed ones!" and in case there are any differences "You don't have to accept, but respect!" (Annex notes3).

Staying with a host also offers the chance to have a insider's view on the culture, local activities, local attractions that may be off "the beaten path". Some locals tend to "show off" about their culture because they are proud of who they are. This kind of behavior made some of them feel like "they were at home even if they were far away from home" (Annex notes3). Being with a local makes them feel more relaxed because they know how to avoid the tourist traps and they can make a more exciting plan for your visit, rather than getting frustrated over what to visit first from all the suggestions in the tourist-guides. They can get tips on cheap attractions and good places to eat, or even free places to hang-out. This makes their travel richer by seeing from "behind the stage" (annex notes3). And the Cultural Experience is another way of "learning from your journey"(Annex notes3) which is something that the traveler take home with them and everywhere else they go to. In this whole context, it is needless to say that all the respondents considered that Cultural Exchange played a major role creating a positive experience.

Amongst all these advantages and positive experiences, there have been also a few downsides. Jin mentioned that, at one point you can get tired of moving from host to host because you need to interact with all of them and this can get trying if you don't "take a break" by staying at a hotel (annex notes3). And Manuel mentioned that, since Couchsurfing has become a for-profit corporation and started promoting itself, it has become more commercial. Meaning that, there were people that were surfing the platform just to get free accommodation with no interest in the values that this community shares.

These were the only two downsides that I have encountered amongst the responses. It is evident that the core benefits of being a member of this community and using its opportunities as a traveler far exceed the occasional inconveniences that may appear.

I can also draw some conclusions that correlate with the literature. Free accommodation was a great motivator and enhancer of cultural exchange. Members are encouraged to teach each other an aspect of their world in a bid to foster cultural exchange and understanding. Couchsurfing travelers' travel itinerary is greatly affected, influenced and optimized by the host. Hosts take their guests around the town or country, showing the most critical and vital areas to their culture. Having a local as a tour guide is a sure security due to that individual's familiarity with the terrain and people.

4.3.Conclusion :

My study has started from the hypothesis that the Couchsurfing platform has created such an active community, because it offers a great Tourist Experience Value to its members. Starting from this hypothesis, I decided to go into more depth towards what would make members have a good experience. I created the variables that influence the experience which are: building the trust on the platform amongst members; its practicality as compared to other similar websites and the Cultural Exchange that is offered in return for the free accommodation service.

Therefore, in order to answer the research statement: "Why are members active?" I broke it down into the three Research questions that I have followed along the analysis.

I have found out that the elements of building trust within the platform are: references, profile information, first experience as guest or sharing contacts with other members, with the reference system as the major influent. Honesty and critics seem to raise the trust in the platform, making it more reliable. However, due to the fact that users avoid in general to write negative reviews challenges the credibility of the platform. Building trust is an entire process which follows a general path of analyzing the profile, references, looking at the pictures, contacting and messaging and, finally first contact. Taking all these in consideration, it can be concluded that Couchsurfing

community is built on trust and the Tourist Experience Value would be very poor had it not been for the elements that contribute to building it.

In the context of other websites, Couchsurfing has far exceeded the others. Very few members knew about other options and even if they knew, the fact that Couchsurfing is so practical, made them not care about the other possibilities. Some of the aspects of practicality are related the easy-to-use interface, unlimited options for finding a host, global presence and the variations of opportunities to interact with other members through the online platform. Having all of these elements combined, makes it preferable for the users and creates a high value in experience.

As I found out from the analysis, the Cultural Exchange is a major drive for the motivation of members to host. It offers insight into the local area, the local activities, it allows the guest to see "behind the stage" of the city they travel. They have a look into the local culture and traditions. They benefit from the cultural differences and also manage to find common traits which connect people from all over the world, making them feel like they are at home with family, rather than far away amongst strangers.

And so, all of these elements have contributed tremendously to the improvement of the Tourist Experience Value, and all of these elements combined create a strong community that is global and active in its nature. As a conclusion, my hypothesis has been confirmed by this research.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Survey questions:

1. Which element contributes most to building trust with other members?
a.   Profile information
b.   Références
c.   First experience as a guest
d.   Sharing contact with the potential host

2. How important is building trust with other members to your Tourist Experience Value?
a.   Not important at all
b.   Not so important
c.   Important
d.   Very important

3. Which of the following websites have you heard of before?
a.   BeWelcome
b.   Servas
c.   Hospitality Club
d.   GlobalFreeloaders

e.   Staydu

3.1 Do you know any other similar websites besides the ones above? If yes, write in the box
bellow! ____

4. Would you prefer using CS instead of these website?

a.   Yes

b.   No

5. Would you consider CS website to be more practical than the others?

a.   Yes

b.   No

6. Which of the elements below make CS more practical than the other websites specified?

a.   more active members

b.   easy access and registration

c.   easy way to request couch

d.   offers more options for interaction (finding groups,meetings, hangout partners)

7. Do these elements contribute to improving your Tourist Experience Value?

a.   Yes

b.   No

8. As a host, which of the following elements of the Cultural Exchange manifested as a result
of offering free accommodation to a traveler?

a.   Language

b.   Food

c.   Traditions

d.   Perspective on local activities and attractions

9. As a guest, did saving money on accommodation, improve your Tourist Experience Value?

a.   Yes

b.   No

10. Did you use your extra budget on more local activities and attractions?

a.   Yes

b.   No

11. As an overall conclusion, do you think CouchSurfing's popularity and success is due to Improving the Tourist Experience Value of its members?

a.   Yes

b.   no

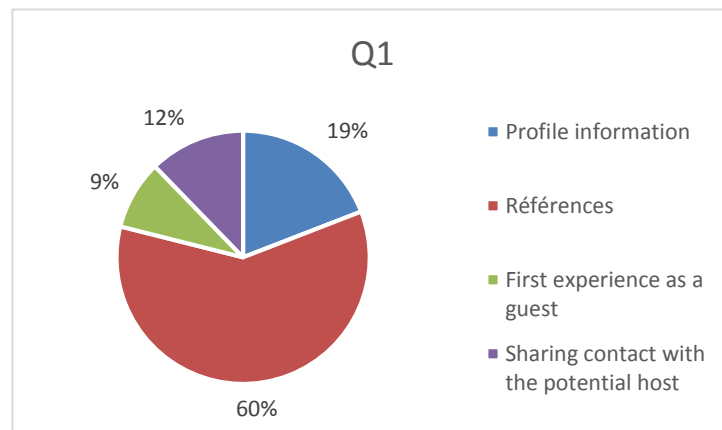Appendix 2

Interview questions

Terms:

The Tourist Experience Value: the perceived value (anything between high and low as compared to normal expectations) of an experience from the tourist point of view (either objective or subjective)

Before we start, state your Name, age and nationality please!
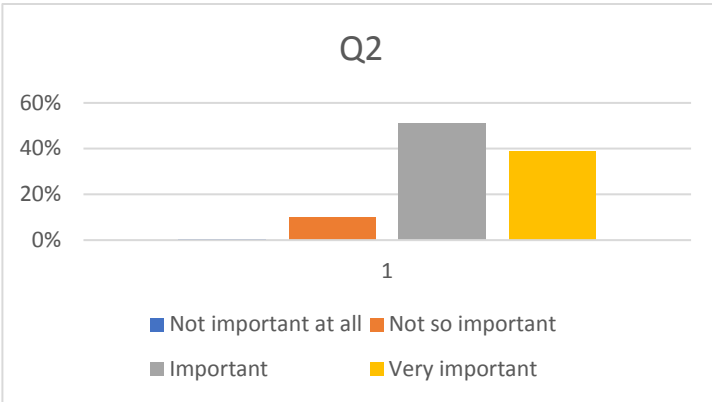
1. How do you build trust with other members?

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'hang out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value? (for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other attractions and activities, leading to a richer experience)

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

Appendix 3

Q1

- Profile information — 19%
- Références — 60%
- First experience as a guest — 9%
- Sharing contact with the potential host — 12%

appendix 4

Q2

Appendix 5

Q3
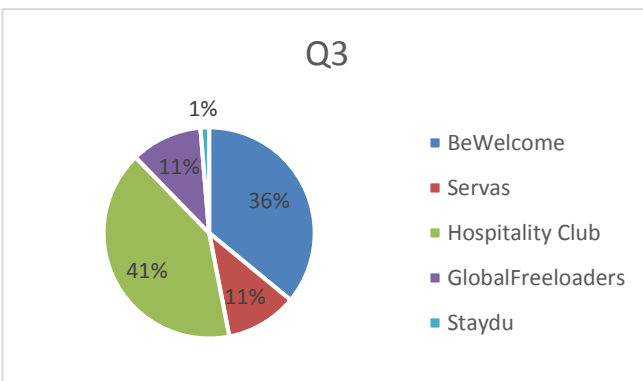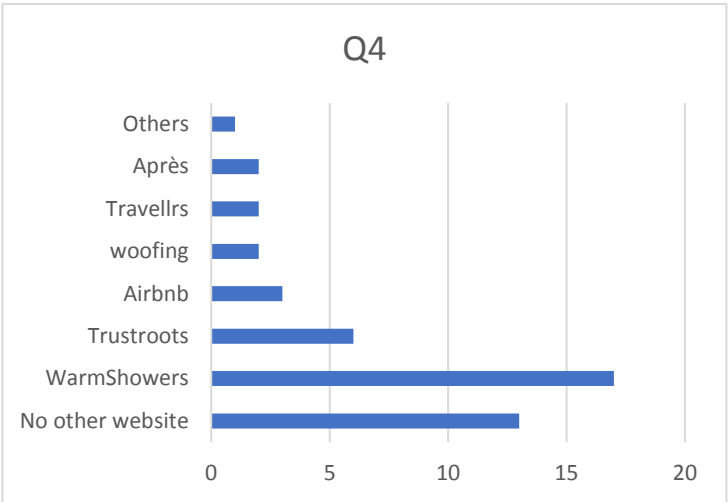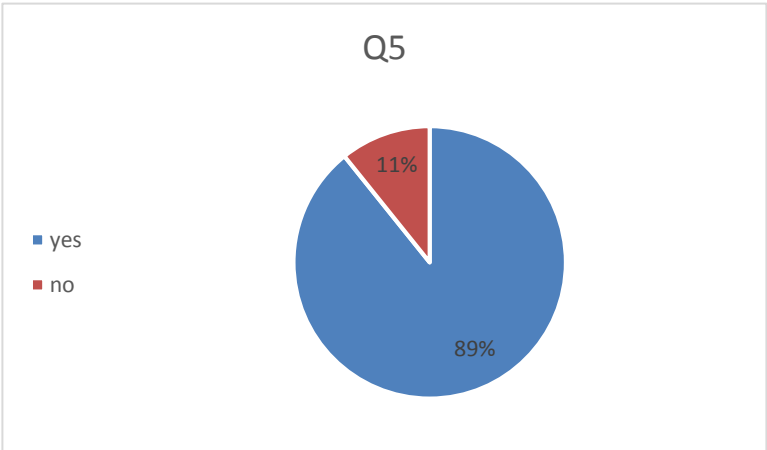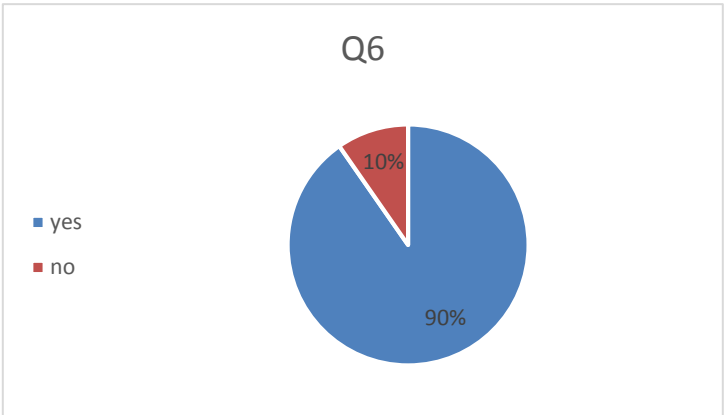
Appendix 6

