Cand. merc. in Management of Creative Business Processes

Master's Thesis

PEER-TO-PEER ONLINE HOSPITALITY PLATFORMS: PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY AND CONSUMER LOYALTY. A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL.

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ABSTRACT

The concept of authenticity in tourism has received wide attention from a sociological point of view and is now gaining relevance also in the field of consumer behavior. Its importance within the creation of attractive and memorable tourist experiences has been acknowledged: it is perceived as an important competitive factor driving tourists' complex decision making. Nevertheless, a unique and shared definition of authenticity has not yet emerged. In the background, we see motivations, modes and means of travel that are rapidly changing due to social, technological, and economical drivers; this is coupled by the penetration of the sharing economy in the industry. This thesis is an attempt to give a theoretical and managerial contribution to the conceptualization of authenticity and its impact on tourist consumer behavior. The study is carried out in the realm of hospitality, a brach lacking analysis in this context. It is argued that accommodation in the sharing economy is an interesting environment to investigate the perception of authenticity within current tourism dynamics. Through an adaptation of Camus' measurement scale (2004), the perception of authenticity in accommodation offered through peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms is assessed in its three dimensions: origin, projection and singularity. Using a structural equation model, the impact of perceived authenticity on loyalty is determined.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The travel industry is evolving at its most rapid pace ever. As the global recovery continues, the demand in tourism is resurging. Technology keeps evolving and along with consumers post-recession, they have transformed "the way [we] talk about, search for, book and experience travel"[1]. The shape of tourism has altered significantly from the days of packaged destinations and mass tourism high dependence of place icons (Bødker and Browning, 2013).

The UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2015 talks about important numbers in the tourism industry: the yearly amount of international tourists in the last 60 years has grown impressively, and the impact that this sector has on the global economy is powerful. This is the result of years of important and dramatic historical events, major technological innovations and far reaching social and cultural changes. Nowadays, cheap traveling abounds, the mobilization of computer technologies is constantly increasing, multiple possibilities of virtual forms of mobility exist, and the role of the so-called Generation Y is emerging. Tourist intentions, expectations, itineraries and sites are becoming increasingly complex and diverse.

[1]The Economist Insights: The Future of Travel. Conference held on March 24th, 2015. http://www.economistinsights.com/technology-innovation/event/future-travel.

Tourism is only one of the many forms of travel that happen worldwide, being at the same time also a fundamental one. It has become an integral part of everyday life, losing its status of specialist consumer product and undergoing what Larsen (2008) has defined *de-exotification*, delivering the everydayness to the extraordinary of tourism. These movements and dynamics take place within the more ample paradigm of mobilities, introduced by Urry in 2000. Key to this are communication and IT, not only seen as tools for information consumption, but sources for networking. The contact with people becomes amplified and fundamental within this paradigm. People are what makes a difference when experiencing a place: tourists are in constant interaction with the environment, making them active and receptive actors within the consumption. Their experience when traveling is made up not only of aseptic sightseeing and souvenirs, but mostly of dynamic and negotiated meanings that create the placeness, and shape the tourist herself.

The ability of staging experiences is nowadays competitively fundamental for companies (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The competition battleground has moved beyond goods and services, to embrace a vision of the consumer that displays an emotional side and wants to engage through her senses in what is offered.

Tourism has been one of the first industries where the importance of an holistic experience was detected. There is the need to differentiate what a destination has to offer based not only on its amenities and facilities, but on a more complex and stimulating approach. Many factors can be summoned to obtain a satisfying result, and success is obtained through the ability to engage the consumers in memorable ways. Nowadays, authenticity seems to be a critical consumer sensibility in this sense (Pine and Gilmore, 2008). People want authentic experiences. Consumption has changed from quantity (the more I own, the more I am gratified as a person), to quality (the more I experience, the more I am gratified as a person). As easy as it may seem in words, authenticity in tourism reveals to be one complex and hard-to-define concept. Why and how does authenticity influence tourists? What is authenticity to a tourist? Is it a universal perception, or does it vary

based on a person's experiences and needs?

Much has been written and discussed about it in the sociological field, but only recently this construct has gained academical relevance in consumer behavior discourses. Very few studies have been conducted on the perception of authenticity and its impact on consumer behavior in tourism. Nevertheless, the importance of this factor within this realm is widely recognized. Many lacunas need to be filled through more thorough observations. In particular, within the traveling experience, accommodation has not yet been analyzed under this point of view.

The sharing economy represents an interesting environment where authenticity can be studied. In particular the focus of this thesis will be on peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms. These new forms of sharing have developed thanks to social, technical and economical drivers. People sense again the importance of community and social exchange, and technology is fostering this processes. Not less important, this type of accommodation represents a cheaper alternative to traditional ones.

The aim of this thesis is to try to lay the basis for an understanding of the perception of authenticity in the realm of alternative accommodation, to grasp its relevance and to investigate on the impact that this has on consumer loyalty towards this type of hospitality.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 The Sharing Economy

> *"[Sharing is] the most universal form of human economic behavior, distinct from and more fundamental than reciprocity. ... Sharing has probably been the most basic form of economic distribution in hominid societies for several hundred years." Price, 1975*

Starting from the sharing of food in forager societies, to current information sharing over the Internet, the act of sharing is relevant today as much as it was thousands of years ago. Recently, after years of capitalist imperatives where consumer behavior was linked mainly to marketplace exchange and ruling consumerism, social researchers have put again into focus this concept, deemed different from any other form of exchange (e.g. Fiske, 1991; Price, 1975; Woodburn, 1998). Starting from 2007 on, sharing has re-gained attention in light of the development of the Web 2.0 (John, 2013) and of the economic situation.

Price noted how sharing was a common practice in what he calls intimate economies — social systems small in scale and personal in quality — that were typical of hunting and

gathering societies, where economic goods and services where allocated without calculating returns. Since then, as groups of people forming communities have increased, and households have changed in terms of both size and roles, intimate economies have slowly and steadily been substituted by institutions. Highlighting this evolution, Price expected for the future an "elaboration of other arrangements where intimate social tolerance, emotional acceptance, interdependency, and so forth are expressed through sharing". Recent developments have shown that this was an accurate omen. According to Belk (2010), the Internet has "ushered in a new era of sharing". Joe Gebbia, co-founder of Airbnb, recognized three phases of the development of the Internet: first, in the 90's, companies were trying to bring people online; then, people started connecting online and social networks started to grow; now, people are using the force of the Internet to act in the real world (Mainieri, 2013:33). The Internet has empowered people and evolved sharing, making it one of the most relevant dynamics of our time. Nowadays, the sharing economy represents an actual, debated, and praised — as well as criticized — concept and movement, that surely deserves accurate attention, if not for the number of sectors that it has influenced. In 2009, Levine defined *sharing* on the New York Times as being "what an iPod is to and eight-track, what the solar panel is to the coal mine. [It] is clean, crisp, urban, postmodern; owning is dull, selfish, timid, backward". Sharing has become the nemesis of ownership, considered, until recently, the smartest and cheapest form of consumption, which for a long time had been recognized as a provider of personal security and independence and a way of accumulating capital (Snare, 1972). In 1988, Belk wrote: "you are what you own"; in 2013, he corrected himself to "you are what you can access".

Sharing within a family, with varying degrees, seems a taught behavior in the contemporary Western world, and the household seems where the greatest amount of sharing takes place (Price, 1975; Belk, 2010). Belk talks about extended self, when the action of sharing goes beyond the boundaries of the immediate family. In this case, according to him, two types of behavior can be observed: *sharing in* and *sharing out*. The latter results in a

quite impersonal form of sharing, dividing a resource among discrete economic interests; the former implies expanding the sphere of extended self beyond the boundaries of the family. It is this type of behavior that results more interesting and has the greatest social and theoretical implications. In less than ten years, *sharing in* has started to manifest its potential, in the form of many peer-to-peer platforms. From pictures on Flickr, to ideas and information on Twitter and Facebook, and videos on Youtube.

Belk (2013, 2014a, 2014b) further analyzed sharing in its pure meaning, against what he calls "pseudo sharing". First of all, he defined this construct vis à vis the concepts of gift giving and commodity exchange; going beyond the highly influential theories of Marcel Mauss on the gift (1925), he claimed that gifts can have an agonistic and selfish ambivalence, that resembles market transactions. Sharing, on the other hand, is non-reciprocal, does not entail transfer of ownership, and it is money irrelevant. Belk acknowledged the presence of an emerging economy, which has commonalities with the concept of sharing analyzed by him in his previous work; he unveiled practices that are related to sharing, but do not involve true sharing, creating semantic confusion in the use of this term. What is noticed is an intrusion of "market exchange ethos", which creates forms of pseudo-sharing, a business relationship masquerading as communal sharing. Under this label he placed long-term renting and leasing, short-term rental, online sites "sharing" data and online facilitated barter economies. On the contrary, he considers true sharing intentional online sharing of ephemera, online-facilitated offline sharing, peer-to-peer online sharing, online-facilitated hospitality. Also John (2013) noticed how sharing acquires different meanings over the Internet: a form of sociability, as well as a form of economic activity or a basic building block of intimate relationships. In all of these cases, though, there is at the base a communal set of values, namely equality, mutuality, honesty, openness, empathy, and ethic of care (Botsman, 2010; Mainieri, 2013; John, 2013).

Nowadays, there is a wide variety of terms gravitating around the concept of sharing

economy and people sharing within their communities[1]. A common definition is still lacking in the academic world (European Commission - Business Innovation Observatory, 2013), although in 2015 the term has been inserted into the Oxford English Dictionary; it is defined as "an economic system in which assets or services are shared between private individuals, either for free or for a fee, typically by means of the Internet".

In the realm of traditional business models, consumer paying for temporary access-rights to products already existed. This concept evolved due to technological advancement and the translation of this paradigm to a system where platforms are facilitating access for consumers to consumers owned properties or skills; this can be defined accessibility based business models for peer-to-peer markets (European Commission - Business Innovation Observatory, 2013; Belk, 2014b), a subset of the above-defined access-based consumption. At the base of this model are, on one hand, consumers owning a certain resource, on the other, consumers in need of that resource. The platform is the medium that facilitates the match at the right time.

Within the broader domain of access-based consumption, there are a number of other terms that are often improperly used. They are defined below, using Rachel Botsman's categorization (2015):

- Collaborative Economy: an economic system of decentralized networks and marketplaces that unlock the value of underused assets by matching needs and haves, in ways that bypass traditional middlemen. Examples are: Etsy, Kickstarter, Transferwise and Taskrabbit.

- Sharing Economy: an economic system based on sharing underused assets or ser-

[1] "Collaborative consumption" (Botsman, 2010), "the mesh" (Gansky, 2010), "commercial sharing system" (Lamberton and Rose, 2012), "co-production" (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008), "co-creation" (Lanier and Schau, 2007; Prahalad and Ramaswamy,2004), "prosumption" Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), "product-service systems" (Mont, 2002), "access-based consumption" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), "consumer participation" (Fitzsimmons 1985), and "online volunteering" (Postigo, 2003).

vices, for free or for a fee, directly from individuals. Examples are: Airbnb, BlaBlaCar, RelayRides.

- Collaborative Consumption: the reinvention of traditional market behaviors — renting, lending, swapping, sharing, bartering, gifting — through technology. Examples are: Zopa, Zipcar, Freecycle, eBay.

- On-demand service: platforms that directly match customer needs with providers to immediately deliver goods and services. Examples are: Uber, Shuttlecook, Instacart.

For the purposes of this work, the terms that will be used are sharing economy and collaborative consumption, that will be utilized interchangeably.
Rachel Botsman, in her book "What's mine is y*ours*", outlines the benefits of the possibility of accessing goods and services instead of owning them. Citing Leadbeater, Botsman states that we have moved from a twentieth century where people were defined by what they owned, to a twenty-first century that will define us by reputation, community, by what we can access and how we share and what we give away. This movement, according to Botsman has some antecedents as well as some important consequences. The collaborative economy has for sure gained momentum from the hit of the financial crisis, from the development of Web 2.0, and from increasing trust in online payments; but these are not the only causes: the growing awareness of people over environmental concerns and idle assets, and cost consciousness, along with a renewed belief on the importance of community, have played their part. Consumerism and the idea that consumption can be unlimited have been put into discussion by the growing perception of what can be our impact on both the planet and on our social relations. What was once seen as progress, is now perceived as future damage.
The core points of these activities are the shifting power from big, centralized institutions to distributed networks of individuals and communities, and the new way of thinking about asset utilization through exploitation of their idling capacity. In the background is

the shift in the paradigm of our existence: technological innovation, changing values, new economics realities, and environmental pressures.

