Book review

Peer to Peer Accommodation Networks: Pushing the Boundaries
Edited by Sara Dolnicar
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The hospitality industry as traditionally conceptualized, defined (if not confined) and operated is witnessing fundamental shifts toward continuous liberalization and de-institutionalization in the past few years. In other words, its boundaries have been challenged, pushed and even redrawn by the continuous influx of new capital, talents and, unavoidably, new technologies. From a historical perspective, the hospitality industry has been quite successful in accommodating, assimilating and integrating these "disruptive innovators" which were availed by the advancements in transportation and communications technologies, such as the jet travel and the internet, and securing new leveraging opportunities for marketing, operation and management with them rather than despite them. However, the latest new factors, underpinned by breakthroughs in mobile internet technologies of social networking, are unprecedented in their globalized powers that have been epitomized by the term of "The Sharing Economy." The disruptive impacts of this new normal of sharing on the current paradigm of the hospitality industry, according to this semantic book of *Peer to Peer Accommodation Networks: Pushing the Boundaries* by Prof. Sarah Donicar at the University of Queensland, Australia, are mainly two-fold. On one hand, the new paradigm is still characterized with strategic objectives of economic viability and profit maximization, thereby framing and shaping a new mode of commercial accommodation that is economically sustainable; on the other, new means of social networking and relationships are explored and anticipated through the sharing mode, mostly on peer-to-peer bases. With its discussion and explanation of what drives the initial expansion and success of the sharing mode, this book effectively builds an optimistic argument for the achievement of its duo aims of economic profits and social satisfaction. This book is best featured with its timeliness, being one of the first academic attempts to conceptualize and account for the effects of the sharing economy on the hospitality industry. Meanwhile, corresponding to the repercussions of the sharing hospitality economy at a global scale, this book deserves credit for its international perspective, thereby arousing the sense of relevance, if not urgency, for an international readership.

Topics covered by this book are not only "hot," particularly with substantial pages dedicated to the hot industrial player of Airbnb but also exhaustive in addressing all of the major aspects in this field and therefore offering a one-stop shop for readers wishing for both immediate responses and deeper contemplations on peer-to-peer accommodation. Logic

flows of the 23 chapters of the book are coherent and cogent, with a satisfying integration of persuasive reasoning, presentation of evidence and case deliberations. Particularly, given the innovative nature of the book aiming to explain an emerging phenomenon with rich commercial and social implications, the book maintains a considerable level of discretion and prudence across its contents, refraining from jumping to absolute conclusions and offering opportunities for inductive exploration and reasoning by the reader. On top of that, one distinctive attraction of this book lies in its appealing to the emotional resonance, with the author narrating her own personal experiences as a provider and user of peer-to-peer accommodation in the introduction section. Such an emotional touch, in addition to softening the somewhat rigid ambience usually associated with academic publications and thereby enhancing the readability of the book, further arouses the attachment of the readers to the topic under discussion and the identification of themselves as key stakeholders to the theme of the book.

The book starts with two chapters offering the conceptual framework that underpin the emergence of peer-to-peer accommodation and its unique features. Hence, these two chapters offer the theoretical support for the many propositions concerning peer-to-peer accommodation made across the entire book. Chapter 1 postulates and elaborates on the six major categories of factors underlying the current success of peer-to-peer accommodation, namely, balance of power, network track record, risk assessment, flexibility, inbuilt mystery shopping, guarantee and micro segmentation. It can be learned from this framework that the success of peer-to-peer accommodation still hinges on classical production and marketing strategies in the hospitality industry, with the integration of latest technological gimmicks in social networking. Particularly, the introduction of the factor of "inbuilt mystery shopping" adds a vibe of fascination to both peer-to-peer accommodation and to reading this chapter at large. Chapter 2 tilts toward the theoretical side with its discussion of how peer-to-peer accommodation can be accounted for from the perspective of sharing economy, and this chapter is impressive in its academic prudence of welcoming future studies to draw clearer verdicts.

The next four chapters, which are dedicated to the introduction and analysis of the most renown and successful peer-to-peer accommodation network – Airbnb, definitely appeal to readers interested in examining empirical cases and learning from practical experiences. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide an in-depth analysis of the business model of Airbnb, which can be concisely characterized as value creation and value communications and transfer for the guests, as well as risk mitigation. At the same time, Airbnb has paid close attention to the supply side of its products – in terms of not only the concrete accommodation facilities but also the hosts who "co-host" the facility with Airbnb, aiming for the cultivation of its corporate values at all hosting facilities. Chapter 6 extends to an international perspective by cross examining Airbnb and other major peer-to-peer accommodation providers around the world, emphasizing the need for amassing substantial numbers of buyers and sellers on such networks, thereby further accentuating the successful operational mode of Airbnb.

How the rapid growth of peer-to-peer accommodations has influenced the hospitality industry is investigated in detail in following Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10. The thesis statement made by these chapters is that vast opportunities have been availed for all stakeholders of the sector, as the transformative powers of the peer-to-peer mode facilitate entrepreneur endeavors, employment expansion, infrastructure gaps filling, seasonality mitigation, etc. The synergistic effects of the peer-to-peer mode on the tourism sector at large are also deliberated, for not only value adding of travel experiences but also planning and packaging of new tourist attractions and events. Meanwhile, the possibility of reduction of permanent

employment because of flexible ways of income earning through peer-to-peer accommodation is admitted.