Appendix 7

Appendix 8

Appendix 9

Q7

40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%

1

- more active members
- easy access and registration
- easy way to request couch
- offers more options for interaction (finding groups,meetings, hangout partners)

Appendix 10

Q8

- yes
- no

8%

92%
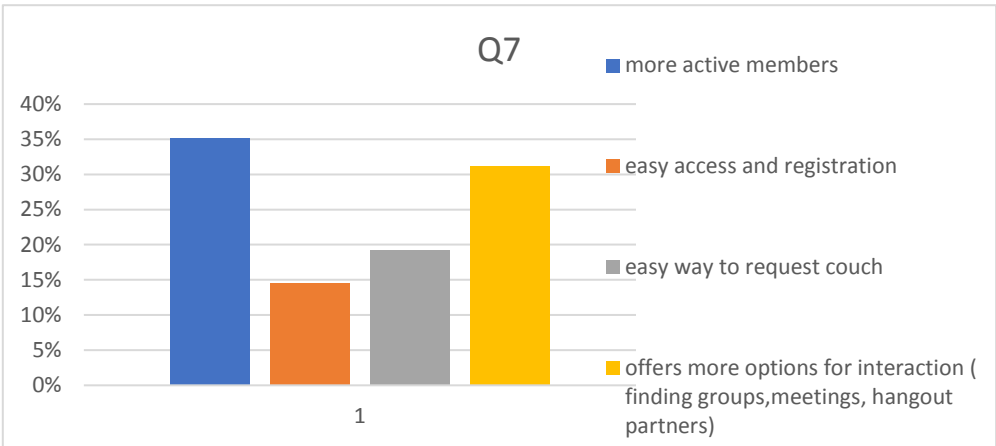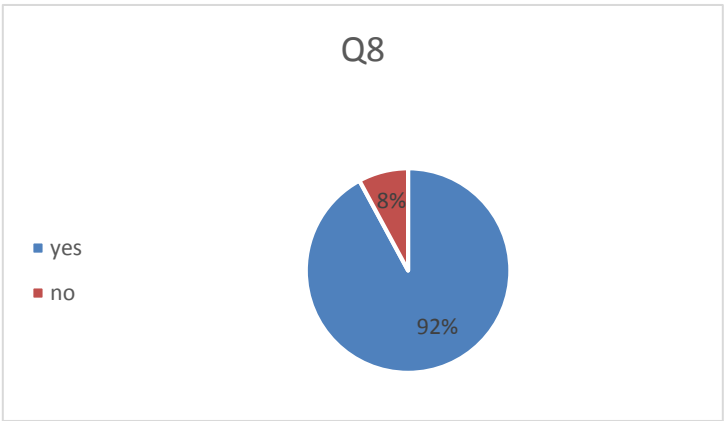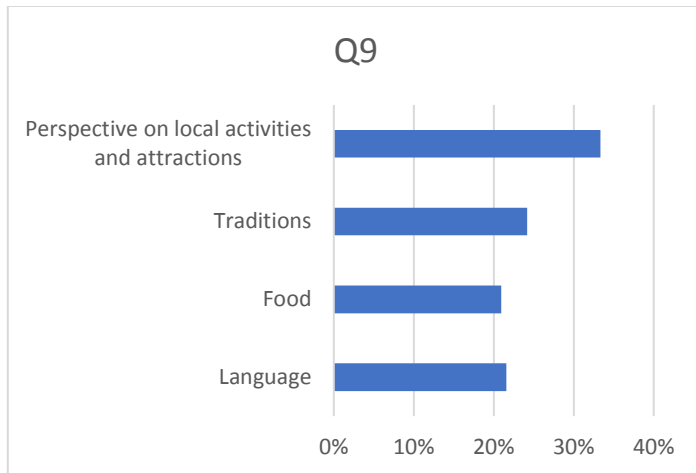
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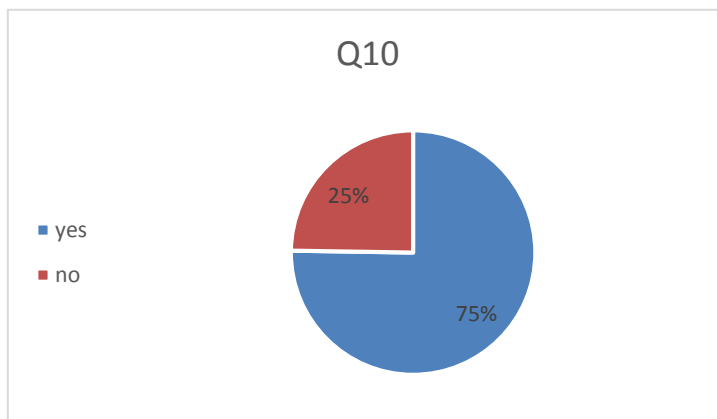
Appendix 12

Appendix 13
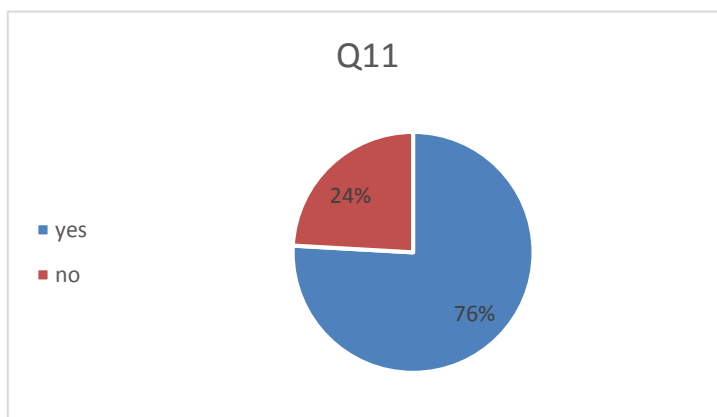
Appendix 13
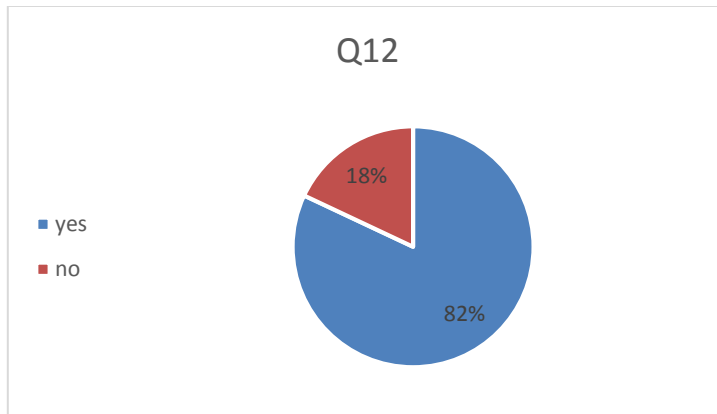
Appendix 14

ANOVA for Q1 and Q2						
Source of Varia	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between G	1950.688	3	650.2292	2.183351	0.142919	3.490295
Within Gro	3573.75	12	297.8125			
Total	5524.438	15				

Appendix 15

Anova between Q3 and Q5						
Source of Varia	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between G	3204.1	1	3204.1	5.107356	0.053727	5.317655
Within Gro	5018.8	8	627.35			
Total	8222.9	9				

Appendix 16

ANOVA between Q7 and Q6

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance			
Column 1	2	123	61.5	5724.5			
Column 2	2	52	26	968			
Column 3	2	68	34	1800			
Column 4	2	114	57	5000			
Source of Varia	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit	
Between G	1795.375	3	598.4583	0.17742	0.906477	6.591382	
Within Grc	13492.5	4	3373.125				
Total	15287.88	7					

Appendix 17

Interview Notes : Research question nr 1.

How does building trust amongst Couchsurfing members increase the Tourist Experience Value?

Iegvenia:

Getting in direct contact is very important to building trust.
Some hosts had trust issues and they asked that she is at home at the same time as them.

Brad:

Building trust before meeting: As a guest: fill their profile, have at least 10 pictures, verification (but not so much); As a host: respond quickly, be upfront and hones about their expectation from the guest; the reference (works both ways)- he prefers honest references and quality over quantity;
Choses guest by amount of common traits
You can't make a couch request unless you have the profile filed.

When choosing guest, their message matters and it is not recommended to send copy-paste messages

Influence of trust: he is able to make friends in an unexpected journey

Jin:

Building Trust: usually CS members are friendly. Her first experience was with three friends so she had no fears afterwards. When she went with her friends safety was no longer a problem

CS is based on trust; trust is reciprocal (you leave your stuff at his place, he leaves his place to you)

Andreea:

Building Trust: check references, where they live, check if they have rules

Olga:

Reading profile, looking for common interests, references, response rate, and message exchange

Trust is important: She always travels with a friend to feel more secure. When alone, she is more careful and asked more questions.

She had a good relationship with the host and so it seemed like the town was more interesting.

Manuel:

I easily trust members from CS because most of them are good people with good intentions. Choosing a host or a guest is a risk. References are basic for building trust but that means you have to rely on people to be judgmental and honest when writing a reference.

Sofi:

After 4 years of experience with CS she concluded that trust is the basis to how the community works.

When there is trust build between the guest and the host you can have more unexpected experiences like , in my case , my host took me to a nearby village, went to a college party and had a lot of fun with local people.

Elise:

When I look for host I send personalized message
Building trust , gradually, created a long lasting friendship with people from other countries.

Jolie:

She has trust issues with the support team. It is good to be verified but you need to pay annually
Check references to be recent. Even so, a guy with a lot of positive references turned out to be a criminal.
70% of my experiences were very positive, but the other 30% were bad. Some hosts even asked for intimate relations in return for accommodation.

Appendix 18

Interview Notes : Research question nr 2.

Why Couchsurfing is more practical and offers a better Tourist Experience Value as opposed to similar websites?