The concepts of sharing economy and collaborative consumption have penetrated many sectors of the economy, from mobility to agriculture, from money lending to tourism. The trend has seen immense growth in recent years, largely due to the increases in internet-accessibility, online social networking, mobile technology, location-based services, and penny-pinching (CrowdCompanies, 2014). Value exchange has been re-thought. The figure below (Figure 2.1) is a representation of the various expression of the sharing economy today. It is designed as a honeycomb, because, similarly to these natural structures that are 'resilient and enable many individual to access, share, and grow resources among a common group" (ibid.), also within this environment people get what they need from their community. Each hexagon stands for a 'family', a category of something that can be shared among people (e.g. knowledge, space, transportation).

Some negative points are, nevertheless, encountered. The main sore spots concern trust towards strangers, as well as the guarantee of minimum safety and quality standards. Systems of rating and other solution are put in place by platforms and communities to try to overcome these problems.

The question that many are now asking is: will this become a viable mainstream alternative to traditional providers, or will it languish as niche markets? Although this issue will not be treated here, it will be interesting to see which answers future research will provide, especially in terms of impact on the 'traditional way' of doing business.

2.1.1 The Sharing Economy in the Tourism Sector

Saarinen (2004) writes that "tourism and tourists have become increasingly a characteristic feature of contemporary societies and global markets, and the economic significance of tourism and the fact that tourism is developing fast mean that new destinations, attrac-

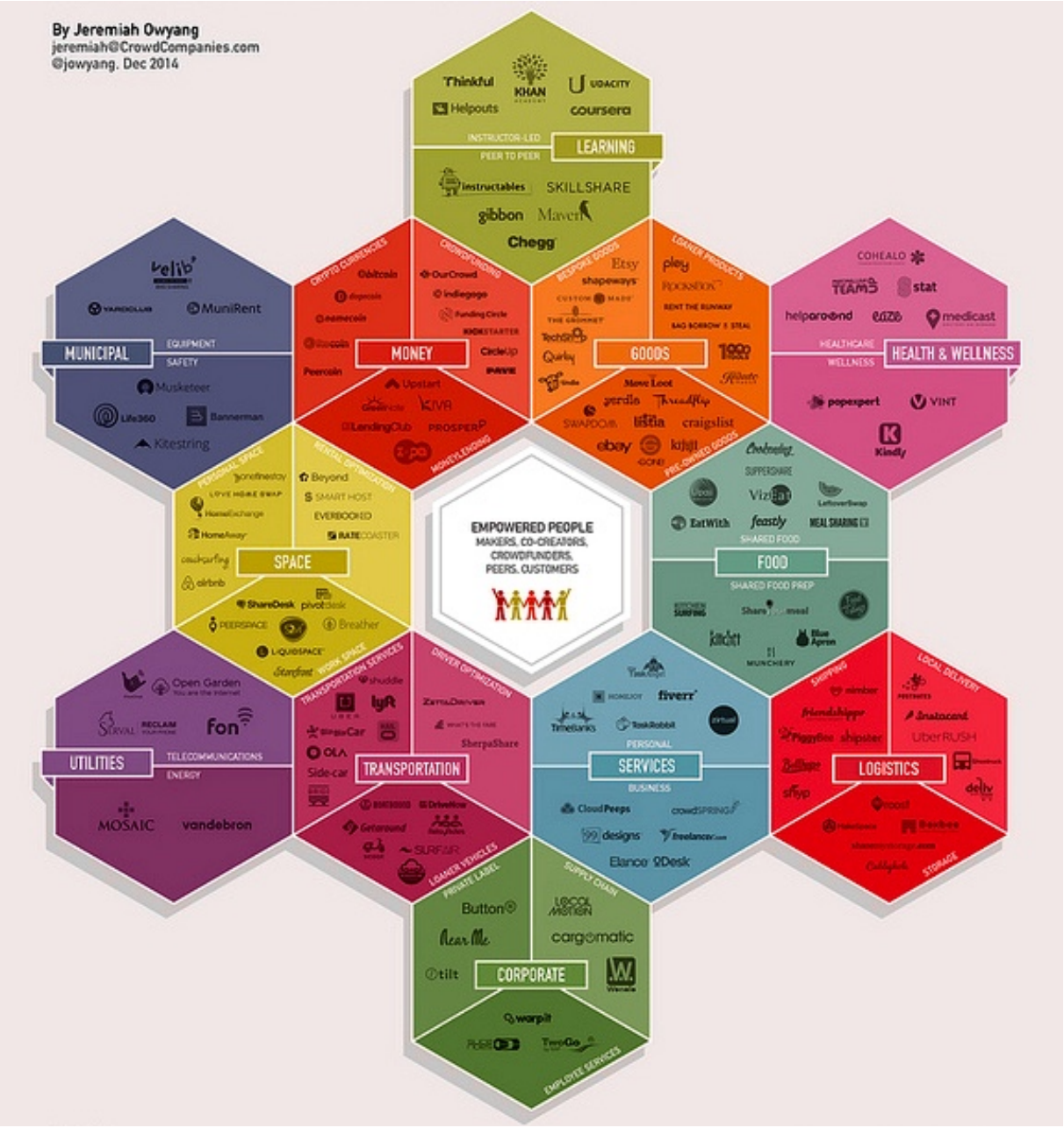

Figure 2.1: Collaborative Economy Honeycomb - Version 2.0

tions and facilities are constantly evolving". Tourism is one the world's most important economic activities. It represents 9% of the world's GDP, and 1 in 11 jobs belongs to this sector. From 1950, the number of international tourists has increased from 25 million to 1133 million in 2014, and is forecasted to keep growing at a rate of 3–4% (UNWTO, 2015). Moreover, the last quarter century has been marked by a series of dramatic historical events, major technological innovations and far reaching social and cultural changes in both Western and non-Western parts of the world. If tourism was a modern Western cultural project (Cohen, 2008), it has now expanded throughout the planet, reaching 6% of total exports. China is nowadays the world's top tourism source market, and according to UNWTO, prospects for 2015 are strongest for Asia and the Pacific, along with the Americas, both with +4% to +5%. Changes have been felt also in demand patterns, with an increase of a "wait-and-see" attitude, with a tendency to last minute booking, increased sensitivity to price and more "do-it-yourself" travel (due to the influence of the Internet and low-cost airlines), wider offer of accommodation other than the traditional ones, less loyalty to destinations, more and shorter travels, rise of new forms of tourism versus the traditional tourism. Among these new way of traveling, the sharing economy is undoubtedly having an important impact. In the tourism sector we can find examples of companies and platforms that are having major success in the implementation of these kind of business models. All aspects of tourism are affected by this wave: accommodation, transport and in-destination activities (Euromonitor International, 2014). For the purposes of this thesis, the focus will be on the accommodation segment.

Along with the concept of sharing, accommodation sharing and hospitality to travelers have always existed. People's motivation to travel may have changed, but the need to rest, eat and come in contact with locals has remained.

Accommodation sharing is a topic that lately has received a lot of attention from popular press and blogs, but little has been written in the academic literature. Although very few studies have been conducted on the impact of alternative forms of accommodation on

traditional ones, numbers talk about an increasing awareness in the possibility of other choice of accommodation and changing motives for traveling. The market is moving towards a change in consumer hospitality preferences and behaviors (Williams, 2006; Cohen et al., 2013). This type of accommodation targets a type of traveller that contrasts with the old stereotype of the ignorant tourist that just snaps pictures and leaves (Cohen, 2008; Skift Report 7, 2013). Now people want to experience the local and make connections with other people.

The factors that propel sharing economy opportunities in tourism are the same that have led this type of consumption in other sectors:

- a social driver — the need to make real connections and the search for a unique and more local experience, along with a growing environmental and social awareness;
- an economic driver — the search for convenience and lower prices;
- a technological driver — mobile technology, social media, and online payment systems make it possible to match supply and demand among a much wider network, and with a reasonable level of trust.

Moreover, another defining element is the increasing presence of generation Y — those born between 1980 and 2000 — leading the way, although now that the market is maturing, diverse consumer population is embracing the concept (Euromonitor International, 2014). Nevertheless, millennials still put more trust in this type of arrangements compared to older consumers and tend to give more importance to the experience in itself rather than things (Horowitz, 2014). 60% of people aged 18–34 have expressed their trust in the sharing economy, compared to 37% of all other travelers (Travel Agent, 2015). The hospitality sharing economy is appealing because it offers better pricing, more unique experiences and more choice, although security, hygiene, and uncertain quality still pose big concerns. Legislative hurdles need also to be overcome: in many cities taxation over

renting rooms and apartments is a hot topic[2]. Other cities, like Amsterdam, have already legislated on this matter[3].

Ideas are still turmoiling: some academics are trying to give an answer to this, taking into consideration especially the economic benefits caused by the sharing economy that these measures might hinder, and also the important changes that it is bringing to consumer behavior (Sundararajan, 2014; Kaplan and Nadler, 2015; Miller, forthcoming; Assolombarda, 2015); but not everybody believes in the "good" of the sharing economy revolution.

Nowadays, there is a multitude of collaborative consumption services active in the hospitality system, each with its own value proposition. Some may be more aimed at renting out underused spaces, others at sharing time, experience and knowledge with other people. Airbnb is the most notorious and successful example: a company reportedly valued at $13 billion, more than mature players in the hospitality industry, such as Hyatt or Wyndham Worldwide; in 2014, the company booked stays for 20 million travelers, operating with about 1,500 employees in 20 cities worldwide (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015). In the table below (Table 2.1), the main players in this sector of the sharing economy are presented.

One of the main question that is posed nowadays is, will it become a serious threat for the hotel industry? By now there are very few answers. Zervas, Proserpio and Byers (2015b), in their study on the impact of Airbnb on hospitality in the Austin area, found out that the most affected categories are the lower-priced hotels and hotels not catering to business travel. The Economist (2014) also asserts that budget hotels are the ones that are facing the biggest threats right now. A contrasting voice is that of Bill Carroll, from

[2]http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/jul/08/airbnb-legal-troubles-what-are-the-issues. Accessed on Sept. 9th, 2015.

[3]http://www.iamsterdam.com/en/media-centre/city-hall/press-releases/2014-press-room/amsterdam-airbnb-agreement. Accessed on Sept. 9th, 2015.

Company	Concept	Key Facts
Airbnb	Peer-to-peer lodge rental platform	Listings in 190 countries, more than 20 million stays booked
Couchsurfing	Hospitality exchange and social networking website	Hospitality is given for free, but an annual fee is due to have access to services; it has 7 million active users
Homeaway	Vacation rental platform	1 million listings in 192 countries
HouseTrip	Peer-to-peer house or apartment rentals	300,000 properties in 6 continents
9Flats	Peer-to-peer property rental for private accommodation	130,000 listings in 109 countries
Wimdu	Peer-to-peer apartment or room rentals	300,000 properties in 100 countries
Onefinestay	Luxury peer-to-peer rentals	Operating in London, New York, Paris and Los Angeles only
Roomerama	Peer-to-peer short-term rentals, no cost to host	120,000 properties, 80% business travelers
Sleepout	Peer-to-peer holiday rentals	Operating in 425 cities in 53 countries
Holidayletting	Holiday home rentals	140,000 properties in 150 countries

Table 2.1: Sharing economy main players in the hospitality sector (adapted from *Travel and Tourism: Travel and the Sharing Economy* - Euromonitor International).

the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University; he states that "Airbnb is not a lodging brand, it's a virtual marketplace, like eBay. It's always going to be a niche, constrained by how many people want to stay in an Airbnb kind of experience". On the same page are big hotel chains. They are convinced that what they offer is different from Airbnb and do not see any actual threat coming from it (Carr, 2014).

2.2 The Experience in the Tourism Sector

In their article from 1998, Pine and Gilmore illustrated how economic value has progressed, arguing that today's competitive battleground for leading-edge companies lies in the ability of being able to stage experiences over the delivery of goods and services, which have become commoditized. The competitive setting is today made up of industries with increasingly blurring boundaries, continuously combined in new ways, and consumers that are more active, informed and connected, thanks to the rampant digitalization (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). Pine and Gilmore write that "an experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as a stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences *memorable*". The difference with commodities, goods and services is that, while the latter are external to the consumer, experiences are personal and unique for each person, who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. New technologies are having major impact on this kind of economy, giving the chance to customize and make each experience more real; critical is the way in which they are used: a key success factor in the innovation of experience is the ability to imagine and combine technological capabilities to facilitate experiences.

Experiences imply that consumers are not only rational, as in an utilitarian perspective, but they are also emotional, with consumption involving "a steady flow of fantasies, feelings and fun"; consumption is thus seen as a "primary state of consciousness with

a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria" (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The experience has to be worth the price, implying that each piece of it has to be designed so that it engages the consumers deeply: design, marketing, delivery.