The following four chapters of the book focus on the macro level of regulatory responses to the peer-to-peer phenomena, with special attention paid to how authorities around the world handle the disruptions brought about by the peer-to-peer mode to existing housing market. Case studies of city and state destinations of Vienna and China are assessed, with rudimentary observations made that policy frameworks regulating the peer-to-peer mode are lagging behind, thereby leaving space for future uncertainty.

Next, the book hunkers down on the two peer groups of hosts and guests, whose interactions constitute the core peer-to-peer accommodation experiences, as well as the core ethos of the entire product. With six chapters assigned to this topic, the host–guest relationship and networks are delineated, classified and analyzed in detail, revealing the economic, social and communal benefits that are brought about to the hosts and guests through the peer-to-peer accommodation experience. The emotional sides of such relationship have been given outstanding emphasis here, illustrating a continuum with love and hate at both ends. What is also highlighted is the possibility of the host–guest relationship being facilitated, maintained and sometimes even manipulated by the provider network whose overriding corporate aim is rational profits rather than bonds building. Then, how the peer-to-peer mode can be operated for charity purposes and at the community level is discussed, opening up the horizon and scope for this mode to assume greater communal and social goals which would exert long-lasting effects on the transformation of social fabrics at large.

The book concludes with three chapters on the ethical sides of peer-to-peer accommodation, discussing issues on guests with disabilities, potential of transferring of its social network mobilization powers to other social and political courses, as well as how this mode can affect and contribute to environmental protection. The book deserves merit here with its somewhat agnostic recognition of boundary pushing by peer-to-peer accommodation in future, thereby reinforcing its exploratory role as one of the first academic publications to probe a rapidly growing and transforming phenomenon.

Overall, this book is highly recommended for readers with varying educational and professional backgrounds and can serve as a credited reference, with its novelty in theme capture, copious yet balanced coverage, solid facts and evidence, insightful propositions, lucid reasoning and elaboration, smooth meandering between facts and arguments as well as riveting emotional arousals. As a highly informative piece of work, this book should be particularly appreciated for its breath and depth of identifying and evaluating the major factors and mechanisms constituting the peer-to-peer accommodation phenomenon and influencing its future trajectory. In the meantime, this book is provocative in eliciting critical thinking and exploration by the reader to ponder at the blurred lines of daily lives and the experiences availed by peer-to-peer accommodation and its social implications. That said, this book can be better presented and more captivating and reflections-inviting in its contents should the following couple of issues be heeded and duly addressed. In the first place, its current layout of 23 independent chapters, while already voluble and insinuating a certain line of logic flow of description and analysis with the ordering in place, can be better aligned and regrouped under a number of sub themes to enhance the presentation of the structure and composition of book and assist selective searching and reading of certain aspects of the peer-to-peer mode like marketing and operation in a more convenient manner. Particularly, as the international accommodation sharing network of Airbnb has received highlighted attention by this book, accounting for four dedicated chapters and being reviewed across others, the organization and coherence of the book would be greatly

enhanced should a tagged sub theme be assigned to Airbnb encompassing all relevant chapters. Realignment of some of the other in-chapter contents may be necessary, with topics such as employment receive alternative discussions in separate chapters. Furthermore, taking cognizance of the novelty of this book as one of the first publications to track a phenomenon which is itself morphing at an unprecedented pace, there is the inherent challenge of comprehensiveness in the inclusion of all of the key aspects pertinent to the topic. Particularly, there can be more discussions on how the traditional hospitality is responding to the impacts of peer-to-peer accommodation. An interesting aspect would be the evaluation of the newly emerging branded and chained accommodations on Airbnb for the peer-to-peer market, with rich implications for the integration of traditional hospitality industry with the peer-to-peer mode. Meanwhile, regulatory environment and frameworks of the peer-to-peer accommodation, believed to hold the lifeline of the viability of this mode in many places around the world, has been inadequately addressed by the current version with only one dedicated chapter. It would definitely leverage the practical references of the book should more case studies be added and in-depth evaluated of regulatory structures and progress in representative localities and potentials for accommodation stakeholders to cater to or circumvent the regulations. What also inadequately deliberated in the current edition are discussions of community responses to peer-to-peer accommodation, which, if duly addressed, would substantially contribute to the social impacts and viability of the peer-to-peer mode. A last concern with the book in its current edition lingers with the seemingly over optimistic vibe permeating through the lines of it, and the academic rigor of this book would definitely be enhanced should the accompanying "dark sides" of the peer-to-peer mode receive due space and critical analysis. Nevertheless, with its astute sense of research focus and masterly command of stylistic language usage, this book boasts appeal to scholars, industrial practitioners and the general public alike, with perhaps most relevance for those seeking the catharsis of their social perspectives and epistemological value systems through the peer-to-peer accommodation experiences.

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