Ahmed:

It is easier to find people on CS compared to other websites mentioned;
Being active: going to gatherings, motivated because he meets new people (networking)

Iegvenia:

Her motivation for being active is to meet new people and share her own life to them.
She knows about BeeWelcome website and thinks it has a poor interface. As opposed to
that, CouchSurfing has an easy to use interface and have an application for smart phones.
And you can find a host a lot faster than on the other website.
She prefers using Couchsurfing because she can't learn as much about the environment if
she would stay at a hotel. She would get different insights into the local culture.

Sofi: "After years, I remember the people more then I remember the places!"

Brad:

He started by surfing. He has also "hanged out"; attended event, organized events, weekly
meetup
Motivation for being active: enjoy meeting new people, show them a good time, enjoy the
city from locals point of view, and see my own city through their eyes
Haven't heard of any website except AirBnb where you see pictures of the home because
you pay to stay, but in Couchsurfing you see pictures of the person because it's about who
you stay with. Other websites are not so popular and CS has more members.
He prefers CS because he can connect to the city, even as a local he explores his own city.
As a guest he doesn't have the stress of finding the best way to enjoy the city he is visiting.

Jin:

She's active because Couch surfers are open-minded and free-spirit people.
She uses AirBnb when she is with other friends, but when alone she uses CS
She prefers CS because if she feels lonely she can make a friend and she can plan with
him/her and avoid common paths.

Andreea:

Activity in CS: hosted 80 people,
Active because: makes new friends, help people, be useful, be active in general

Hospitality Club doesn't have good connections; she used WorkAway but you have to work; CS is more popular

Preference for CS: learns about the culture. She once learned about Central Asia from a couple and she didn't know anything about that region before. Couchsurfing inspires you to travel more

Olga:

Motivation for being active: meet new people, Uses CS because it is hard to meet locals if you stay at a hotel.

A local would talk about their every-day life

The CS platform is more organized, profile requires more information, most members have pictures.

One inconvenience is that you can only make 10 requests per week which is not enough if you travel more often.

Manuel:

What makes me be so active? "CS has become a part of my life. I met most of my friends on CS!"

Member of BeWelcome and Trustroots but not enough members. Most of the people use CS which has a much practical interface.

I prefer using CS because it allows me to know other cultures and make friends.

Sofi:

I am active on CS because, for me, it is like a "global village" where people know and respect each other regardless of sex, age or nationality.

CS is practical because you don't have to pay for hostel, you won't need a tour-guide, and you make friends

Elise:

Being active on CS helps learn about the local life and maybe learn about "secret" locations to visit. Also I joined the local Facebook group of CS

I prefer using CS because I get a better experience then being with tour guides.

Jolie:

I was a guide in my city
Motivation for being active: meet like-minded people, get positive vibes.
Also negative: some use it as a dating site
Member of BeWelcome; CS is easier to find host; interface is fast and efficient; you can join other people while traveling
I prefer CS because: "you are a traveler not a tourist" ; it is more fun and "laied back"

Appendix 19

Interview Notes : Research question nr 3.

How does Cultural Exchange contribute to the Tourist Experience Value when it comes to members' motivation in offering free accommodation?

Ahmed:

Is motivated to receive guests because he is the only person that speaks English from his village.So he enriches his environment by introducing locals to travelers. He introduces the guest to the people around him.
Saves guests money by offering free meals as well.
Cultural Exchange: eating with hands (cultural differences), traditional food, staying in home with parents until marriage, children are happier because they don't have so much to study
His implication with CS is important for the people in his village because it opens their mind to other cultures, making them more prepared for leaving the village life in the future.

Sara:

Motivation for hosting: time to give back and meeting quality people\

Saving money allows me to travel more

Rich Cultural Experience from spending more time with a local and learning about local way of life. And you can find that you have things in common with people from all over the world.

Ievgenia

She hosts people because she likes helping them, it inspires her to travel and creates her own social network in other cities.
Her experience was improved by saving money because she could see more attractions, create tighter bond with her host by offering a gift from her own country.
Cultural Experience: understanding the diversity of culture; visit together with her host (having a local eye-view)
She had only good experiences and she considers that the Cultural Exchange is like a "bonus" to having free accommodation

Brad:

He hosts because he likes meeting new people and helping them.
Saving money helps him do more activities or visit attractions, take his host out (because the gesture for your host is the most important for him)
Cultural Experience: local food, speaking local language (Spanish) , hosts tend to "show off" about their culture because they are proud of who they are)
Cultural Exchange played a very important role because you are more relaxed about visiting a new place since you are with the local because they know what to see and to avoid "tourist traps"

Jin:

She spent her extra budget on activities, more adventurous experiences and a Spanish Class
She learned a life lesson as a result of Cultural Exchange: "Love your closed ones!"; also learned heard crazy stories from her host

Cultural Experience played a VERY important role in her Tourist Experience Value because: She felt like she was at home even if she was far away from home. The downside of using CS is that you might get too tired from all the interaction, so , sometimes, she used hotels.

Andreea:

Sometimes , even her grandmother is receiving guests. Since she is, mostly, alone, every time she has guests she is more happy, it is like therapy for her. A lot of guests mentioned that they would like to stay with her.
We don't see our guest as guests but we treat them like family. We offer tours, meals and advice, not just free accommodation.
When she was in New York, where the is much competition among guests, she offered to do chores for accommodation.
Cultural Exchange: created a cultural connection, stories, music, receiving tips on cheap attractions and food, it offers the opportunity to know cultures of people from the other side of the world
When you are offered free accommodation, you "pay back" by offering attention, respect and friendship.
Life lesson by using CS: "Before asking, give!"

Olga:

Saving Money: she bought the host a cake on her birthday, she went out with the host, spend on other attractions, travel more often.
Cultural Exchange: besides learning from the local people about their every-day life, she was also the one that gave a good impression about her own country and culture. She discussed about life in her own country, offering the local a perspective on a foreign culture. This shows how the Cultural Exchange benefits both sides.
Very important : It makes your travel richer, you see things from "behind the stage"

Manuel:

As a host, I was motivated to offer accommodation because , for me, it is "passive traveling" by hearing interesting stories and the way people share their culture.

Where hotels are expensive , he couldn't have done it without saving money.

Cultural Experience: prepare national dish, recommend places to go and spend time with guest

The most important role that a couchsurfing experience has is to offer cultural exchange which you wouldn't normally get if you stay in a hotel. You can have unexpected experiences and you experience things that you can't read about in the travel guides.

One downside of CS is that it has become more commercial after it turned into a corporation but it still works. It is just that there are some people that are on CS just for the free accommodation, with no interest in the Cultural Exchange.

CS is challenging the traditional way of experiencing tourism.

Sofi:

Motivation for accommodating: she likes having new people in her home because it is like having a "piece of the world" with her.

Cultural experience played a vey important role because "it is the way in which you learn from your journey"

Elisa

I spend my saved money on local interests and taking out my host

Cultural Experience: she has learned to respect other cultures by enriching her knowledge about cultural traits

"I am an ambassador of my country when being with a local, so it is a mutual share of cultures"

Jolie:

Motivation for accommodation: "give back after being a guest";

Saving money: take my host out, spend on adventurous experiences (bungee jumping or skydinving), rent a car to travel further, ALCOHOOL

Cultural Experience: ask host to take her where they've never been before (being open to adventure)

Yes. Comparing other's culture with your own would offer a poor experience. So, sometimes "you don't have to accept but respect."

Appendix 20

Interview transcript 1

Name: Ahmed Khalid

Age: 28

Nationality: Indonesia

1. How do you build trust with other members?
you already know I come from another country i check my references
the references
if I take people give them good references I will easily to accept them and have them in my house

If you are looking for host, how do you know how to trust?

I'm not sure
I've never been hosted by people exactly when i go to another country i prefer to hostel or hotel another
and never been hosted in another country or the local people

Then I want to ask you why haven't you tried to use culture thing to find host?

I don't know exactly
I don't do so much travelling because I'm so busy with my work and my study in my country so even I go to somewhere in my country
I prefer to rent a hotel instead of trying to find the local people
I don't know when I go traveling I do that

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

Very Important
Actually why I'm never hosted by local people because when I go to traveling I never go alone
so I go with my friend and if not a few people
that's why
I'm trying to find a host and they can be living at their home with so many people so that's why

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that

means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

Yeah
you know sometime in case there are so many people that trying to take people like for example men sometime looking for girl for something bad
and if sometime happen in my country in Indonesia
and that's why we are so worried to accept a host
its very important and when they do the bad thing
it will impact the future times when we hosting people also
that's why very influence like Karma you know Krama
like when first time you get don't as I say to you that the bad thing
at hosting people will be happier in the next time we don't want to host again

Don't want to host again if we get the experience

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

Usually in my current city we use to come gathering like monthly gathering but it usually people around us
because I'm far to do that in another country but in my country itself or we use to have gathering like monthly gathering or run activities or like open trip but not so far that only island close to us.
I hosted people like 3 times, more then 3 times

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couch surfing community?

In couch surfing we have met so many new people that
and very helpful to making a lot networking and experience
and if you come from another country also I will love to meet new people
and in couch surfing it happen

Experience when meeting new people

In my country when we meet
we come gathering in 1 place exactly, we talk about our experience when we go another country
right so that's why they tell us so many things they experiencing
when they are travelling to another country like me
I am foreigner, even I already go country not too much but they do that a lot, many many country
so like so many things regular, very common so many experience they tell us that maybe inspire me to do the same thing, to go to different country that they already visited.

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

Okay I don't know, I only know CS
but there is similar, I forgot the name but when I tried to submit to apply my account
its really hard and also the looking isn't acceptable
I saw, I prefer to use couch surfing instead of
isn't look good in my eyes

I know some but not interest to know more about them
I mean entering the website, I don't want to know more about the website and entering to the member

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

Yeah okay the first maybe couch surfing is the most popular website in traveling all over the world
its easy to find new people in couch surfing
like when we going to trip another country or we gonna trip to another city
it will be like part of message from them to me like offering the host and asking what time I will be there, how much time I'll spend myself there
that's because couch surfing is most popular web and I think so many people, so many traveller have couch surfing accounts so that's why I think it will be easy for me to use that account
and couch surfing will open for me a lot of advantages like so many people send me private message.

Are you able to connect with people with private message?

Yeah

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

As a host I'm responsible for my guest
the first thing why I'm so interested to host people in my house because im gonna introduce partner to people around me
because in my surrounding, I live in the city so their no people who can speak english
only me, I'm the only one who can speak english so I'm introduce my entire
speaking english is must, we have to communicate with people around the world so I'm trying to host them and invite them in my house because I'm trying to open up their mind
because I don't know why in my surrounding only a few educated people who speak in english in my city
I must know 1 who can speak in english
so that's why I'm trying to invite them in my home in my village so anyone can come meet directly in person and make impression
even they cannot understand its order but I'm trying to translate it into their conversation that's why I'm trying to interest to my home

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value? (for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other acttractions and activities, leading to a richer experience)

I think it will save much money because we don't need to rent a hotel right
yeah because the host itself will be
so you can save your money when you try to be hosted with local people
and also for accomodation sometime the host give you free meal
 even you want to make together but sometime they will give you free
usually I use to do that with my guest

Did they spend more money in the community?