Tourism has been one of the first sectors where the need to offer experiences to consumers was raised (Quan and Wang, 2004). Destinations cannot compete only with their amenities and facilities, risking to commodify their offer and to lose competitiveness, but also need to create differentiating experiences (Legiewsky and Zekan, 2006).
One things to bear in mind when thinking about experiences in tourism, is how profoundly the way people travel has changed: motivations, modes and means. Therefore what the tourist wants and can experience has been transformed as well. From a sociological point of view, Uriely (2005) analyzed how the concept of experience has evolved from the 1960's until today. The transition from modernity to the post-modern thought, has brought profound changes in term of differentiation between the touristic experience and the everyday; if once normative, aesthetic and institutional spheres were differentiated, now this distinctiveness is blurring. Munt (1994) argues that "tourism is everything and everything is tourism". If once, the type of tourists were generalized in broad categories (Boorstin, 1964; MacCannell, 1973), the experience is now pluralized, as each tourist may seek a different kind of experience with different motivations. This all leads to an interpretation of current tourism that is relative; contrary to modern theories that tried to conceptualize tourism in absolute truths, everything is now characterized by compromising statements. Theorizations have moved from grand theories to the diversity and richness of life. With the diminishing difference between everyday life and tourist experience, Urry (1994) declared "the end of tourism". Experiences that were once confined to the realm of tourism, are now accessible in various contexts of everyday life: "People are tourists most of the time, whether they are literally mobile, or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images" (ibid., p.

259). Nevertheless, tourism continues to expand. In a globalized world, where there seems to be no trace of anything new to be discovered, the number of travelers is increasing. Still, the problem of offering something different and new is threatened by the availability of tourist experiences in the routine of everyday life and by globalization. How to make future demand increase? One of the major risks nowadays, apart from commodization, is the so-called McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993). Many location and businesses, in a quest for trying to be unique and innovative, end up copying successful examples, therefore creating environments and experiences that can be already found in many other locations and are not true to the essence of the place (Richards and Wilson, 2006). There is a need to offer more active and longer lasting experiences, which are created together in the everyday by institutions, locals, culture and tourists. There is a need to focus on consumption as an holistic experience, involving all the senses, and consider consumers as rational and emotional animals (Schmitt, 1999).

2.2.1 The Meaning of Authenticity in the Touristic Experience

The quest for the authentic experience is considered one of the key trends in tourism (MacCannell, 1999). The concept of authenticity in tourism was introduced in tourism studies by MacCannell in the 1970's. Since then, many scholars have attempted to clarify the construct, with diverging results and no absolute definition, making it a problematic and insufficiently explored concept (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010).

The formulation of the concept of authenticity initiated under the vast umbrella of modernity and was later influenced by the rise of post-modernity. The theorization of the concept of authenticity seemed to lose its importance in the sociological academic field towards the turn of the twenty-first century. Studies moved away from this kind of problematization, due to post-modern influences, the rise of non-Western tourism, and changing motivations in why people travel. According to some scholars, authenticity vanished under the denial

of the existence of "originals" in the contemporary world (Baudrillard, 1994) and the mere search of fun and enjoyment (Ritzer and Liska, 1997). According to others, authenticity is a social construct that evolves over time (Hughes, 1995; Taylor, 2001) and it changes along with cultures, closely related to an individual own experiences and interpretations; this can co-exist with the idea of post-modernity. This construct has gained relevance also in other fields, where it keeps igniting ideas and elaborations of the concept.

Wang (1999), in analyzing the concept of authenticity in tourism, starts from the definition given by Trilling; its original usage is connected to museums, "where persons expert in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them—or, if this had already been paid, worth the admiration they are been given (1972:93)". Moreover, Wang reports that Trilling notices how this use has been extended to refer to human existence and to "the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existence (1972:93)". This analysis provided by Trilling gives us the possibility to understand that when referring to the touristic experience, we can recognize two aspects: the authenticity of the *experience* and the authenticity of the *toured objects*.

Investigation on authenticity started out as a consequence of the idea that modern life has an alienating effect on people's existence; therefore, through tourism, travelers seek something that might be defined *authentic* and can bring them away from their corrupted lives (MacCannell, 1973). But the more experiences are staged in order to meet travelers' desires ("staged authenticity"), the less they are real, excluding authenticity from the experience itself. Boorstin (1964) criticized mass tourism versus the heroic travels of the past, stating that people are now looking only for contrived experiences and are easily satisfied with what he called "pseudo-events".

MacCannell used Goffman's (1959) division of *front* and *back* to describe what is made available to the touristic public: the meeting place of customers/guests and service persons/ hosts, versus the place where the home team retires between performances. What

becomes appealing to the tourist in search of the 'real thing' is the back. Being admitted to the back region means intimacy and closeness, being included into hosts' social relations and see life as it really is. But, when access is permitted to tourists, the back region loses its own sense of being and becomes a touristic space itself. According to MacCannell, the tourist thinks to be accessing a back region, when in fact she is actually accessing a staged front region. In this sense, front and back regions do not exist as ideal poles of a touristic experience.

Cohen (1979; 1988) moved a critique towards the first sociological studies in tourism, stating that until that moment the tourist had been portrayed as a "superficial nitwit, easy to please as well as easy to cheat". First of all, he claimed that the tourist cannot be categorized in big groups; rather, different type of tourism can be differentiated. Second, he sees MacCannell portraying an alienated modern tourist looking for "the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is yet untouched by modernity. He hopes to find it in other times and other places (MacCannell, 1976:160), since it is absent from its own world". What he claims is, that authenticity is not objective, but can be conceived in different terms. He suggests that authenticity is a socially constructed concept and its social connotation is not given, but negotiable. Also, tourists are able to perceive settings as differing in their authenticity.

After these first theorizations, the construct started to split up in different sub-discourses. Wang (1999) tried to compile a first conceptual clarification of the term, analyzing three different type of authenticity, which had emerged from the previous different approaches to the matter. Namely, these are: objective authenticity, constructive or symbolic authenticity, and existential authenticity. The main dispute has been on whether authenticity can be an objectively identifiable property of objects and culture or a subjective, socially and individually constructed perception of them. Hereafter, a brief sum up of the three conceptualization of the construct.

- Objective authenticity: it is object related and it refers to the authenticity of origi-

nals; therefore, authentic experiences in tourism are equated to an epistemological experience of the authenticity of the originals. It is a museum-linked conception of authenticity.

- Symbolic authenticity: it is also object related; it refers to the authenticity projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc. There are various versions of authenticity regarding the same objects. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism and the authenticity of tour objects are constitutive of one another. There is, therefore, no absolute and static original or origin on which the absolute authenticity of originals relies. Authenticity and inauthenticity are a result of one's own perspectives and interpretations and is context-bound.

- Existential authenticity: it is activity related; it refers to a potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism are to achieve this activated this existential state of Being within the liminal process of tourism. Existential authenticity can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects. This conceptualization stems as an offspring of the post-modern thought, where in-authenticity is not a problem, since it is claimed that we live in a world of simulation, with no originals. The tourist is not looking for authenticity in toured objects, but rather in a existential state of Being activated by certain tourist activities.

The impact of post-modern thought, the ubiquity of the usage of the concept of authenticity and the increasingly shared idea that authenticity is a perception of each individual and it is continuously socially constructed, have brought important modification on the use of the above presented classification. Steiner and Reisinger (2006a) have been critical about the concept of objective authenticity, claiming that this concept no longer has a place in tourism research, because of the impossibility of arriving at a consensual under-

standing of the construct, as it is not possible to "reconcile a determining, fixed, objective reality with socially or personally constructed multiple realities". They claim that if there is no communal definition, there is no solid base to carry on research on it. With the contribution of Kim and Jamal (2007), the notion of existential authenticity is upgraded, since also hedonic and pleasure-seeking touristic activities seem to create environments for meaning-making, putting together the concepts of authenticity and post-modernism, which seemed antithetical. According to Steiner and Reisinger (2006b), existential authenticity goes beyond tourist research, as it is a product of a long philosophical tradition concerned with "what it means to be human, what it means to be happy, and what it means to be oneself", referencing — among others — Hegel, Heidegger, Rousseau and Sartre. They continue by stating that meaning is created through experiencing, instead of just living off of interpreting the world through institutionalized concepts. Only one's own experience yields the truth. They quote Kirkegaard stating that "being in touch with one's inner self, knowing one's self, having a sense of one's own identity and then living in accord with one's sense of one's self is being authentic". Authenticity is about free choices, not about maintaining traditions or being true to some past concept of individual, social or cultural identity.

From a more pragmatic and less philosophical point of view, Jamal and Hill (2004) argued that authenticity is a fluid and flexible concept, therefore it is better to try to understand its various dimension and aspects, rather than considering it into discrete categories. What is missing in the study of authenticity is an holistic approach and the inclusion of various factors into the equation (Andriotis, 2011).

Consumers place value in the authentic (Carroll, 2014; Lin and Wang, 2012). In tourism, value is conferred on the place through past and present activities, memories, knowledge and sociocultural relationships that occur in relation to time and space. The personal dimension takes up an important role, as meaning about touristic spaces lie in the "eye of the beholder" (Lanfant, 1995:36). Most scholars agree that authenticity is not an attribute

Authenticity		
Object Related		*Activity Related*
Objective Approach	**Constructive Approach**	**Experiential Approach**
It refers to the authenticity of the originals. Correspondingly, authentic experiences are equated to an epistemological experience of the authenticity of originals. Authors: Boorstin (1964), MacCannell (1973)	It refers to the authenticity projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers in term of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc. Authenticity is socially constructed. Authors: Cohen (1988), Beverland and Farrelly (2010)	It refers to a potential existential state of Being, that is to be activated by tourist activities. It is not related to the authenticity of toured objects. Authors: Jamal and Hill (2004), Resinger and Steiner (2006), Kim and Jamal (2007), Grayson and Martinec (2004),

Table 2.2: Conceptualizations of authenticity, a few landmarks. (Adapted from Wang, 1999)

inherent in an object and it is better understood by considering individual evaluations of particular contexts (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). All that is objective in the destination space, takes meaning in relation to the person and its activities of sense-making and identity-building, constituting the 'lived experience' (Jamal and Hill, 2004). Beverland and Farrelly (2010) claimed that process of authenticating an object or an experience is contingent on consumers' goals, as they actively seek authenticity to find meaning to their lives. In this concept also staged authenticity, does not mean superficiality (Chhabra et al., 2003), because it is controlled by people themselves.

Authenticity has an important role in determining a traveler's satisfaction (Moscardo and Pearce, 1986; Derbaix and Derbaix, 2010), as well as loyalty (Casteran and Roederer, 2013; Dickinson,2011; Kolar and Zabkar, 2010). Authenticity is becoming a critical consumer sensibility (Pine and Gilmore, 2008). Due to the loss of landmarks in the post-modern era, people are trying to give meaning to their lives through the search of authenticity in consumption (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Gilmore and Pine, 2007). Authenticity can be thought as a tourist driver; tourists judge authenticity through emotional experiences, making the post-modern tourist an affective-driven, experience-seeking hedonist (Jensen and Lindberg, 2001). Therefore a tourist can be said to travel in search of authenticity, that he can find according to her own interpretation of the experience and of the world.

2.2.2 Mobilities and Networks

The mobilities paradigm is one of the most important constructs of the last decade. It is a natural consequence of the increasing movement of people and goods throughout the world, "a diverse mobility of peoples, objects, images, informations, and waste" (Urry, 2000:186). The mobilities concept is vast and complex and it is deemed relevant in a variety of fields, including tourism. The latter is only a subset of a broader list of

movements, that include migration, transnationalism, diasporas, and other obligatory as well as voluntary form of travel (ibid), but at the same time is a fundamental part of wider processes of economics and political development, as well as a integral part of everyday life (Edensor, 2007; Franklin and Crang, 2001). Tourism is no longer a specialist consumer product or mode of consumption: it has become a significant modality through which transnational modern life is organized (Franklin and Crang, 2001). The tourist role as it was conceived for centuries, makes no sense anymore (Olsen, 2002). There has been an evolution in the theorization of how people consume places during the experiences. If Urry (1990) claimed the visual nature of tourists' consumptions, much of the recent research has turned towards the performativity and embodiment of the experience (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994); the attention is dislocated from symbolic meanings and discourses, to embodied, collaborative and technological doings and enactments (Edensor, 2000, 2001; Haldrup and Larsen, 2010), emphasizing the quotidian nature of tourists' performances. Emotion and cognition acquire equal importance in the consumption of places.
The concept of mobilities gives the possibilities to understand at the same time both large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information, and more local processes linked to everyday life. Therefore, the mundane is not only routine made of robotic and rigid praxis, but it is full of other potentialities: it is "fluid, ambivalent and labile" (Gardiner, 2000:6). Tourism "provides an occasion for coming across and meeting with dimensions of cultural difference, engaging in dialogue and negotiation over meaning, confronting the habits and forms of unquestioned common sense which are taken for granted" (Edensor, 2007). Globalization and post-modernism, therefore, do not mean homogenization of habits and traditions and loss of the extraordinary, but the possibility to enlarge networks and opportunities through the fusion of exotic and mundane, and the search of new type of experiences on various levels.

Communication and IT are key to the mobile society. Technology in tourism is not only information consumption, but also networking (Bødker and Browning, 2012). In tourism,

for many, they are becoming a fundamental part of the travel experience: mobile devices are used on journeys, "fluidly switching between mediated and corporeal co-presence with distant social networks" (Hannam et al., 2014), also to facilitate new opportunities of collaboration and interactive travel (Germann Molz, 2011). In each phase, traveling is both actual and virtual (Edensor, 2007).

Cohen and Cohen (2012) briefly summarized which are the most important dichotomies in tourism that have been put under scrutiny by the concept of mobilities. What once seemed a staple and a fixed dualism, has now lost its rigid significance:

- Blurring boundaries: conventional boundaries between distinct domains are weakening — work and leisure, study and entertainment, ordinary life and extraordinary holidays, reality and fantasy.

- Home/Away: contemporary communication technologies enables tourists to feel at home while simultaneously being away. Moreover, increasing labor mobility, diasporas and new forms of nomadism increase the convergence of these two concepts, with people that are the same time "touring away and towards home".

- Daily life/Tourism: the ambience of touristic situation is losing its extraordinariness, as tourism is becoming more part of everyday life and is less bounded to specific sites and periods; tourism is not antithetical to the everyday (Edensor, 2007), it permeates the everyday life, what Lash (1990) calls de-differentiation. Edensor (2007) and Larsen (2008) talk of de-exoticization of tourism.

- Hosts/Guests: defined as the "cornerstone social relationship of any tourist system", it has lost its meaning as the two roles are blending together; a common example is outsiders engaging in tourism businesses, or hosts being guests in little developed destinations.

- Domestic/International: this trend — the progressive creation of an unbounded

concept of society — has been re-dimensioned after the happenings of 9/11 and the increasing securization of borders against terrorism and illegal immigration. This underlines the fact that mobility is neither seamless, nor it is equally distributed across societies (Gogia, 2006), but it is a function of power.

In a world characterized by time and space compression (Harvey, 1989), networks have been expanding. People can travel to and connect with other people faster, more conveniently, and cheaply than before; moreover, membership to different social groups are spatially dispersed and do not overlap with others (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Larsen et al. (2007) claim that tourism is now concerned with reproduction of social networks. Therefore, tourism shows and increasing reliance on "connections with, rather than escape from social relations" (ibid.). If once tourism and everyday life were thought to belong to different ontological worlds, the exotic and the mundane, now it is clear that life permeates touristic consumption (Larsen, 2008). Larsen calls for the need to de-exoticize tourism, since it is a set of social and material relations, which are part of the "everydayness".

Sociabilities and Place-Making

One important aspect in the tourism experience is the significance of sociality and social networks. Larsen (2008) notices how this aspect has not been widely discussed in the literature. Human are social beings and the most of what they do takes place in close proximity with other people. Modern cities and technologies create new experiences of proximity, also due to cultures of movement and mobility. Simmel (1950) defines sociabilities as "'pure interaction' between, in theory, equal participant who come together for the sole purpose of enjoying each other's company". This gives the possibility of inserting the significant other into the frame of the tourism experience, going beyond the mere consumption of a destination. According to (Bialski, 2012), host-guest interactions

can be conceived as a form of sociability. Tourists, when travelling, are exposed to the unfamiliar, and association is therefore an integral part of giving meaning to the travel experience (White and White, 2008). They engage in the 'micro-level production' of their experiences (Moore, 2002:53).

Tourists always exist in a constant, processual interaction with the environment in its broadest sense. Tourism is relational and entails the development of social networks and their obligations, enhanced by technologies and tools such as emails, mobile phones, websites, apps, and access to means of transportation. Therefore, tourists are not only passive consumers, but producers of social relations (Larsen et al., 2007).

The networks that are created between tourists and locals are not relationship that entail community as belonging and being, but rather a constant becoming of social relations that are ephemeral but intense and are characterized by fast cycles of integration and disintegration. These are "new form of tourist realities that bridge the senses of belonging and the senses of displacement and mobility" (Urry, 2000).

A tourist continuously *makes* places through interactions with locals and the environment. This contrasts the view of Urry (1990) of tourists consuming a place only through the gaze, and gives credit to the fact that experiences are based on multisensoriality and networks. Bødker and Browning (2012) discuss how interactions between locals and tourists are an essential part of place-making. There is no dichotomy between construction and consumption of places (Rakič and Chambers, 2012).

Being in contact with a local can give access to 'authentic' practices that a tourist can consume. Larsen et al. (2007) argue that tourists' place-making is driven by interactions with the locals and is done through the mechanism of networking. Becoming a 'local' can be defined as a touristic experience: many offerings made to tourists make this claim, promising authentic experiences and insights. Relationship with people within tourist settings can help tourists achieve an authentic experience (Moscardo and Pearce, 1986).

A place is not prescriptive, but socially negotiated, contested, and dynamic. (Rakić and Chambers, 2012; Bødker and Browning, 2013; Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Urry's (1990) notorious conceptualization of the *tourist gaze*, for years influenced the idea of how tourists consume places. With the 'performative turn' in tourism studies (Edensor, 2000, 2001; Haldrup and Larsen, 2010), this view has since then shown its shortcomings. Tourism consumption is considered to be multisensorial, corporeal and active; the body is active in consumption and creation of subjective meanings and experiences (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994).

Rakić and Chambers (2012) underlined the difference between *space* and *place*. *Space* in many academic publications tends to be considered as a realm without meaning and "fact of life", that, with time, produces the co-ordinates of human life. On the other hand, spaces become *places* when they acquire definition and meaning through human action (Cresswell, 2004). Moreover, the meanings produced are individually experienced and understood by individuals. Therefore, tourist performances have an impact on the production of places, making tourists co-producers of such places through their own experiences. Contrary to what Cohen (2008) writes, *placeness* is not diminishing under the impact of globalizing forces; in fact, the continuous interaction of people in spaces keeps constantly creating new places which in their novelty do not lose their attractiveness.

As cited above, an important role in sociability is played by technology, especially in the case of network hospitalities (Ikkala and Lampinen, 2015) and of place consumption through locals (Bødker and Browning, 2012). The social interaction and the exchange of accommodation that occur via hospitality-exchange services have been referred to as *network hospitality* (Germann Molz, 2013). Prior research has highlighted that social encounters are an important motivation in participating in these form of hospitality exchange (White and White, 2008). The concept of network hospitality has its roots in Wittel's network sociality (Wittel, 2001); it refers to contemporary forms of association and social interaction that consist of and are formed around networks of various kinds

instead of stable communities. This makes us understand the modern relationship between hospitality and technology and how strangers encounter one another in a mobile and networked society (Germann Molz, 2011).

2.3 Consumer Behavior in Tourism

Consumer behavior (CB), or travel behavior, is one of the most researched area in the field of tourism (Cohen et al., 2013). It is concerned with 'all activities directly involved in obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services, including the decision processes that precede and follow these actions' (Engel et al., 1995:4), and, more pragmatically, with answering the question "Why do people travel?". In their review, Cohen et al. (2013) list the key concepts of tourism CB; they argue that too often theories and models have been borrowed from mainstream CB literature, without taking into consideration the multifaceted characteristics of tourism. The analysis requires to take into consideration processes internal and external to the individual, examining the complex interaction of many influencing elements on the decision-making process (Moutinho, 1986). Moreover, tourist behavior is constantly evolving, making emerge new meanings, making it more qualitative, more demanding and more varied. Decision making in tourism CB is very complex, due to the unique context in which decisions are made and the multiple elements that need to be defined within a journey, taking also into account other consumption decisions that take place dependently. It is argued that tourists use consumption to make statements about themselves, to create identities and a sense of belonging (Williams, 2006). The experiential view of consumer behavior (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) can be adopted in the tourism sector. It goes beyond the utilitarian perspective of consumption, where the consumer purchases, uses and disposes a product, with no ambience and context or emotions taken into consideration. On the contrary, touristic consumption involves a steady flow of fantasies, feelings and fun and it acquires a variety of symbolic

meanings, hedonic responses and esthetic criteria.

The tourist buying decision is also characterized by other defining elements: traveling is an investment with no tangible rate of return and the purchase is planned and made utilizing savings that have been piled up over a considerable amount of time. Therefore, a tourist is purchasing an intangible satisfaction (Moutinho, 1986). Needs and motivations are what activate the process of consuming tourism. The behavior is influenced by the consumer's perception of alternatives, taking into account psychological influences, learning experiences, attitudes, beliefs, personality and self-image, along with cultural and social influences. The main external influences listed by Cohen et al. (2013) in the field of consumer behavior in tourism are: technology, which is having a major impact in all the stages of the consumption process; the shift in generational dominance from Baby Boomers and Generation X to Generation Y, both in the workforce and in the primary source of visitors for some destinations and tourism attractions; the increasing attention to ethics in the touristic consumption.

Particular attention in the consumer behavior needs to be paid towards the increasing role of tourists as prosumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). Consumer and firms are increasingly collaborating for value co-creation, manufacturing goods and services.

2.3.1 Authenticity and Consumer Behavior in Tourism

Authenticity is becoming a critical consumer sensibility. When companies compete based on how sensational their staged experiences are, consumer decide to buy or not to buy based on how genuine they perceive the offering to be (Pine and Gilmore, 2008, 2014). Contemporary research sees authenticity playing a role in numerous domain of social life, including tourism (Carroll, 2014). Whereas vast attention has been given to the sociological aspects of authenticity, less research has been conducted within the realm of consumer behavior. Nevertheless, as already noted above, the importance of authenticity

from a competitive point of view, seems more important than ever. And this does not only concern the tourism industry, but all sectors in general, independently what type of goods, services or experiences are offered (Pine and Gilmore, 2014).

What Carroll (2014) asks is: is authenticity really important? Does it drive consumer behavior in unique ways? Consumers surely place value in the authentic (e.g.: Carroll, 2014; Derbaix and Derbaix, 2010; Dickinson, 2011). He notices that demonstration of how consumers convert perception of authenticity in higher value rating have been only a few so far: (i) Derbaix and Derbaix (2010), studying 'generational music concerts', found that perceived authenticity does have an impact on the perceived value of the concerts; (ii) Casteran and Roederer (2013), studying the Strasbourg Christmas markets, found out that people which perceive it as more authentic visit it more often; (iii) Kovacs, Carroll and Lehman (2015) analyzed how people assign higher ratings to a restaurant when they consider it authentic. Therefore, perceived authenticity is still a wide field that needs to be defined from a consumer behavior point of view.

Authenticity — as already seen in the conceptualization above — is a polymorphous concept that cannot be observed and quantified directly. This makes it difficult to clarify a relationship between it and a behavior a consumer may have as a consequence of its perception. The first person that tried to circumnavigate this problem, in order to be able to assess perceived authenticity in a market setting, was Camus (2004): in her article she constructed a scale which gives the possibility to measure authenticity in the food industry. She defines market perceived authenticity as a characteristic of a product which is connected to its origin, distinguished by the fact that it fills a deficiency in the consumer's life, and that it is reinforced when the product represents a part of the consumer's identity. The scale is defined by 12 items divided into three domains: origin, projection and singularity. Each of them is referred to as a factor determining market perceived authenticity. The origin of a product is deemed relevant since nowadays the sale of products on a big scale has homogenized, and made unrecognizable the difference at

the eyes of consumers. Anonymity creates a sense of in authenticity. Therefore, if people know the origin and the production chain of a product, they are more prone to consider it authentic. Also projection of the consumer herself is defined as a relevant factor in the determination of perceived authenticity; as Belk stated "we are what we own", therefore people's possessions and acquisitions define their way of life. The last factor is product singularity: in literature it is underlined how uniqueness is one of the major characteristics of authenticity in the strict sense of the term.

Through a series of qualitative and quantitative studies, Camus confirmed these three factors as determinants of market perceived authenticity and developed 12 items that make up the scale.

Chapter 3

Research Design

3.1 Research Question

The demand for authenticity — the honest or the real — is one of the most powerful movements in contemporary life, influencing our moral outlook, our political views and the consumer behavior (Potter, 2000:i). Authenticity has attracted interest in many areas, including tourism. In this sector in particular, authenticity is a construct difficult to conceptualize and operationalize, even if it has received a great deal of attention in the sociological field (e.g.: MacCannell 1973; Cohen, 1979; Wang, 1999), and is now of central interest for consumer researchers (e.g.: Casteran and Roederer, 2012; Kolar and Zabkar, 2010; Moscardo and Pearce, 1986; Pine and Gilmore, 2008). Many discourses have been developed on this topic, but still there is no communal definition of it. Authenticity can be fenced as a concept that encapsulate what is considered genuine, real, and/or true (Casteran and Roederer, 2013).