Not much, they save their money
yeah but sometime if we go like exploring the area, the city, if we eat together or having dinner or

lunch together we share cost

we spend and we share the cost, usually we use to do that

but sometimes as a host I give them free meal, usually I give them free meal because I feel that I have to be responsible of my guest and yeah.

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

For example, we are eating

In indonesia we usually we use hand, no spoon you know the spoon, without fork and they usually can not eat without spoon so sometime we show them how to take it using only hand into our mouth

so many thing happen like difference on where they come from

because usually the different culture also will influence to our conversation

will influence to our conversation

where they come from and the culture also

its only one example

like I just know that usually people in our surrounding, when they grow up, they grow 18 years old if m not mistaken.

when they are 18 years old, they cannot stay with their parents

yeah I mean like my friend from neitherland, russia or so many western type people, they said

they use to go, they have to go to another country to study abroad and looking for job far away from their parents

usually they said after they are 18 years old, the parents send them away from their home, they said like that, I don't know exactly but different in my country

I'm still living with my parent until I grow up, grow old and get married and finally spend time together

yeah I think so many things happen to exchange our culture

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

Okay maybe because around me its so traditional

Yeah we almost cannot touched by

but sometime by

I'm in

to our country, I wish that our mind will open up, we cannot stay in here only

we have to interact with people around the world

its ok for us we can survive in our country but for the next years

for the people

of coming

I carefully say I can't survive in our city

because in city so many tourists

so many forigners come to my country and I always say to them okay right now we can survive

even can't understand english much but for the future I can not answer that we can survive this way.

I always

to my surving

I wanna introduce life isn't only here, work isn't only in this area, work is work

we have to open up our mind, our mindset and we have to see how amazing this world

Appendix 21

Interview transcript 2
Name: Andreas

Age: 23

Nationality: Mexico

1. How do you build trust with other members?

I built trust while I travel, when I am hosting people.
I sort of used couchsurfing like 3 years ago and in the beginning I didn't trust
and then I also started hosting people and start to travelling

how was your first experience?

my first experience, 3 years ago when this guy called me and said hey you can stay for free, I said hey are you kidding me

in the beginning I didn't know what was it, so I stayed with him for 3 days and it was wonderful I was so surprised, it was so perfect that experience,I started hosting a lot of people.
I remember after him,I started hosting like almost 30 people.
yeah it was like, I was thankful because he said you don't have to pay me
the only thing that I asked him to do is receiving people from all of the place to your house and that's it

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

so at first I need to check if they are hosting or they are not hosting
usually I prefer people with references
I don't care if its a girl or a guy, the only thing I trust is reference
I check where does he live or where she live
how far from downtown, That depends actually
and yeah references are the first thing and other things like is to check the rules, because every host is different,
so most of them I say its ok you can stay up to 3 days but I need help in the house or I need a gift
its like not because I need it, it's because of attention, no party animals and if they say its okay

he can arrive anytime he want, and you have to check because when you writing them a request, they will see if you filled the profile or not and why would you choose them

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

I have to say like I have so many experiences in couchsurfing, I have like I don't know 100 people in couchsurfing
most of the time I have positive experience
the best experience I ever had was with a Spanish couple, they didn't had any reference, they just found me in the net but I accept them
and they were amazing, we're still like best friends.
even I didn't mail them
they were waiting for me with a load of hope right, and have good friendship with my host in Amsterdam, we always talked, I send them cards and the guy who host me Moscow last year, I just host him like 3 weeks
so it was amazing, when he was here, I never thought like he will be here
you never expect anything but it can happen
I only have like 2
The First One was French girl, when I am not hosting, I am giving to hers just because
so I wanted to give her a tour and she's like oh no you should be like
I even call her in the hostel and she said no no no you are so complicated
I have money and I'll pay for someone else, and I say hey I am not doing it for the money
its like something you do without receiving anything, no tips
and the other girl was from Russia
she was very complicated, at the beginning we started using couchsurfing but then she was giving me Russian classes
she was always in the mad mood so I was like hey you are so complicated, I don't want to know about you anymore because that's the only way this has to be right

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

the number of people that I have hosted is like 70, 80 right now
not in like a regular reference, I don't care but I like to help people
the people that have host me, I have like gesture thing
it was in France, Italy, even in Mexico, in Korea, in Belgium, yeah usually everywhere
I have been in so many bands, but only in Mexico
I have been in meetings, weekly meetings in Paris, weekly meetings in Bhusan, Korea
I was in Belgium, we created bands like Mexican culture in the South Russia which is

you created what?

cultural events

cultural events in Russia, and I met so many people there
people are saying hey there's nothing here
but you are creating the first event culture
and I was like go see it
usually like there are events in Mexico for culture
I have done and
posadas, I have been in posadas, at least twice, posadas is a Mexican

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

I think I use couchsurfing for making friends,
I am not like doing something I get bored, I don't want to get bored
so I want to help people, I want to be useful and at the same time I want to make
friends everywhere

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

I won't compare couchsurfing with other sites
I haven't used them, I have been in hospitality club but it was not good
and couch surfing is more popular
there is another website that I have used, and people from couchsurfing use it too
its called work away
but work away is like you get accommodation, you have a host, you get a recommendation to travel but you have to work
it may be like farming, nannying, housekeeping, it could be anything

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

in couchsurfing I've met so many people from everywhere right
it can help me to know other cultures, lately I've met people from san holio
Mexico, san holio is completely unknown, we don't know anything
and I met a couple from Kazakhstan, they were amazing I mean they told me about the culture in a way like you want to go and see it by your own eyes
and I have met people from darkim
usually like Mexican window..
but they don't know our culture

and yeah couch surfing create connections
it's not just getting accommodations, you get a lot of experience
in my case, I would like to see experience
and it will increase my knowledge of other cultures, and I would like to see them

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

I will say like, it always makes us happy, to receive people
I have hosted in two different places, here in my house with parents, here we have hosted
because we live next to travel Keno
people come here ...
they tell a lot of stories, that makes you feel like your with company
and in my place in Mexico city, with my grandma, she is a very old lady, she is like 91 and having
people at her house makes her happy because she lives alone,
when we full the house with people from couchsurfing, she is always happy and telling stories
and that time since she is not lonely, she is motivated and that means that she gets less depressed
and she wants to do more, she is open to new things
couchsurfing is like a huge experience for us, for my family
we are so happy with this, we don't only give free accommodations, we give tours, we give
meals, We gave them food for the next destination, we check if there ok, we take them to the
doctor if it's necessary
we don't see them like a guest, we see them like a family
we expect that some day they will come and do the same in their country

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value?
(for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other acttractions and
activities, leading to a richer experience)

well I can give an example in New York
in New York hostels are extremely expensive
in low season even its expensive
and then because it cost a lot of money to live,
if you stay like two weeks, you are like oh my God
not only for accommodation
so I decided to use couchsurfing,the problem is that in New York there is lot of competition
because everyone wants to do couch in New York
and you don't have the chance to get accommodation because because most of the host are tired
so they want us to to contact someone
and I say hey, please give me your phone
housekeeping, wash your dishes, I will do anything
this guy's save me, she stayed with him like 4 days, at the beginning I was kind of insecure because
he's kind of special, he was like so serious and in the alternative mood
like I don't know anything about that, but he was like where we spiritual
he helped me a lot, and at the same time he wrote me,
you are so kind, you help us and at the same time you created a new environment, you have
a good eye
something like that, but it was really nice

yeah the same time I helped, he helped me because I save a lot of money
I don't have to pay any hostel those days so
he even gave me food so it was more than enough

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

okay so as I told you I always try to create that connection
my dad, specially my dad always like to know about history
we like to exchange music, history
and we have a lot of visitors,we created a group,
and things that you won't know if you will, you don't have those opportunities like having guest in your house, people from all over countries
things that you never know but that day you have the opportunity to know it
and yeah always it's a great experience
and we finished knowing a lot of things, like vocabulary, cultures, history
even tips for going, visiting
because we our self are travellers,we new generation is like trying to save money and going everywhere
this is a new generation

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

yes always, as I told you this is the best part of couchsurfing
I always try to invite people from everywhere, like seriously
and you cannot only invite people from one country, you almost can invite people from everywhere like Central Asia, Africa, south of Asia, South America
its like wow, you like to have them here
it's the best experience ever

Appendix 22

Interview transcript 3

Name: Brad
Age: 27
Nationality: USA

1. How do you build trust with other members?

I think there's two way to do that, before you meet the other member you build trust by filling up your pfofile completely.

So the old couch surfing platform used to ask more questions the the current one and so I used have that, kinda built in to the about me section but I think

If you write a fair amount about yourself, so that people can use to know

Yeah so before you meet your host, I think the fact that you have fully filled up profile can help with the trust so if it says you are just somebody trying to use the profile or service, anything negative

If you add, I always think that you should add atleast 10 pictures which will help people build trust but pictures

actually learned this from a host, hosted many people but I think that is one way to help build trust because people know what you look like so you add you know a fair amount of pictures, not just pictures of you with another people but also in great amount by yourself so you have trust of someone knowing who you are

some people care about the verify thing but for me its not a big of a thing but I think that's certainly a way to build trust and then if you are the host I think you can build trust as a reputable and active host by responding quickly when people wave you but that's all on the online platform

when actually comes to meeting up with someone, their's a lot of ways of building trust, that's just sort of in real life but you know its just a little bit about the service depends on sort of being upfront in the beginning if you are host or a guest, just telling people sort of what you expect when you get out of the experience some people on the road trip you know when they stayed with 8 different couch surfers or 8 different couch surfing hosts that whole week before so they kinda want to say the whole life story again and they just need a place to crash in Kansas or somewhere like that so those people might not necessarily want to say like hey I can't wait to explore the city, they just say listen I just really need a place to crash, as long as they say that and then people accept him and I think its totally okay but if you for example act like you're interested in exploring the city and then you actually get there you just want to sleep all day then that's just sort of lack of trust so I think its important to basically be there upfront both as a host and a guest with what you expect to get out of the experience.

And I think when you do that, you get a fantastic experience because everybody wants something different out of it.