In today's world, the ability of staging experiences for consumers is key for staying competitive (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Tourism has been one of the first sectors where this need has been recognized (Quan and Wang, 2004). Staging experiences implies that

consumers are not only rational, but also emotional (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), and the consumption of place implies both emotion and cognition (Rakič and Chambers, 2012). Bearing in mind that the perception of authenticity stems also from the emotional and sensual perceptions of the traveler — not only from an objective observation — we can state that authenticity can play a relevant role in the perception and enjoyment of an experience (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006b). In the tourism industry, being able to grasp the concept of authenticity and apply it to consumers' experience seems of further importance in order to avoid problems of McDonaldization, of commodization, 'cookie cutter' solutions (Legiewsky and Zekan, 2006), and to be successful (Pine and Gilmore, 2014).

The touristic experience encompasses various activities, from sightseeing, to transportation, to eating and sleeping. Concerning the latter, the need for accommodation makes up a relevant part of the tourism experience (Eurostat-OECD, 2014). Along with the traditional possibilities (hotels, B&Bs, etc.), with the rise of the sharing economy, a new wave of alternative accommodation has entered the industry. People can now rent, swap or offer a bed, a room or a whole house, to guests through platforms active over the Internet. Although it still takes up a minor share of the whole sector (Zervas et al., 2015b), it results interesting both in terms of the experience offered to the traveler and in terms of pricing (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Staying at someone's place, with the possibility to have a direct relationship with locals and live in a local house, is for a certain type of consumer a value added to the experience. One can meet people and get to know the culture more easily than staying in the hotel. This solution gives the possibility to travelers to come in contact with locals — what Goffman (1959) descibed as the 'back' — more easily compared to traditional types of accommodations. There is a more direct fruition of the local economy and of the neighborhood life, enlarging the borders of the experience and reducing the risk of the constraints of mass tourism itineraries (Skift Report 7, 2013).

There is a lack of research on the concept of authenticity linked to accommodation, and in particular related to accommodation solutions in the sharing economy. It comes as a surprise, considering the fact that authenticity has been widely studied in the fields of heritage tourism, events, touristic campaigns, theme parks, etc. There is growing sensitivity of consumers to the question of authenticity (Casteran and Roederer, 2012). In the academic literature, what is referred to as sociabilities (Larsen, 2008), seems to acquire further meaning when considering staying in the house or in a room offered by an inhabitant of the place. Social networks in the sharing economy are produced and consumed both online and offline, thanks to the important role of technology; through this kind of alternative accommodation, they can give the possibility to guests to obtain and consume more unique experiences, mainly thanks to the social relationship that are activated during the journey. Moreover, through a genuine and less constrained interaction between tourists and locals, the making of place (Bødker and Browning, 2013) acquires new meaning, going beyond something staged ad hoc for the tourist; they get the possibility to go further into the visit and into the understanding of a place, compared to just mere sightseeing. Inserting these ideas in the discourse of mobilities (Urry, 2000) hosts and guests can mix their own and relative everydayness with the exotic of the other, creating new meanings each time an encounter of this type takes place. Considering this type of scenario, tourism loses its status of consumer product and digs further into the comprehension and embrace of cultural difference; there is no need to be afraid of the effects of commodization or globalization in the tourism sector, as each encounter and experience has its own unique meaning and outcome. As Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of UNWTO, remarked in his opening keynote at *The Future of Travel* on March 24th, 2015, "it is through travel and tourism that we discover the beauty of our diversity, the beauty of our differences and the strength of our differences, because tourism and travel today are bringing the best out of us, we are re-inventing ourselves and our roots; and the world is more beautiful because we are more different from one another and because we are more diverse".

Sharing is a practice as old as men (Price, 1975; Belk, 2010). Sharing in the accommodation sector represents what Price (1975) defined as a type of arrangement characterized by 'intimate social tolerance, emotional acceptance and interdependency', which seems a good place where to encounter, experience and develop authenticity. Therefore, the perceived authenticity of people choosing this type of alternative accommodation is positively enhanced by the possibility of living closer social relations with the locals and by experiencing an intimate local setting, such as a house.

In literature, there is still no clear understanding of how perception of authenticity affects consumer behavior. According to Casteran and Roederer (2012), the impact of authenticity on CB might provide a better understanding of the concept itself. Do people looking for an authentic traveling experience choose to stay in an accommodation within the offering of the sharing economy?

The general aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the concept of authenticity. The specific objective is to understand how tourists perceive authenticity in accommodations offered through peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms and what is the impact of tourists' perceived authenticity of the experience on their consumer behavior, namely loyalty to an alternative type of accommodation in the realm of collaborative consumption (e.g. Airbnb, Couchsurfing).

Perceived authenticity is a theme that is now gaining relevance in the field of consumer research, and its importance on the competitive ground has been recognized both in marketing and management. Acquiring competitive advantage means creating and delivering a superior and different value for the consumer. Therefore, authenticity has a role in enhancing the value of the offer.
Studies on the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer behavior are not many, and, in particular in the field of tourism, the knowledge about it in the accommodation sector is completely lacking. What is argued here, is that in light of the

increasing use of alternative forms of accommodation through collaborative consumption platforms and the changing modes and motivations of traveling, perceived authenticity plays a major role in this kind of accommodation. The particular nature of this kind of accommodation — as outlined above — targets people who are more prone to a type of tourism that gives the possibility to come in contact with local people and live a place from a different prospective compared to that of mass tourism. Therefore, the importance of social relations — both online and offline — placemaking, technology, and the possibility to access directly what Goffman (1954) defined the *back*, have all an impact on the perception of authenticity through accommodation within the touristic experience.

The contribution that this thesis would like to give is: (i) theoretical, testing the relationship between perceived authenticity and the choice of accommodation, and (ii) managerial, offering an understanding of the factors determining how a person chooses an accommodation to enhance the outcome and satisfaction of her touristic experience.
Alternative accommodation through collaborative consumption platforms provides a rich context that still needs to be further investigated. This would like to be a small contribution to a topic that is promising interesting developments.

Hereafter, the structure of the research will be outlined.

3.2 Methods

Once the topic of accommodation within the touristic experience had been picked, immediately attention was focalized on its relevance as a factor influencing the perception of the experience itself. First of all, the academic literature was reviewed to understand the state of the art about the construct and to contextualize it within the broader framework of tourism. Some key concepts were highlighted as prominent influences of perceived authenticity in accommodation. The lack of literature on the topic we are here analyzing

was acknowledged. Moreover, previous studies on the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer behavior were analyzed. The latter provided also insights into the methodologies for measuring authenticity, which will be analyzed in further detail below.

The review of previous studies that exist about this topic has been fundamental for proceeding with the methodology to study the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer behavior (Camus, 2004, 2010; Casteran and Roederer, 2012, Derbaix and Derbaix 2010). In particular Camus's contribution in the measuring of authenticity has revealed fundamental here. As already explained above, in her article from 2004, Camus built a measurement instrument to assess market perceived authenticity in the food industry. In 2010, Derbaix and Derbaix used this scale to evaluate the relationship between perceived authenticity and perceived value, applying it to a concert. Apart from this application to an event, we think that the original sector for which the scale was created is closely linked to the domain studied here. Food has always been an integrating part of the touristic experience, defining element of cultures and places (Quan and Wang, 2004). As food is an expression of a society, so can be accommodation; very often the two are also interrelated. Therefore, the factors influencing the perception of authenticity in the food industry could be compared to those influencing perceived authenticity in accommodation.
Contrary to Derbaix and Derbaix (2010), who adapted their scale of authenticity after some pilot studies, due to the nature of the subject studied, we claim that Camus's scale can be easily adapted to our case.

The methods used for the purposes of our study will be quantitative. Based on Camus's scale of authenticity, a questionnaire will be proposed to people who have already experienced a type of accommodation within the realm of the sharing economy.

Proceeding from the premises above, the tables present the items created by Camus and

the items adapted for the purposes of this study, based on the conceptual foundations outlined in the literature review. The items are divided by dimension.

- Dimension: ORIGIN (Table 3.1)

  The dimension of origin, declined in the realm of accommodation, is here intended as the possibility to be able to watch and experience first-hand, as well as get in contact with the locals and their environment; see exactly where they are from and interact with them in their home and living places. Social relations that start online, continue in an offline setting. Through the interaction with locals, the traveler is able to get a better understanding and a different and direct point of view on the place visited, and to perceive its originality. As in the food industry, also in the accommodation sector, homogenization and anonymity can be defined as a sign of inauthenticity. Therefore, being able to see the 'real thing' through interaction with locals determines a higher perceived authenticity. It becomes clear the importance of sociabilities when traveling, as a factor influencing the perception of the experience. Tourism shows an increasing reliance on "connection with, rather than escape from social relations" (Larsen et al., 2007).

- Dimension: PROJECTION (Table 3.2)

  The product reflects the consumer's personality and the choices a person makes when deciding how to travel (Moutinho, 1986). If Camus defines projection as the impact that the possessions we own have on our way of life — "we are what we own", in light of recent developments (Botsman and Rogers, 2012), we can translate it using Belk (2014) definition "we are what we can access"; therefore, if people make traveling decisions based on their personality and self-image, the choice of an accommodation through a collaborative consumption platform defines the beliefs, attitude to traveling, and identity as a person (Williams, 2006).

- Dimension: SINGULARITY (Table 3.3)

Items	
Camus (2004)	**Questionnaire**
The product is natural	The accommodation is real expression of the person that owns it
The product consists only of natural elements	The accommodation makes me feel at home
The product does not contain artificial elements	The accommodation is different from a traditional type of accommodation
It is known how the product was manufactured	Through interaction with the owner I can better understand the place I am visiting
The origin of the product is known	This type of accommodation gives me access to the place I am visiting at a deeper level

Table 3.1: Authenticity Dimension: ORIGIN

Items	
Camus (2004)	**Questionnaire**
The products reflects the consumer's personality	This type of accommodation reflects my idea of travel
The product defines the consumer	This type of accommodation helps defining myself as a person
The products helps the consumer be herself	This type of accommodation helps being myself
The products is aligned with the consumer's style	This type of accommodation is aligned with my traveling style decisions

Table 3.2: Authenticity Dimension: PROJECTION

Items	
Camus (2004)	**Questionnaire**
The product is unique	This type of accommodation is unique
The product is one of a kind	This type of accommodation is one-of-kind
There is no other product similar to it	There is no other type of accommodation similar to it

Table 3.3: Authenticity Dimension: SINGULARITY

Each type of accommodation within the realm of collaborative consumption has to be thought as unique: it is the reflection of its owner, which in turn reflects her own tastes, experiences and culture (Skift Report 7, 2013). Therefore, it is legitimate to think that each chance a person has to stay in a house or room offered through a collaborative consumption platform, will represent a one-of-a-kind experience. Within the territory of globalization, this type of accommodation represents a turf where people can mix and exchange their differences, creating genuine experiences and therefore increasing the perceived authenticity.

These items will be used within our questionnaire to measure perceived authenticity in an accommodation within the realm of collaborative consumption.

3.3 Structural Model and Hypotheses

Through the survey we would like to test the relationship between *Perceived Authenticity* and *Loyalty*, a component of consumer behavior. In particular, we would like to see if there is a direct causal relation between the perceived authenticity and the loyalty towards alternative types of accommodation, i.e. the readiness to book and accommodation through a

peer-to-peer online hospitality platform and recommend it to one's friends/relatives. The structural model is presented below (Figure 3.1).

> *H: If perceived authenticity of accommodations offered through peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms increases, consumer loyalty towards them increases as well.*

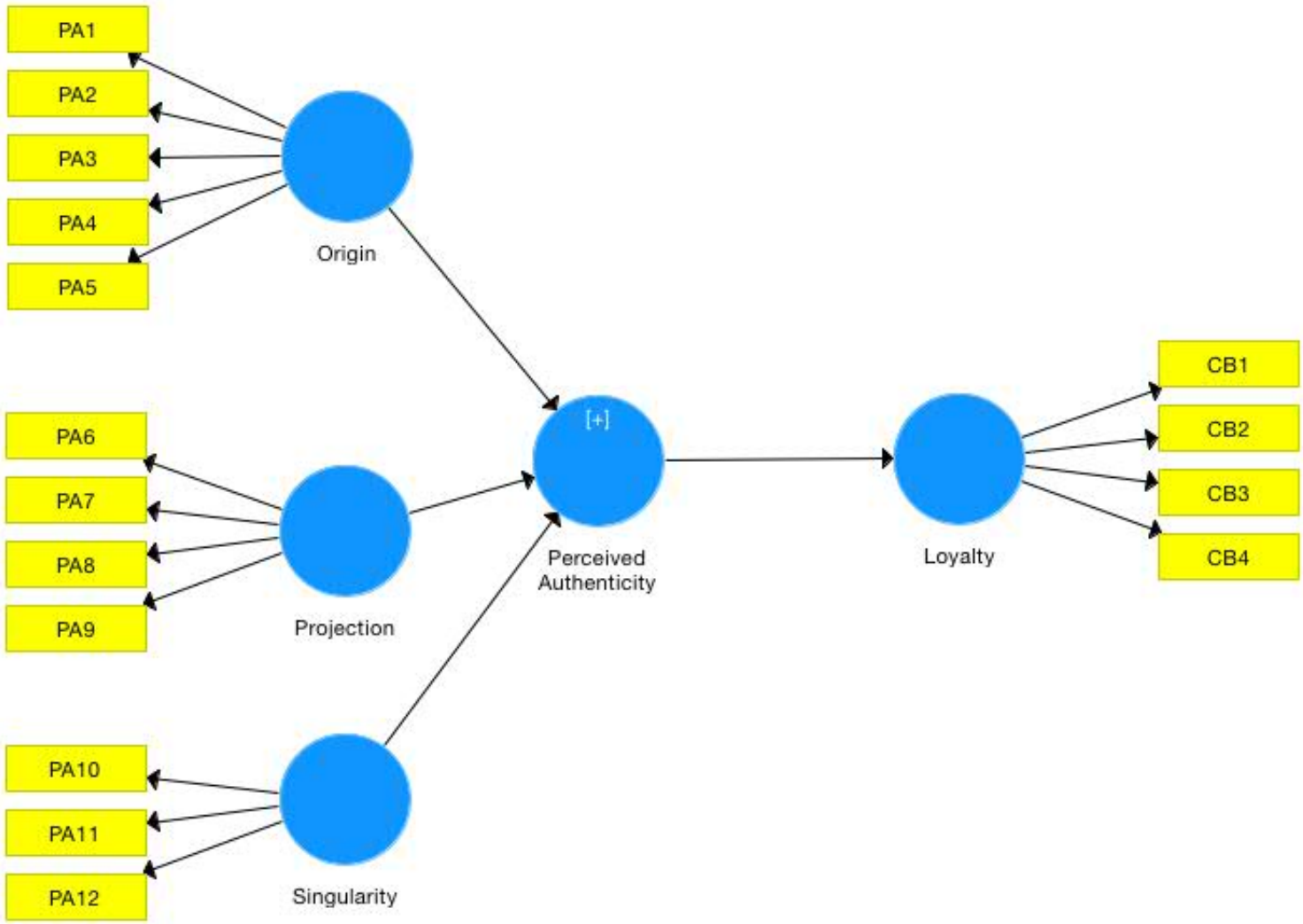

Figure 3.1: Structural Equation Model

Chapter 4

Study and Results

4.1 Data Collection

The data for the analysis came from a survey (see Appendix A). The questionnaires were administered during the month of October 2015, mainly through social media and by email.

The questionnaire was made up of eleven questions. What was meant to be measured through the survey was:

- traveling habits,
- use of IT to travel,
- loyalty to alternative types of accommodation,
- perceived authenticity,
- sociodemographics.

The first question of the survey (*Have you ever chosen to stay in an alternative type of accommodation within the realm of the sharing economy?*) was meant to discriminate

between those who had already used the type of accommodation under scrutiny and those who had not.

The total number of questionnaires collected was 235. Of these, only 165 were usable for the purposes of this study (i.e. questionnaires that had a positive response to the first question and were fully completed).

4.1.1 Sample Description

For what concerns sociodemographic factors, the sample was formed in its majority (90,0%) by people belonging to the so-called Generation Y, therefore between 18 and 35 years of age. The rest (9,1%) was represented by the other generational categories (Generation X and Baby Boomers). There were no respondents older than 70 (Figure 4.1). Concerning gender, the sample was overrepresented by females, being it more than two thirds. The general level of education of the interviewees was quite high: 38,8% held a Bachelor's Degree and 47,9% held a Master's Degree (Figure 4.2). As for current occupation, 57,6% were students and 30,3% employed. People self-employed and out of work were 4,8% and 4,2% respectively. The remaining 3% was represented by retired people and those that had answered *Other* (Figure 4.3). 80,0% of the sample reported itself as *Single*, while 19,4% as *Married or in a Domestic Partnership*.

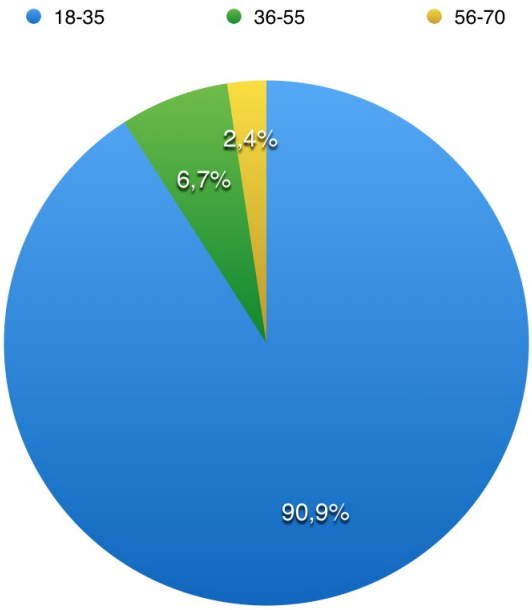

Figure 4.1: Age of respondents

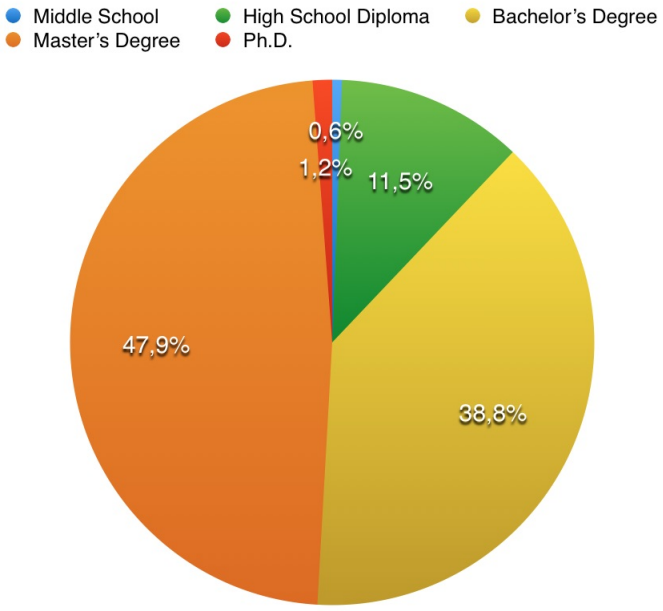

Figure 4.2: Levels of education of respondents

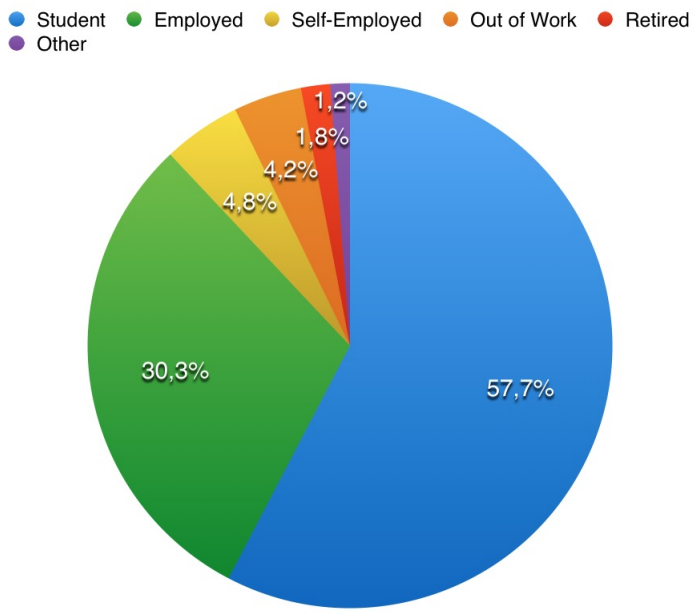

Figure 4.3: Occupation of respondents

Looking at traveling habits, most of the respondents declared that they travel once every few months or few times a year (44,8% and 35,2% respectively). 12,1% travels once a month, while only 4,2% travels more than once a month and 3,6% less than once a year (Figure 4.4).

The use of IT when travelling is widely spread among the respondents. On the scale from 1 to 7 proposed, 99,4% answered from 5 up, meaning that to them the use of technology is important in all the phases of traveling (before, during and after) (Figure 4.5).

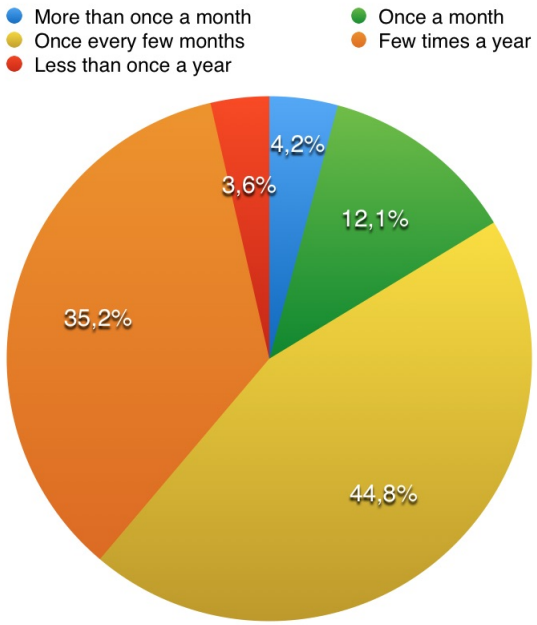

Figure 4.4: Traveling frequency of respondents

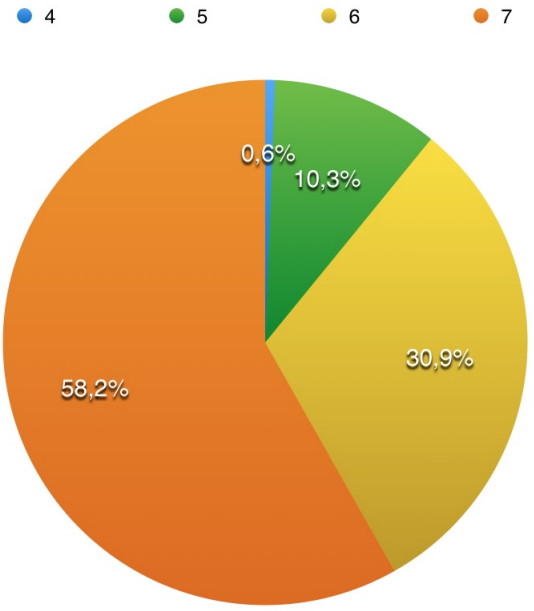

Figure 4.5: Use of technology when traveling

4.2 Quantitative Results

The softwares used to analyzed the data were two: SmartPLS (v. 3.2.3.) and SPSS Statistics 23. The latter was used screen the data, run the descriptives and the correlations presented below. The former was used to run the structural equation model to test the hypotheses. The use of SmartPLS is suggested when samples are small and distributions are not normal, when applications have little available theory, and when correct model specification cannot be ensured (Gaskin, 2013; Wong, 2013; Glocker, 2012). Moreover, there is a large use of this software in fields such as behavioral sciences marketing, management information systems and business strategy. Being a soft modeling approach, it is a good alternative to hard modeling approaches, such as SPSS (Wong, 2013).

It needs to be taken into consideration the fact that SmartPLS is still considered an emerging multivariate data analysis method, and researchers are still exploring the best practices of PLS-SEM (Wong, 2013).

The steps that were taken to proceed were the following: first, data were screened to check if it was ready to be used for our purposes; secondly, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the constructs of *Perceived Authenticity* and *Loyalty*; finally, the structural equation model was run to test the hypotheses.
Each phase is discussed more in depth below.

4.2.1 Data Screening

To ensure that the data were usable, reliable and valid to be tested for causal theory, they were screened focusing on specific issues.
First, it was established that there were no missing data within the questionnaires available, as a missed entry may cause problems to the functioning of a causal modal (Gaskin, 2013). Of 188 questionnaires that had a positive response to the first question, only 165

were usable, as the remaining 23 were for the most part incomplete. Still, the minimum suggested sample size to run an analysis in SmartPLS was reached. Then, the data set was screened for outliers. Only a couple were detected but it was decided not to take them out due to the small size of the sample and to the fact that they laid in questions that were measured through a Likert scale (Gaskin, 2013). The presence of unengaged respondent was also investigated, but none were detected.
Linearity was then tested through the ANOVA test present in SPSS. The Deviation from Linearity measured was 0,072 (Sig value >0,05), showing a linear relationship between the two constructs (*Perceived Authenticity* and *Loyalty* (See Figure 1 in Appendix B). Linearity was also tested between the three dimension of *Perceived Authenticity* and the construct itself (See Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4 in Appendix B).