I think yeah you know just when you are in person I think that's just human nature when you hanging out with someone you kind of again you know when someone shows up in your house you kind of let them know like hey you know I like to go to bed at this time if you don't mind and you can go out after that or whatever and then when people do that then you know that it builds the trust and then ofcourse when its also done then afterwards there's the reference system which I think that when I was talking to friends about this, I think that references is great as long as we can trust each other to actually write a negative reference when its necessary because I know I've talked to friends with mine and they've said that they have avoided writing negative reference because they've

About how that will reflect o them which is understandable from 1 point but on the other hand if its necessary I think its important because if the reference system Falls apart if nobody is willing to write negative reference but in general you can tell not just from the quantity if references which I don't think you really matters but the quality of reference if you actually read and tell ok yeah this person really have some good references, good reviews as everybody says like oh that was great it's not a lot you can read into that very much so hopefully if you have a great experience with someone I would write a reference you know a little bit more personalized not just like oh yeah that was good so that people can kind of get an idea of you know who they are and why should host them or serve them.

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

yeah I thought that was interesting question
my first response is actually I trust most couch surfers you know based on like I was
saying things like a filled out profile so what I look for is you know this may be a little bit a
male privilege because I am not as concerned as a girl would be with someone trying to hit on
me or something like that so
what I am concerned with when I'm looking for host is the amount of connection that we will
have in my time
sort of do I have anything in common with this person
you know if I am enjoying my time with him, is this someone I want to spend time with even if I
wasn't staying at their house and sometimes you don't have the luxury of that depending on where
you are going and how badly you need a place but for me in general if someone in couch
surfing, got a few references I for better or worse I am generally very trusting person so I tend
to assume
and I haven't actually experienced so far that couch Surfers are fairly trustworthy in general
you know most people on the site and actively using it want to help others, so they care about
it and so I don't feel like every time I login that I need to like weed myself out of people giving
me bad experience
yeah I would say, Base trust on you know a fully filled up profile. I don't trust anyone that like for
example doesn't upload, if there's no picture on the profile I don't even pay attention to it.
but if there is you know if there
and actually couchsurfing having seen the way the site has been evolved they have actually tried
to build certain trust aspects into the profile you can't even write somebody if you don't have a
certain percentage of a profile filled up.
so that's interesting
but yes if they, they do that but then I guess I base my trust on the fact that they active in couch
surfing, how active are they and then you know from my host prospective which is something that
I have only been doing recently I started, late last year if they say prospective of trust in
guests on request they send me
yes exactly that's everything because I usually get so many requests and I don't have time to check
out the profile of everyone that have request me but I can tell based on how much they choose to
write and whether they choose to comment anything that I have mentioned in my profile. if they
say something about, something in my profile then I know that they have taken the time to get to
know, who I am and they still interested in meeting me then I know ok this person is probably
going to enjoy his or her time with me and if some one just copy paste the same message to
everyone- look I am looking for spend one of these Nights can you help, well I don't know if I can
trust him to actually want to be there or if they are just planning on mooching a free night so
those instances I tend to just say no.

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

yes so my story is kind of actually kind of again a story
I got into couchsurfing because I was interested in taking a road trip across United States and not staying in a hotels
you know meeting locals as I want and so on the trip I had unfortunately a car accident and my car got completely totaled.
and I was driving from Virginia to Wyoming so I had to be in Wyoming for a job so I rented a car and kept going and I was very kind of bump up about it and I had a big mountain bike on top of my car so I needed to get a car to hold the mountain bike so I got this big van and I got this couch Surfer in South Dakota which is near where mount rushmore
and I was pretty upset about the fact that my car was gone but I continued on my trip and I wrote this guy and I have said hey man you know I got a little late but if it's still ok if I stay in your place and he is like well I have another couch Surfer and I said it's ok man I'll sleep on the floor I just dont will you want to deal with the hotel etc and he is like okay if that's ok so I went to his house,
I went to his house and he was a nice guy, he was young about my age, two small kids and since I showed up he is like hey man I made some dinner for you and I am like oh wow that's cool.
it was nothing fancy but then in the bag eventually he was like this is my other couchsurfer and the guy came out, he was an old guy he was actually celebrating his 60th birthday he was on a road trip around the country on a bike trip so he was actually biking across the United States on you know his bicycle just celebrating his 60th birthday so that guy was pretty cool so you are we hanging out that evening and just sort of talked and sort of build a rapport, got along with it and then the next day we were talking about our plans and we, we will discussing about options and I was saying well I want to drive around and see Mount Rushmore and do other things and getting out on a bicycle was asking well you know maybe I'll do the same things and I said well if you want to ride man its not a problem.
and then he was saying well yeah we can do that and then he was asking host like well what are your plans for the day, and he was saying like well I don't have any plans and he was like do you wanna come and then I realised that in a way it kind of work out nicely that I got in in this van because I can fit all of them in the car so I said alright cool, let's all go so we have hopped in this car sort of like a misfit family and we drove around and the guy you know the local he knew all the spots we need to go, see and stop and check out so that was really cool. and so I guess as far as the trust building experience goes it was from the beginning when I trusted him to respond my message that helped, and when he opened up to me that helped more. so by the time you know we suggested and then you know just meeting him and hanging out in his house all that evening and talking that helped build trust more. so by the time they suggested that we go out and drive somewhere that will trust more so it wasn't feel like I am letting strangers into my car for a while, of course not I felt like I was letting good friends in, so in the whole experience slowly the first build I can pinpoint a single point like I can say ok now I trust you.
but in general the whole experience only made possible by the fact that I trusted these people with everything, I knew I was safe in their hands and mostly I trusted him to increase my experience because if I had been driving around All By Myself I wouldn't have been able to share any of it with anyone, wouldn't have been able to say wow look how cool that is to anyone because I was by myself so that was that and then there was lot of things I wouldn't have seen are known about the place if it hadn't been for the fact that they came with me, so I think in general building trust with those guys highly increased my my tourist experience.

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

yeah I have done lot in couchsurfing, specially since I moved here in Austin Texas.
in the beginning I think most of my couchsurfing experience was surfing, like I said earlier with the last question I got involved in couchsurfing because I was planning to take a road trip around the United States so
I first couch served in Savannah Georgia, in fact If you are interested I wrote a blog about that, my very first experience which was just sort of a long story. you can find that in my profile, there is a link there.
but anyways that was my first experience and then I took this road trip and I was quite impressed with you know how well received I was in everyone's home on my virtual perspective specially even I had to change my schedule on whole thing in South Dakota.
so that was 24 when I got started and after I lived in Wyoming for a while I actually move down to tantamount Central America for about a year and a half and while I was down there I couldn't host because I lived in housing provided by my job. but I was still interested in meeting people so I set my profile to wants to meet up and nobody got me for months and months and I kind of forgot about it and then one day a Russian guy who is on a road trip Mexico down to Panama certainly messaged and asked if I want to go get dinner and I was like yeah that be great, so he has been using couchsurfing throughout all of Central America and he had a point, he said you know you should you should set your profile to maybe can host and you probably get more people writing you and then you can just say no I can't host but you know if you want to hang out and then we can.
specially when I did that and well I lived in Panama I probably declined 50 or 60 request but I met up with many of them, some of which one girl i even plan a trip with her to a different part of Panama, we went in a same cabin together.
and there were people exploring throughout the town and there was a hostel near where was staying there I would recommend that to people and that was a nice experience for me because when the time I was working and living in Spanish everything I did was mostly communicating in Spanish so when I met up with people via couchsurfing it was nice to meet someone either from Europe or United States or whatever they came from usually speaking English so it was nice, ok I got to speak English with someone so I didn't host when I was in Panama but I got a lot of request there felt like a local showing people around and then I move back to the United States and I got a job here in Austin and when I move to Austin then I first realised the power of couchsurfing community in the City because I never experience that before, never very lived in a large City and so here the couchsurfers that are local all hanging out on a regular basis and they get to know each other well actually first started here by trying to find a place to live and I had been using Craigslist.
so anyways I was using craigslist to find the place to live and I couldn't because there's not just many options and a lot of people that excuse me a lot of options were fake so I want to stay with someone for a little bit before check the lease or anything like that, meeting or commitment and when I did that I wrote on couch surfing and I said hey anyone can host me for a day or two that would be great that way I can, find a place while I'm here and then one woman actually wrote me and said hey I rent out rooms, short term, a couple of months, if you are interested that way you can kind of deal things that way while you are here and I was like oh that would be great. so I did that and it worked out so well that I ended up staying with her for about 4 months and in the short time after I got there I saw all this events happening in Austin ok and there

was Spanish, English language interchange meet up so I went to that and met some people and then Austin has cool thing where they have WhatsApp groups for couch surfers based on different activities so there is a WhatsApp group for the Spanish meet up and there is a WhatsApp group for the couch surfing community in general in Austin so one of the people added me to that and so I realize wow there is a strong community here, in Austin there's a lot of couch surfers they hang out on a regular basis, and then the house all I'm saying in the woman hosted other couchsurfers, like I was living with her and paying rent but she would have couchsurfers come from all over, so in short amount of time that I live with her, we had people from Belgium and Ireland and England and China, all over so that was cool and she was always busy so I got to show them around even though I lived a short time in Austin I knew something more than they knew so I would take them along and it's kind of Discover the city together and then my roommate, my friend we organised weekly meet up in Austin so she is said she used to live in London and there is a meet up every week so she was kinda surprised when she moved in Austin and there is no couchsurfing community regular event so she created one, this was almost last year July 2016 so she created this event and when she do it, some people from the website group said hey what's going on, why there are creating this event. they haven't realised that they have been planning events in WhatsApp so they haven'tin csi so new people or travellers weren't able to see what's happening so they didn't get the idea that there is a large couchsurfing community. anyways so we created this event, I helped her and I've been 2 almost all of them, so her and I actually ended up buying couchsurfing Baner from the website after if you meet UPS so that we don't have to keep exploring like oh we're over here Cause when you meet up in a bar you wait outside and nobody knows who you are so you have to ask anyone are you a couch Surfer.

so we bought this big sign where we use, it will helped since the people were easily able to tell where the meetup was and we have both locals that come regularly and people that were traveling, that were just in Austin for that week and willing to meet somebody locals so that's me going on for long time and it's going well

and the big thing we did that we organised was the couch crash, that was huge event that just happened and that was inspired by the fact that my roommate Emily and I, we had Met Through The Weekly meet up and both of us we want to live somewhere other than we're living, so with all our weekly meet up so we decided ok we're going to try to host something bigger for people who try to come to Austin, it had happened in Austin before but we were inspired by the fact that so many locals that are so active in couchsurfing it should be easy for us to show other people good time so we started planning that event in November and it just happened in just last weekend in April so we would have regularly, regular meeting with about 5 of us organizing it, and we sort of plan out events, we tried to increase publicity

and it went really very well,we had probably hundred people in total and in general I would estimate about half of those came from other town and half of them local Austin,but I think it went really well and I think we we are going to do it again next year so that was organizing at massive scale, putting on a bigger event where people came from mostly the US but we had International people that where planning the travelling through the US at the time, so they plan the routes to make sure that they timed it to be in Austin that weekend, so it's fantastic and I think it really forged a lot of good relationships and the cool thing is because the event went well, you know back to the trusting people build the trust it would be very good experience if they came back and so I think that was the most important thing is that when people travel somewhere they don't know what they're going to get, what's going to them but we put on a good event where they got to do and see a lot of things that are important to Austin and meet couchsurfers along the way, so I hope is that if we do this event next year because of the

success of 1st year, everyone from the last year would be interested in going and of course will tell their friends
so we will vote on that, sort of increase in travelling

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

I enjoy meeting other people and showing them good time
be it just exchanging stories, I also whenever I travel, I think it's awesome way to travel
because not because it's free but because I enjoy saying things from the local prospective and when I'm hosting,i enjoy to see my own City through a visitor eyes.

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!

I haven't use any of those, I can't really compare to those but the only thing I know of that is somewhat comparable is airbean b
because it uses the concept of staying in someone's home instead of hotel
I think the main difference can be looked at when you go to book on the site so when you book on Airbean b, you see pictures of the persons home and if they know you interested in this where we all be staying and if you are on couchsurfing, you see pictures of people and you would be interested in who am I staying with.
and I think that says everything because of course there's payment involved with Airbean b, but beyond that I think it's a matter of connecting with the person when it comes to couchsurfing and when it comes to Airbean b it's a matter of staying somewhere host where you want to be or whatever but you don't care about the people because you're paying them for the home, lots of time they are not even there, so that's the main difference that I see between
those two, payment, home versus people but I didn't use any of those sites and I think the reason I haven't used because I don't feel like they are widely used

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

I think it will help to connect to a city, much more than staying in a hotel room because you get to know someone who is local, I get to hear the stories about how they like to live in the City.
you get to know what they enjoy doing, hopefully it depends on the host but even from the locals prospective, I find myself doing tours in my own City but I would otherwise not doing when I have a guest, something that's important as well you kind of forced to get out explore your own City, so I think in general couchsurfing highly increases the tourist experience value because if you're comfortable about going out and exploring the city that you're in because you are trust that you are host,showing good time, know where to go, know where to eat,know what's fun to do and you don't have the stress of trying to figure that out. that could be when you are travelling in lot of different places that can be time consuming and annoying to try to figure out if this restaurant or

you know where should I go to eat and most of you don't have to worry about where to stay so all those things combine often Times a host can help you with transportation, you can have a much more enjoyable experience because you aren't worried about your basic necessities or when i'm gonna eat and how I'm going to get there all this things so kind of taken care of in couch Surf.

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

basically in one sentence, I enjoy meeting people so that sort of my motivation and helping people and then I enjoy an excuse to go out and you things and see things in my city
but I would normally go and see when I have a guest

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value? (for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other acttractions and activities, leading to a richer experience)

yeah when you're saving money it allows you to do more things, so you save money on accommodation well that means you more likely to say alright fine I'll go to this activity that may be cost something that if I had to pay for a hotel I might not have done and so from that prospective I think just sort of allows you to budget more money for other activities which will of course increase tourist experience value

as a guest did you ever considered take out your host or buying gift?

I usually do do that at some point, you know take them out, try to buy them meal, cook them a meal, something that you could definitely say there is some money invested in that, almost always try to do something like that
it depending on the city and what you doing, it's almost always the cost of a meal is less than the cost of the place to stay specially if you're staying more than one night
so I still think its economical, the way I think is it's not about how much you spend, its about the gesture of doing something nice for those
more concerned with the budget and don't have the time to spend for you know don't have the means to buy meal for the host,i feel like there is always something you can do to show the host that you are appreciative and not just looking for free place to stay because also negative experiences that come when people just seem to taking advantage of the situation when there is not sort of give and take, which is what the whole website I think it's based on the human interaction, some person give something, some person take some vice versa.
then it's not as good if you feel it's one sided so yeah I always try to do something like that, treat my host to drink or dinner or something.

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

yeah I would say, when I experience couchsurfing I almost always find out and learn things about the city that I wouldn't have known
or particularly by person

often times they take me to places that you wouldn't know to go, if you are just googling things to do on that city so

to be fair I had only really mostly couch Surfed in America, so I tried other places but I have usually been on a very tight schedule and that percluded me from finding host easily by travelling so I have not always used it abroad but even amongst the different part of US that I have stayed, for example I couch Surfed in new orleans for a while and while I was down there, my host we went to a shrimp market, and then we went back to his house and we made a big shrimp bowl which is like a traditional dish for New Orleans, so I think when it comes to meals and food, that's a very easy way to share culture of that place usually if you staying with someone who would like to cook for you or at least take you to a restaurant that is typical of their cuisine of that city so culturally you get some food, if there is any sort of language exchange like when I was in Panama, it was nice to have the culture of speaking a different language in this case English from Spanish but so I think in between language and food, it's easy to share these things very simply, and then culturally whenever you travel, acting host specially always easier to show off that makes the place they live special.

so be it if you happen to come in a festival, people want to take you to that, people want to show you as a guest, usually host are proud of their city, that's why they are happy to host people, they want to show that off, so I think from a cultural perspective they always interested in sharing a little bit about them self but also little bit about the place to live and culture that surrounds that place.

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

yes a lot of That depends on the host, and the guest, how much they interact but in the situations that I have been in, it does play an important role because you get to experience specially when it comes to certain events if your timing is right.

you can experience something, with the ease and relaxation of being around the local, for example say you are in Thailand and there is a big festival happens when your couch surfing, well your host will probably know oh yeah we need to park over here.

however it works out, it's just that they have the ease of knowing how to navigate something that's happening be it A parade or whatever, they know where to go, they know where to stand, they know where to see, they know where to eat afterwards, so culturally it makes you more comfortable to be around the local to have a host, to be couchsurfing and it all depends on the person, that's my idea of the situation and I'm not saying like every host is like to expect, in my experience both hosting and surfing, if there something cool going on, I tried to share people so for example I hosted the couple last month, one of them was from France and the other one from England, they were dating they were travelling around the US, I got invited to a craw fish bowl which is something sort of cage thing they were doing here in Austin and so I invited them and for me it's a cultural experience but also cultural experience for them,and they were only able to go through it because I was already going, they wouldn't have known about it, they wouldn't have seen it, and so as a result they got to experience that and I was happy to share and I think yeah it plays role because you are sort of the connection to that culture of the place as a host

Appendix 23

Interview transcript 4
Name: Elisa
Age: 23
Nationality: Indonesia

1. How do you build trust with other members?

usually, going somewhere, travelling, I usually when I am trying to find a host or locals I usually
send them a special message which is not a template I mean so one of them will get one message
from me
I write them based on their profile so I kind of like building their trust that ok you can trust me and
I can trust you and also sometimes I rate their reference if they have or for the new members I'm
usually like asking their personal contact and like be there because
before coming to their couch

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

trust is very important for me and specially as a girl you know it's gonna like more risky, so I really
need to, trust who is the locals and what they do and something like that so it's very important
usually even like I need something that maybe we can connect to each other you know, we have
like any common interest or something and like we have like same activity or something like
travelling so its like connecting

**3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for
example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that
means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became
friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)**

I am still in contact with one of my cultural thing friends, even like they didn't host me, we just like meet in their country anyone and I'm still contact with them
which I mean it's really great to have a new friends and I mean like when I was in Malaysia so if they treat me good, so for me it's like Malaysia should really serve their Tourist really good, so that's really important for the tourism

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

until now I never been host because I am still living with my parents, its like its hard
about being guest, two times I guess
is the guest, hanging out with locals I don't know maybe like, its like more than 5 but less than 10 times

any events you participated ?

oh yeah, I once came to local couchsurfing members in my city like just once, and because I don't know they did it in midnight so I just hang around with them just once
but for the local activity, I am not that active

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

for me couchsurfing is very interesting because
for me like if I go somewhere in travelling I want to know how the locals do something like serving a guest, their hospitality, I really want to know and the culture, maybe something
like secret, secret place where only the local goes something like that, that information
I want to get information that I can't find on Internet, something like that
I want to feel it

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

actually I just know couchsurfing, I haven't tried another

but tell me at least how do you think couchsurfing is, in what way do you think couchsurfing is practical to you?

the only website that I have tried, that I know that serving hospitality with the locals, it's really great you know because I already experience with the locals, hanging out with them and still friends and even like the send me postcards when they are travelling which is really great to have new friends from abroad
I don't know any other sites maybe bad or something because I haven't tried

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

yeah I told you already that couchsurfing experience gave me experience that I can't get, it's just like with the local tour or something
even I like solo travel, I think it's better if I can get new friends from locals so
it's really great experience

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

as I told you I never been host
but is my friend who host me in their home, if they come to my country, it will be great if I can host them
because I am still living with my parents so I can't decide those things alone

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value? (for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other acttractions and activities, leading to a richer experience)

since I'm living with someone, it makes me like can save more money but actually I can hang out with them like having coffee or something like talking
I can allocate them to another things like spending or hanging around with my host, to local interest or something

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

yeah it's really great about the cultural exchange like specially when I was in Vietnam, so its like they don't know
it's like I am a Muslim and in Vietnam it's only like less than 1% Muslim in Vietnam so its like, it's really great to see like I can understand, I mean I believe that we can live together I mean we don't have to fight with each other because I experience it I mean we really respect each other so it's really great I mean the cultural exchange also like how they serve me.
I think it's like, It's not that different than here actually because I don't know maybe we are Asian, I don't know maybe in the other side of the world
but it's really great to experience those things

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

yeah for me like if I get really good host, I can feel that
its like when I travel,for me I am ambassador of my country so they are so its like they serve their country good

they introduce me their country nice so I think it's really good so I can like also have them introduce their culture to friends or anyone who ask me about them

Appendix 24

Interview transcript 5
Name: Sofi
Age: 25
Nationality: Argentina

1. How do you build trust with other members?

I think your question refers to all the members of couchsurfing
I mean if you put up a profile, you really should be honest, I think that's like the first thing, the most important thing in this website
oh and yeah of course it helps when you are charismatic, like someone ask you for help or yeah you are available for them
I think at the end, this website works with, I don't know if in English you can say but in Spanish we have an expression, its called santo de fe. Faith, like you have to trust someone that you don't know, eventually
and from my experience I had really good ones, I never had a really bad experience so it was really good at the end for me that jump of faith.