Normality and homoschedasticity were not tested. Normality was not relevant in this case, as the software used was SmartPLS; the presence of homoschedasticity, according to some school of thoughts, is not considered a problem (Gaskin, 2013).

4.2.2 Confirmatory Factor Analyses

The first step taken towards the fitting of the model was a confirmatory factor analysis to identify underlying factors for the whole set of items operationalizing *Perceived Authenticity* and *Loyalty* in the study. The main aim was to test if the scale to measure authenticity created by Camus (2004) fitted also our study. *Origin*, *Projection* and *Singularity* were tested as dimensions defining *Perceived Authenticity* as a latent variable; also *Loyalty* was tested as a construct already present in tourism literature, measured as readiness to use this type of accommodation again and recommend it to one's friends/relatives (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010).

Following the general guidelines, all the dimensions making up a latent variable were designed as reflective towards the indicators that generate them. However, *Perceived Au-*

thenticity is a second order latent variable: the direction of the lines going from each dimension to it was a matter of debate. According to Coltman et al. (2008), when considering the nature of a construct, some theoretical considerations need to be done: (i) the nature of the construct, (ii) the direction of causality, and (iii) characteristics of indicators; moreover, there is the need for some empirical considerations: (i) the intercorrelation among indicators, (ii) the relationship of indicators with constructs' antecedents and consequences, and (iii) measurement error and collinearity. In general, a formative variable is identified when the indicators causing the latent variable are not interchangeable among themselves and there is not expectation of indicators to be correlated. A reflective variable is defined by indicators highly correlated and interchangeable among each other. From a conceptual point of view the three factors that determine *Perceived Authenticity* are three different dimensions, not interchangeable among each other; each one has its own distinct characteristics and impact on the higher latent variable, as already described above (See Methods). Although a test for correlation showed a significance at the 0.01 level, when checked for multicollinearity, none was detected among the three indicators. Therefore, *Perceived Authenticity* was set as a formative second order construct, supported by theoretical and statistical evidence.

The confirmatory factor analyses were run and showed positive results, establishing confidence towards the measurement models.
Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7 show the outcome of the confirmatory factor analyses.

Perceived Authentictiy

Going from left to right, it is possible to notice the loadings of the indicators making up each first order factor. All the loadings are higher then the desired value of 0.7. Also, composite reliability for all the three dimensions is higher than 0.7. Therefore, reliability is confirmed. For what concerns validity, when checking convergent validity (AVE), all the constructs are above the threshold of 0.5, and discriminant validity, measured through the HTMT criterion (Hanseler et al., 2015), reveals no problems.

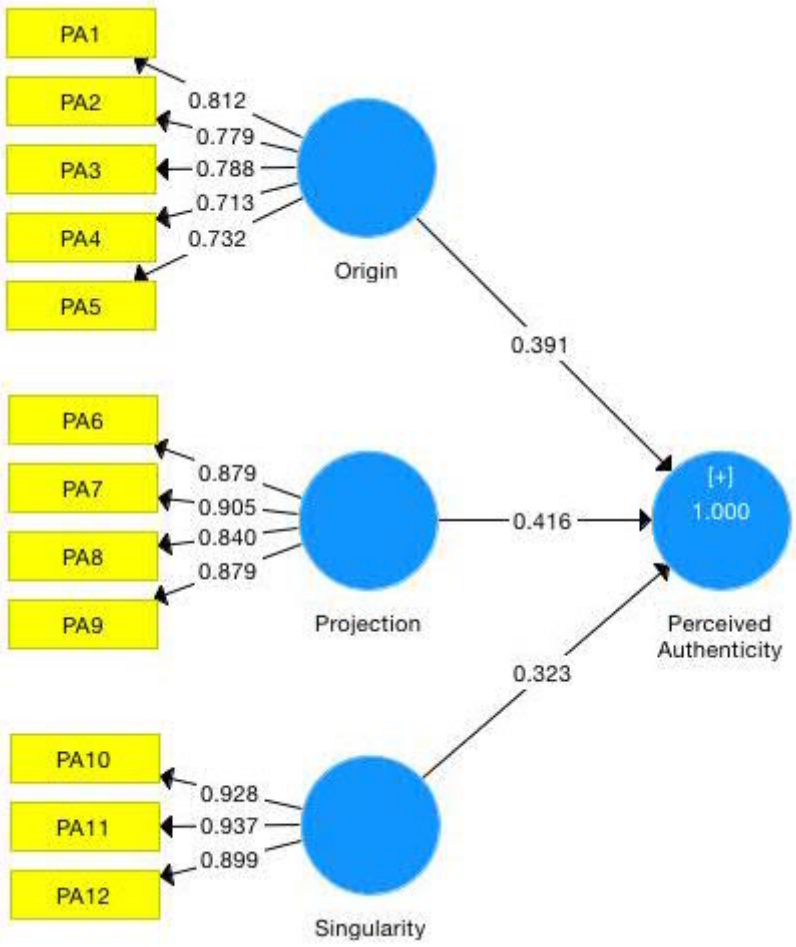

Figure 4.6: Perceived Authenticity - Confirmatory Factor Analysis

When looking at the formative second order factor, it is possible to say that its variance is 100% explained by the three first order constructs (R^2=1.000).

The procedures to determine the validity of reflective measures do not apply to formative indicators, and no single technique is universally accepted for validating formative measures (Gaskin, 2013; Thongrattana, 2010). Nevertheless, Hair et al. (2014) suggests three steps: (i) assessing convergent validity of formative measurement models, (ii) assessing formative measurement models for collinearity issues, and (iii) assessing the significance and relevance of the formative indicators. When tested, convergent validity showed values above the recommended threshold of 0.80 for all the three dimensions (see Figure 8 in

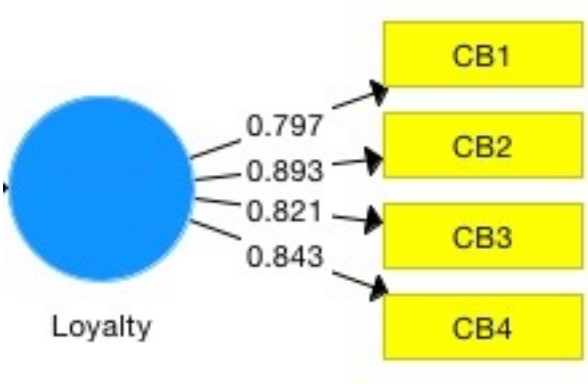

Figure 4.7: Loyalty - Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Appendix B). As already mentioned above, no sign of multicollinearity was detected, as all VIFs were below the safe number of 3 (see Figure 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7 in Appendix B). To test the significance of the path coefficients, a bootstrap procedure was conducted. All were above 1.96, therefore being all statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Loyalty

The same measures defined for *Perceived Authenticity* were analyzed for *Loyalty*. All the loadings showed a value higher than 0.7. Convergent validity showed a value of 0.905 (See Figure 9 in Appendix B). Therefore, reliability was checked. Discriminant validity was ok, thus confirming validity.

Latent Variable	Indicator	Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Origin	PA1	0,812	0,897	0,587
	PA2	0,779		
	PA3	0,778		
	PA4	0,713		
	PA5	0,732		
Projection	PA6	0,879	0,929	0,767
	PA7	0,905		
	PA8	0,840		
	PA9	0,879		
Singularity	PA10	0,928	0,944	0,849
	PA11	0,937		
	PA12	0,899		
Loyalty	CB1	0,797	0,905	0,704
	CB2	0,893		
	CB3	0,821		
	CB4	0,843		

Table 4.1: Results Summary - Reflective Variables

4.2.3 Structural Equation Model

The structural equation model constructed to test the hypothesis was made up of an inner model constituted by five latent variables: *Origin*, *Projection* and *Singularity*, the exogenous variables and *Perceived Authenticity*, and *Loyalty*, the endogenous variables. The outer models were defined by the indicators that create the latent variables. For the dimensions of *Origin*, *Projection* and *Singularity* there are five, four and three respectively. On the other hand, *Loyalty* is made up of four items.

The aim was to test the causal relationship between *Perceived Authenticity* and *Loyalty*,

i.e. whether an increase in the perception of authenticity of accommodations offered through peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms has an impact on the loyalty showed towards this type of alternative accommodation.

When fitted, the model gave moderately positive results (see Figure 4.8).

As above, the tests to assess a formative construct were run. A result above 0.80 provided support for convergent validity and the t-statistics obtained showed a value well above 1.95, therefore confirming the statistical significance. Multicollinearity was not tested, as there was only one construct acting on the endogenous variable.
Loyalty R^2 showed a value of 0.369, meaning that *Perceived Authenticity* explains almost 37% of its variance. Therefore, it can be stated that *Perceived Authenticity* has almost a moderate effect on *Loyalty*.

Lastly, f^2 was tested to measure the impact of predictor constructs on endogenous variables; for what concerns *Perceived Authenticity*, each dimension can be said to have a very large effect size on it, as they are all higher than 0.35 (Hair et al., 2014). Also for *Loyalty*, the effect size is considered to be large (f^2=0.586).

	Perceived Authenticity			**Loyalty**		
	Path Coefficients	f^2	t-values	Path Coefficients	f^2	t-values
Origin	0,384	1.640,582	20,849			
Projection	0,441	2.059,894	20,553			
Singularity	0,303	1.152,770	19,375			
Perceived Authenticity				0,608	0,586	12,162

Table 4.2: Results Summary - Formative Variables

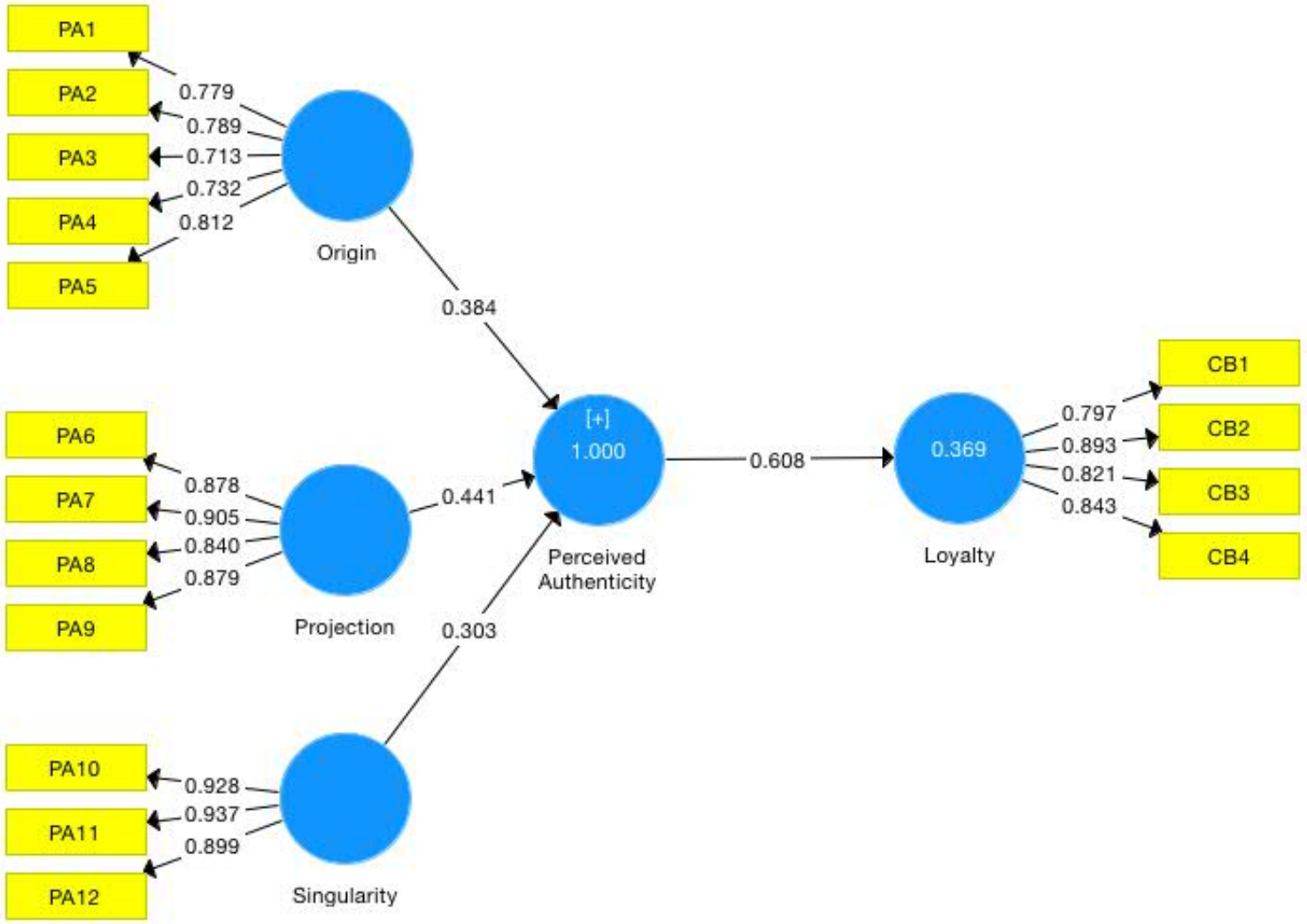

Figure 4.8: Fitted Structural Equation Model

4.2.4 Correlations

Beside testing the model, we wanted to check if the other data gathered could give some interesting insight on the matter. We checked some correlations among sociodemographics, traveling habits and use of technology. The outcome was a strong negative correlation between *Age* and *Technology*, which highlights the increase in the use of technology during traveling as age decreases (Table 4.3).