I mean yeah I have hosted a guy from Switzerland, my profile was not even complete and he made a boat trip, I offered, he was like yeah I can go
I didn't had any references or anything, or friends even, and these guy was like yeah I can go maybe it's because I'm a girl but he wasn't scared or afraid of going somewhere with a person you don't know

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

now I am in couchsurfing for 4 years, I think 3 years
trust, its like many other relationship, it's the basic
you can give some one trust, it's established, any kind of relationship you need to trust each other
it's the same here,
here because trusting stranger but eventually it ends up saying, being friend I think
so yeah it's like the basic

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

from my experience every person that I met through couchsurfing were, I mean the
relationship that I have built with them, it's really really good
I think thats the magic of couchsurfing, you always meeting some nice and interesting people,I
think the websites to know the place or of course the city like local are
for example it happened to me in Berlin, I was staying with this guy Josh and we got around like
really really well, I think he took me to port dam, it's a little city close there and I couldn't have
gone there if it hadn't been for him, it was like a full surprise for me.

and then I was in Venice, I stayed with a guy, he was from Palawas, its a City close to there
and I went to this college party, in the middle of Venice, so it was so unexpected but that's what I
meant, it experience things that I like More locals but for foreigner, you won't feel foreigner, this
party I was talking with a guy from Romania,and another one from Luxembourg so it was really
really nice
I mean so unexpected i think that what makes it so good
and once i was hosting a guy from Brazil Gary
and one of my friends was hosting a guy from France, leo
and this guy from Netherlands was with me once,he wrote me, then met me, then he host me,I told
him that I had another one already in my place but he said we'll hang out, so we all gather in one
apartment, it was awesome because it was 1 girl's birthday so we sang her in French, in
Portuguese and in Netherlandish, I don't know the language they have
I don't know, everything that I have told you should far happened because of, because I trusted
these people
and these people trusted me

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

well as I started being host, most people started the other way, they start being a guest
I found this website and it was super cool to have foreigners in your place so I tried it and I
hosted 15 people pretty much
yeah I counted 15 or maybe less
but if I start to remember each one of them,
because I do remember them all

and I am being a guest in 11 houses I think
actually a little bit more because I was new
okay 15 houses, I don't know
and hang out, I tried the Hangout thing in Paris, I met a guy from Egypt and a guy from Amsterdam I think he was
I was like weird, I wasn't fond of it, I prefer the other thing like stay over in the place, discover the city with your host
I didn't organised any event, actually I've never been to a cultural meeting so I can't answer that

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

I don't know what you are referring "to be active" part like if I want to participate, that I wouldn't ask like why not, why not do it, it's beautiful Idea actually
you have this huge community, like this local village that connects people from all over the world and it doesn't matter the sexual orientation or their religion belief, it's beautiful actually
its like social expression, socialism, I don't know how to explain in English it's very complicated
you give and you don't actually expect something back, but you always have something back, it's unexpected

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

okay I never tried anything like, I never tried BeWelcome, wow there are so many I didn't know
I think I just answered that, what makes couchsurfing so practical for me
I mean its practical when you're traveling you don't have to pay, your hostel
and you make so many friends
because you be friend with the guy,
in Amsterdam we end up dancing salsa in the middle of the park with his friends
it gives you memories with people you don't know if you ever gonna see them again
it's nice

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

I think I answered you that already I don't know
my experience as a tourist abroad was available
because I use couchsurfing, when I was in Europe I saw all this people, different countries offered couchsurfing,that help, yeah that help me in the money way, but also experiences

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

at the beginning, to try something new
look cool to have foreigners in my house, but afterwards I really enjoyed spending time with them
it's like having a piece of a world in your own place because his sit together, you talk, you know you
both human, it's a habit like sometimes that varies, that's the interesting part

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value?
(for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other acttractions and
activities, leading to a richer experience)

and as a guest, how it helps saving money, okay I already told you that, I was able to travel around
Europe because couchsurfing
I did save money in accommodation and I used it for other things, more interesting things

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you
think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

well I always take the guys to typical places, like typical food from Argentina, very regional
I mean it's always or most of the time through the food because we have food here that you don't
have
sorry some people don't have of course but parties and music
my friends I know they love and people
they really pretty much hate it and then like yeah I'm gonna try
and they love it actually at the end but in Argentina I believe that everything is an excuse to get
together with your family or your friends or why not both
so when you have a person from another country, okay you have the excuse that they are here so
yeah let's get together, have a meal, get to know each other, play some cards, just to be together
I enjoy it so

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value?
Why?

I mean, I'm pretty young I haven't tried the other type of trip like you go to a hotel, you buy this
package where you have tours with the tour guide in circles of tourist
I've always traveled with couchsurfing and so I have always related with people, with
locals, experience that kind of travel so it's kind of hard for me to tell you if it improves
like how important is the role of this website
for me its like its awesome but I haven't experienced the other part, maybe someone tried, yeah I
prefer travelling so
but yeah for me it's actually the most
a way to use, to learn from your journey,because you are not only taking pictures of the
cathedral, you are also learning the story about it and how it felt
I mean, it happened to me in Austria, Indiana
I was, actually the girl that hosting me in Indiana was the girl I hosted here in Argentina
we became friends and when I went there, I stayed over at her place

we was walking in Indiana central and we went to the cathedral and walking around there and she showed me like next to the front door, you see a..
and if you, like if you pass by you won't see it, someone have to point it out until you'd like
it was the time when Hitler was there, he took over the Vienna and he changed the name Austrich
it was something like I remember long to explain,it doesn't matter now but I mean if she hadn't been there, if she hadn't point that out, I wouldn't have seen it, it's very interesting
and now I come up with that, I think like I have more memories like that
ok with the guy in Amsterdam, is dancing so funny in the middle of the bar, they never dance anything like that
I don't know like people in Amsterdam like, yeah you call me, hi
yeah I tried, I had another type of experiences in Amsterdam

Appendix 25

Interview transcript 6

Name: Olga
Age: 27
Nationality: Russia

1. How do you build trust with other members?

it's hard to answer this question
I don't know how to build trust with them, firstly I go to the profile and I see like in general who are they,if they really have something in common
of course I look what type of people, their rating also I see what type of people, their rating and also I see if the ratings are quite high, I see the fact that they are nice and if I can trust them
and after if I sent them a request, and then we begin to discuss some just seem normal if we don't say something new
but I build trust with them since from the beginning
so if something strange appears, in common communication, I trust them

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

yes trust is important
I usually travel with Andre, he is a friend
because of that i feel more secure, also because of that i don't look for some special proof of the trust and I think in any case
if nothing too strange in the discussion, I trust this person
trust is important,when I choose my host and because I am going to stay in the house of this person that I've met so I want to feel secure but I, my level of trust doesn't need to be very high for the moment because I travel not alone so I know that I can, that I have some
but if I would have travel alone, I want to say that in this case I would be more careful, I would ask more questions, I would see more details and since I am not alone I am more relaxed

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

I have positive experience with couchsurfing, with my host
I trusted enough and we didn't become may be friends but we spent good time together
and that was a very good experience
for example I was in a town that was not so much touristic but it was quite
but I had a very good host, and had a good relation and so because of that for me this town was a good town to travel
and I think in this town I had a tour because the people accepted my request and I had to choose between them and I choose
because this person seems trustworthy

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

when I was not active in couchsurfing, I never hosted myself, few times in my account I put that I can,
so few times I met people
I showed them City where I live, it was nice experience and I was hosted few times,
when I visit some childhood couchsurfing and not all the time I want to visit friends

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

I may be not so much active in couchsurfing community
well maybe before, 1 year ago I was very active because I wanted to meet more people, I was new to the city and I didn't know where to go there, so this makes chance to meet more people and also some tourist
and because it was new for me I like to go out for walk, Discover something

I'd like to meet new people from different countries so when I used as a host it was also to meet new people, some locals and people where I was going otherwise I think it's pretty fast to make contact with local people when you arrive to a City and instead you stay in a hotel or hostel and you don't have friends, since you're tourist
so couchsurfing is not only cheap way and it also gives to meet some people who live there

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

actually I don't use similar websites, I don't even know about them. I only knew only about couchsurfing
Facebook, for example I made a new alias and in Facebook there is a group alias couchsurfing between volunteers, between people who made it because there people all around the Europe

what do you think it's so practical about couchsurfing?

it's well organised, I like that people have their profiles, information is there, interests, what they expect from their guests
so I like that the information is not just the
build the trust questions, the fact that there is the information since the beginning and also photos and some information about the, what are these people are doing in their life
actually just recently their was change and now you can't send more request
recently policies of couchsurfing changed and now the number of requests that each person can send is limited by 10 request per week and for me it's little bit unconvenient because it's not all the time that I plan my trip in advance
and sometimes it's few cities in a row that I want to visit so because of that just 10 request for a week is not so many
usually I travel in holidays so often People ask for
I go to visit my family and somthing

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

and yes so my preference for couchsurfing
usually when I used it, I had a good experience, didn't had bad ones
so my tourist experience value is increased because of couch surfing, my tourist experience value is pretty high thanks to couchsurfing I can say

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value? (for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other acttractions and activities, leading to a richer experience)

as a guest, in fact I can say my social improvement
my tourist experience value because yeah I can spend more money to go out, also with my host
for example offer something to my host, I refer my home country, or City
for example for the dinner
for example once I travel with my..I bought a cake
my host made for me dinner,
so when we go out we can go to the bar
and also I travel before for example when I was a volunteer, I didn't had in general a lot of money so to travel
I would travel very less if I have to pay all the time, tickets and hotels and some activities

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

what is cultural exchange is one of the biggest bonus of couchsurfing because you get a chance to stay with locals and sometimes it's also foreign people who live in the country and host people but they can tell life in this country
and I like this possibility as a chance to know about everyday life about, about something more than tourist attractions and also because it's a chance to stay
which is of course different from City standard and also to see part of the city sometimes less beautiful but more realistic
so in general I like cultural exchange as a, it's a chance to see real life of the country
not only like some historical stuff but also how labor market and all the stuff
and myself I contributed as well I,
in general I tried to give nice image of Russian people, like polite, respect full
and secondly if we have discussion I also tell how in Russia, if we discuss economics, we compare

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

and yes cultural exchange plays an important role to increase tourist experience value
its one of the most important things to do
can you say Why in a few words?
it makes your travel more richer, it gives prospective to see things from a different point of you
and like that
could see a little bit behind the stag

Appendix 26

Interview transcript 7
Name: Ievgenia
Age: 26 years
Nationality: Ukraine

1. How do you build trust with other members?

Well basically for me to think, it's the profile and also how often the person comes to couch surfing
how often he or she answers requests
yeah based on profile and activity

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

Well actually it depends so ofcourse its very important
I have to trust my host and he or she must trust me as well
so I think its very important
of course it depends on how
what experience
chance to understand something about the country as well, I mean this person with whom I'm staying with
his country he represented, he resided for example so
I think both

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

I can tell the experience of me being as a host so if
for example their was 1 guy, we stayed at my place
we was from berlin and he had to stay here like he walked in the very last moment
basically in the morning he wrote me in the mail he arrived already
so I was
because he couldn't find a place to stay
and also I had some food prepared for him I mean we had dinner together so it ws very pleasent
he even wrote me in the comment
it was very good

Do you had time to build trust before you accept him as a guest?

Yeah because he wrote me and I'm answering very fast and also I wrote him like how to be find my place so he was calling me and I keep talking to him like how to get to my apartment

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? Etc.)

If we talk about couch surfing I was hosting and I was a guest as well
basically last week I was a guest in
so I find a guy who host us, it was a very good experience
about hosting here actually I was hosting last time last summer because after that my husband came to
live with me and we have very tiny apartment so I can not let in more
but in case we will change the place we ofcourse host someone
so its not dependant on not to host, its dependant on my living condition
but if I get a chance I will host someone
I also like to see on facebook also, I used it to host
facebook couch surfing
…

If people ask something in couch surfing, I answer it
people ask something about

How many times you hosted?

5 times

how many times you been a guest?

5 times

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

Because its interesting I mean you can meet other people from other countries, you can show them
something about the city where you live, tell them something meaning about your life about your country
well like exchanging their culture experiences
also help people because I know that not many people have money to travel with
and yeah also I think of it
from my culture to tell them, share something
so its kind of cultural exchange

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

To be honest I haven't used one of them, I only surfed the BeWelcome website but I didn't liked the interface

it was slow

so comparing like experience or something with these websites because I haven't went through

Whats the practical thing you see in couch surfing?

I think the website interface is very easy to use

and also I like the culture

So that's why actually its very easy to use

so that's why I would prefer more than other services

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

Because when we

and couch surfing is very easy because there is a map, a open map, you find anything and walk with it

because most of the websites they don't have the mobile versions so it's a bit hard

I mean when you stay in a hotel, you cannot experience the culture

cannot see how the way you go there, accommodation usually how

for example we were in a motel, before we started looking for our host we couldn't understand how the streets

for example because they do not have numbers like the houses do not have numbers

so you can imagine that if you just stayed in a hotel

you go to streets and try to find your host and

yeah I think its like it depends on the person of course but its definitely much better to stay with people

but not in a hotel because it saves money and also brings insights of the culture

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

For me I don't know its just I want to help people

try to communicate

I want to meet more people

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value? (for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other attractions and activities, leading to a richer experience)

It gives me more money to do something else
go to some events or some exhibitions or something like that
I can spend this money on the host or cultural experience

How did you express your directives towards the host

I always try to bring some sweets or something
like sweets or I even ask our host what they would like to have maybe they have some references
and mostly I behave very good
because I also appreciate myself the person is not messy or not noisy or not drinking or not smoking inside in my apartment
also trying to keep the conversation going, not just staring at the ceiling
yeah people who host also trying to communicate as well

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

Other people are better to me
or like less conflict or understand other people
have same values as you have
Be patient
makes you more flexible, more understanding

What was the cultural exchange?

You see how the people communicate
how they host you, will they propose you to eat with them or do they offered you their food
or do they propose you to walk with them or go to sunburn together or not
how they, do they give the keys straight away or they want you to come only when they are home
something like that

Did any of your host had the condition to be home only when he at home?

yes

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

It depends, maybe be the cultural exchange is not the first motivation to
mostly its because you know
place to stay basically
same time its very convenient very good like a bonus
it depends on the situation of course, it is also
I never had bad experience as well with culture, so for me it was only good experience
and gave good prospective for my country so

so generally I think it was good experience

Appendix 27

Interview transcript 8
Name: Jin

Age: 26

Nationality: China

1. How do you build trust with other members?

normally its like I think it's the first time you see them
you feel like connected already because of the people I have met, in general the couch surfing
people, they are all quite friendly so, normally when the first time you see them, they were like kind
of just being very friendly so you don't really feel kind of awkward, but because for me I am also ve
outgoing and friendly person so I'm not really afraid and the first time I tried couchsurfing with and
two friends so three of us couch surfed together so it's better and after that I tried to go couchsurf
myself so I'm already, because I already had the experience so I didn't had that much fear anymore
my host, he looks nice so it feels kinda okay I trust him.

2. How important is trust for you when choosing your host? WHY?

of course like I mean couchsurfing thing itself kind of based on trust because you trust the host bec
you're going to stay there and leave all your belongings there, and they also trust you because they
stay in their own house and some of them they even leave the key to me. you are so its neutral and
course it is very important
normally when choosing the host, I already kind of like assume that trust will be there because the
platform itself it's kind of a platform for trust, for mutual trust and in general I trust people

**so you are saying that this platform is for your kind of people, like people who are also friendly ar
also people that are not afraid of meeting new people right?**

yes, but I mean at the start you may be, you need some courage because of first time you are kind
concerns like how he works and
but that's why the first time I was not really daring to try that myself so the first time I did
couchsurfing was when I was in Lake House America and I did the couch surfing with my 2 German
friends.
so like three of us we traveled together so I was not really concerned about the safety issues or any
so it was very nice experience

3. Describe a situation where building trust has influenced the Tourist Experience Value! (for example, you might have not trusted a host/guest enough to meet with face to face and that means that the experience value was poor; or you trusted a host/guest enough that you became friends and that resulted in having a rich experience value)

I think the first time I really like, I was kind of
how the trusting is when I was travelling in Bolivia, then the host wrote to me that he was not going to be there because he will be away with the family, the whole family they will be like travelling but he left another couch Surfer to pass us the key. so that was the moment I feel wow, how could that happen, how could it be possible.
so that was the first time and then he asked another couch Surfer as to remember his name, his name is Peter and he is from Czech Republic, so he came to the bus station, he came to the station to pick 3 of us like collect us from the bus station and he just passover the key to us and took us to the house of the guy and yeah the guy was not there.but in the end the guy came back, he came back because his wife and his kid went first, he was like stay there for One More Night and he left the main bedroom to us to sleep and he was sleeping in the couch instead.
so that Czech Republic guy he was crazy like couchsurfing guy and that night we talked about all the crazy stories,so that really kind of make me realise that this trust is very big thing.

we felt sorry after we left, he wrote us message like some of the manure was missing from his house so, we don't know who is the one who really took the manure or whatever but just he was asking around because he got so many stolen or whatever

4. Tell me about your activity on CS! (how many times you hosted and been a guest?, did you 'handg out' with visitors/locals?, did you organize any events? etc.)

I been guest 5 times maybe, not really much and I never really hosted someone, an hour how is always some guest or father's friend or whatever that is not really using the platform, so the platform is really for the Traveling

because I always sharing with other people that's why I don't really host people

the recent one I went to Australia, I didn't really stay with any host because I have a friend, in Australia I stayed in friends place but I still like meet up with some cultural guys and in Singapore I am not used to be very active in couchsurfing group but we have a kind of community and they have kind of regular events, I only participate in some of the events like sometimes they have cultural exchange like some Malaysia festival and all the couchsurfing community will just gather together and have some kind of traditional festival celebration and sometimes I also think they also organise Barbeque, I also participate once or twice because I am active in another group which is Spanish group and Spanish group sometimes like sometimes together with couchsurfing group and they will have something so it's just like we have common kind of connection in between so sometimes I just happen to know more people from couchsurfing or whatever

5. What makes you want to be so active in the couchsurfing community?

couchsurfing people in general they are more open minded or adventurous, and more easy going, its just same kind of like direct

6. How would you compare CS with other similar websites like BeWelcome, Servas ,Hospitality Club ,GlobalFreeloaders and Staydu, or others that you might know ,from a practical point of view? (If you don't know any other similar websites you can elaborate on what makes Couchsurfing so practical for you!)

honestly no
if sometimes I can't really find couchsurfing host then I would just use a v m p and this thing is only when I travel alone I use couchsurfing because normally in Asia, when I travel with friends, my Asian friends kind of concern that why you want to try couchsurfing, why you want to save the money on accommodation, they are kind of like the don't accept it, so I just use couchsurfing when I travel alone and if otherwise with friends like if we go to, go for a driving trip or whatever we will just stay in hostel or Homestay instead of like find a couch surfing host because if we go in a group, it's not really easy to find a host as well.

7. How do you think your preference for CS is connected to the Tourist Experience Value ? (for example CS offers an valuable experience by allowing you to meet people of diverse ethnicity and so you prefer using CS as part of your tourist experience)

yeah I love couchsurfing, because I don't like to plan for my trips, I mean last time I will plan maybe I'll borrow or whatever but nowadays if I go travelling, I would just buy a ticket and go to the place without any plan, and I'd rather find a host instead and just go there and see because normally the host would have some recommendation, and I just don't like to follow the normal like the kind of the common kind of way to travel like follow the guide books so I would try couchsurfing instead if I have the chance I mean I have the chance

I like solo travelling so if I go to a place and I am alone, I'm cool with myself, just being myself and I am also kind of feel lonely so I want to make some friends so like go couchsurfing and meet some cool people

it's just very interesting

8. As a host, what motivated you to offer free accommodation?

not really,
I was there guest but when they come to Singapore I just host them but because I already know them so I just host them.
but because we are already kind of friends so is not really host a stranger

9. As a guest, how did saving money on accommodation improve your Tourist Experience Value? (for example you have more money to spend with your host or on other acttractions and activities, leading to a richer experience)

yeah of course saving is good because I think most of the couch surfing people are same like spend some on accommodation and food but spend more on experience so this is how this thing works I feel so mostly ideal thing I when I go to travel is I spent most of my money on transportation and otherwise for accommodation and would like as minimum as possible

would you do with the extra money?

I would spend it on more adventurous maybe like I'd rather spend on going hiking or going diving and yeah I mean after I come back I will take. I mean in general I spend money in kind of experiences so like now I am taking Spanish classes as well so I spend money on taking order

10. Describe the Cultural Exchange you had as a guest? How did it manifest? (Or how do you think you contributed to the Cultural Exchange as a host?)

I think the funny thing is that the last time when I was doing cultural thing because there was like the first time I went to America and it's kind of opposite from where I was born and that time I was not that open minded as now so that time I was very conservative and latinos, they are kind of totally the opposite so when I was kind of and also when I was listening to the guy who left the key and another Czech Republic guy and when they were talking about all the crazy stories I was telling them how conservative I was and how my family
other kind of things, like just exchange this kind of different culture they will also kind
of shocked like because I told them I never really had my parents and I never really said I love
them because in South America it was so common like you help people and you say you love them.
and also because I I am trying to this Opera so normally when I travel I sing song of this Chinese
Opera and kind of cultural exchange, and showing a bit of my culture

11. Did the Cultural Exchange play an important role in improving the Tourist Experience Value? Why?

of course the cultural exchange,
but I think I don't know in general, you feel home kind of feel
if you feel you are a meeting cool people, you are listening to their stories and you are learning their
culture instead of you learning the local culture and normally goes crazy people they have more crazy
stories. so that tell you about their crazy stories so it's kind of you learn more of their culture instead of
the local culture.
one another thing because I always communicate with travellers or whatever so there was one time I
met German travelling alone in the whole South America then he told me life is also a person like
travelling so he say when she is tired she won't choose couchsurfing, she would choose hostel
instead because well you choose couchsurfing normally you need to spend energy in communicating with
people and sometimes like making friends can be good but sometimes when you are too tired, and you
just want to be with yourself so she said at that time she would just choose hostel so she can enjoy hostel
being in hostel instead of like spending all the energy to talk to the host, because the time you talk to CS

guys, they are so talkative and that time we were kind of sleepy already, we kind of want to sleep but they were just keep talking

well it was all fun experience I feel, and some of the host they would just talk for hours and so it was really good