		Technology	**Age**
Technology	Paerson Correlation	1	-0,198**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,11
	N	165	165
Age	Paerson Correlation	-0,198**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,11	
	N	165	165

Table 4.3: Correlation results between *Age* and *Technology*

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Before analyzing the relationship between *Perceived Authenticity* and *Loyalty*, it was fundamental to understand how to define authenticity. There is still no universal consensus on the definition of this construct, therefore, a way to measure and justify authenticity was needed. Camus' (2004) perceived authenticity measurement scale was adopted and adapted to gauge the perception of authenticity among peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms' users. The results obtained through the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the dimensions chosen to measure *Perceived Authenticity* (*Origin*, *Projection* and *Singularity*) adequately defined the construct. Therefore, it was confirmed that people using this type of alternative accommodation share the same beliefs and attitude when traveling; they perceive the importance of coming in contact, network and share information with locals as a fundamental factor of an authentic experience. They feel that these connections let the tourist into experiences not defined a priori by aseptic schedules and itineraries that neutrally cross a destination, but deliver holistic, singular and genuine experiences, becoming a fundamental intersection and important block in the definition of a positive and satisfying journey.

This mirrors the current situation of tourism within the paradigm of mobilities and the

traits defining it (Urry, 2000). The increased use of peer-to-peer online platforms to search for accommodation reflects both the increasing role of IT and communication in the consumption of tourism, and its definition as an exotic and mundane activity defined by emotion and cognition (Edensor, 2000, 2001, 2007; Franklin and Crang, 2001). Technology boosts the possibility to come in contact and network with people, both online and offline (Larsen et al., 2007; Bødker and Browning, 2012). Through this contact and the interaction with the environment, the traveler 'makes' place through a dynamic and sensorial experience (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994). Therefore, the relationship between technology and hospitality has created a stimulating environment fostering sociability and authentic experiences, offering an immediate and undeniable connection with the destination.

This operationalization of the concept of authenticity helps defining the characteristics that deliver a higher value. When looking at the impact that perception of authenticity has on loyalty, we can now state that in the field of hospitality in tourism this factor has a somewhat moderate impact on the use of this type of accommodation. It is an interesting insight in realm of tourist experiences, suggesting the motivations for traveling of the type of tourist described above. People choosing repeatedly those kind of accommodation define authenticity as a way of experiencing first hand the destination visited through contact with local people and places. Staying in a place such as private local house, communicates much more to a person willing to experience the 'real thing'. A home is a true expression of cultures and habits.

Interesting information can be extracted also from sociodemographic data, traveling habits, and use of IT when traveling. As already described above, the majority of the respondents that had used peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms were part of the so-called Generation Y, confirming the importance of this group in the tourism sector. They travel more and spend more as a percentage of their disposable income when compared to the overall population. Changing travel dynamics, diffusion of IT and sharing dynamics,

and their propensity to integration when traveling, make them a good target for this type of accommodation. Considered these factors, when looking at the correlation between age and use of technology, it was clear that as age diminishes the use of technology increases. This relation could be explored more in depth, also in relative to the perception of authenticity and the subsequent level of loyalty.

5.1 Conclusions

After an extensive theoretical and statistical analysis, it can be stated that the initial hypothesis was moderately confirmed. The operationalization of the concept of authenticity gave an interesting definition of what this construct means to people choosing accommodation through peer-to-peer online platforms, and why sharing is appealing and chosen in the hospitality sector.

Starting Point	**Method**	**Outcome**
Authenticity Measurement Scale (Camus, 2004)	Confirmatory Factor Analysis	Confidence in the measurement model was established
H: If perceived authenticity of accommodations offered through peer-to-peer online hospitality platforms increases, consumer loyalty towards them increases as well	Structural Equation Model	Hypothesis Confirmed

Table 5.1: Summary of the study

It was argued here that, in light of the changing consumer hospitality preferences and behaviors (Williams, 2006; Cohen et al., 2013), and in light of the rise of the sharing economy in the tourism industry, hospitality offered through peer-to-peer online platforms gives the

possibility to get in contact with the locals and the place at a deeper level, creating a more authentic and genuine experience when visiting a destination; therefore, when choosing this type of alternative hospitality, it is possible to go beyond the mere visit of the place, and enter a dimension where travelers can have an holistic experience involving people and spaces.

The scarcity of data pertaining to shared lodging makes it difficult to analyze the tangible effects of the sharing economy in tourism. In recent years, nevertheless, the relevance of perception of authenticity as a critical consumer sensibility affecting behavior has soared; authenticity had always been studied only in the context of the experience of the visit, i.e. the activities performed by a tourist when out and about within a destination (e.g. Chhabra et al., 2003; Andriotis, 2001; Casteran and Roederer, 2013). Perceived authenticity in accommodation had not yet been addressed. In a world where companies compete on the ability of staging experiences for the customers (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), authenticity reveals as an important element evaluated by consumers when pondering their actions (Pine and Gilmore, 2008, 2014). Therefore, competitiveness of a company derives also from the sense of authenticity and genuineness it permeates.

Thanks to the hospitality offered through sharing economy platforms, people traveling get the chance to experience the place not only from the *front*, but starting from the *back*. Perceived authenticity has been defined here as the possibility to get in contact with the locals online and offline, determining a mode of traveling that goes beyond mass tourism and mere sightseeing, but wants to dig into the real essence of a place through active interaction and networking with people and space, creating each time a one-of-a-kind experience tailored by the traveler herself and her synergy with the environment.

This has been a first step towards the understanding of the relevance of authenticity in hospitality, in particular as a factor influencing loyalty towards accommodations offered through peer-to-peer online platforms. Although the model created and analyzed was quite simple, it gave some interesting insights on a topic lacking investigation.

The common perception, nowadays, sees the sharing economy as an incumbent figure over the tourism industry, and therefore also on the hospitality sector. This halo, although extensively documented in the common press, was tried to be quantified only by a small number of academic studies (Derbaix and Derbaix, 2010; Casteran and Roederer, 2013, Kovacs et al., forthcoming). Some members of the traditional sectors want to reject it all together, but this is not correct. There should be an interest in trying to understand its concept, especially in light of the fast developing dynamics of the industry and of future consumers' categories. Strong (2014) suggests that established brands should leverage on the opportunities that the sharing economy has exposed, by encouraging and facilitating greater online engagement to get a more concrete perception of their customers' opinion and needs and by establishing balanced relationship with people that share the same values. Definitely, understanding the appeal conveyed by authentic experiences would be an incisive success factor to avoid the risk of adopting cookie cutter solution. Knowing what people want to experience when traveling, gives the possibility to create more ad hoc holistic traveling solutions. Being able to adapt to the different expectations and needs of consumer is fundamental "to obtain competitive advantages in the increasingly dynamic, unpredictable, unstable and competitive tourism and hospitality environment" (Williams, 2006).

The possibility given to people to interact before, during and after a travel has an immense impact of the dynamics of the travel itself, including accommodation, of course. The connectivity among people adds value to the traveling experience, creating discourses that go both ways. Moreover, it does not bound the experience to the sole time of traveling but extends it creating relationships and fond memories of people and places.

This has been an attempt to give a theoretical contribution to the concept of authenticity and its managerial implications. The meaning of authenticity that has emerged in this context is related to the possibility that a person has of coming in contact directly with the people and places of a destination, therefore searching for authenticity in the relations

and networks that she is able to construct during the travel. An authentic experience is an experience permeated with sociabilities before, during and after a journey.
From a managerial point of view, this study has delivered some insights on aspects that could be leveraged to be more successful in the experiential economy: To offer something that integrates with the surroundings, a tangible exchange between guests, local history and culture delivered as an "amenity" provided to the customers (Bagley, 2014).

5.2 Limitation and Further Research

Although the sample size crossed the minimum required to perform an analysis of this kind, a bigger sample might give stronger results. Moreover, the type of media used to distribute the questionnaire might have influenced the sample the sociodemographics of the sample. Using different ways to administer the survey could lead to a more varied sample and could allow the use of other softwares to conduct the analysis.

As this research was meant as a first step into the analysis of the perception of authenticity of accommodation in the sharing economy and its impact on loyalty towards this type of alternative hospitality, further analysis could be conducted in this field, in order to understand the changes that tourism is undergoing as a sector. Moreover, it could be of high interest for hotels that are facing the rise of alternative types of accommodation, in order to respond with an appropriate offering.
Other paths could lead to a more thorough understanding of traveling needs and motivation of Generation Y, which in the next years will also become the source of business travelers. The millennial generation is a phenomenon apart from the economy of sharing, but the two are undoubtedly interconnected.
Needless to say, also technology and its use done by consumers while traveling could be pursued to enhance the perception of authenticity while traveling thanks to information sharing and networking.

Appendices

Appendix A - Questionnaire

Default Question Block

Nowadays, it is not rare to observe people who travel, choosing to stay in an accommodation offered through the many platforms that exist over the Internet: there, people that have a spare room or a spare house can offer hospitality directly to potential guests. This is one of the expression of the sharing economy within the realm of tourism, and particularly they fall within the category of alternative accommodation (in contrast to traditional type of accommodation, such as hotels and B&Bs). If you have had the chance to experience this type of hospitality, I kindly ask you to spend 5 minutes of your time to answer to the following questionnaire . All the answers you provide will be kept in the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for the academic purposes of my Master thesis. Click on the arrow below to begin. Thank you!

Have you ever chosen to stay in an alternative type of accommodation within the realm of sharing economy (e.g.: Airbnb, Couchsurfing)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Which accommodation platform(s) have you used? (more than one can apply)

- ☐ Airbnb
- ☐ Couchsurfing
- ☐ Homeaway
- ☐ Housetrip
- ☐ 9flats
- ☐ Wimdu
- ☐ Roomerama
- ☐ BedyCasa
- ☐ Other (please, specify)

How often do you travel?

- ○ More than once a month
- ○ Once a month
- ○ Once every few months
- ○ Few times a year
- ○ Less than once a year

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very), how much do you think that technology (websites, apps, social networks, online platforms, etc.) is an important tool in the organization and implementation of your traveling experiences?

Please indicate your level of agreement of disagreement with each of the following propositions based on your experience with alternative accommodation. (From 1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree)

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
I use this type of accommodation most of the time when traveling							
Alternative accommodation is my favorite type of accommodation							
I would use this type of accommodation again							
I would recommend it to my friends							
The accommodation is the real expression of the person who owns it and of its culture							
The accommodation is typical of the place visited							
The accommodation does not contain any standardized element							
Through interaction with the owner I can better understand the place visited							
This type of accommodation gives							

me access to the place I am visiting at a deeper level						
This type of accommodation reflects my idea of travel						
This type of accommodation helps defining myself as a traveler						
This type of accommodation helps being myself						
This type of accommodation is aligned with my traveling style decisions						
This type of accommodation is unique						
This type of accommodation is one-of-a-kind						
There is no other type of accommodation similar to it						

Overall, on a scale from 1 to 7, do you think that this type of accommodation is more authentic compared to traditional types of accommodation? (1=Completely disagree, 7=Completely agree)

Age

- 18-35

- 36-55
- 56-70
- 70+

Sex

- Male
- Female
- Other

Education (if currently enrolled, highest degree received)

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Ph.D.

Occupation

- Student
- Employed
- Self-employed
- Out of work
- Homemaker
- Retired
- Other

Marital Status

- Single
- Married or Domestic Partnership
- Widowed
- Separeted
- Divorced

Appendix B - Statistics

Data Screening

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CB * PA	Between Groups	(Combined)	2187,103	49	44,635	3,351	,000
		Linearity	1287,586	1	1287,586	96,671	,000
		Deviation from Linearity	899,517	48	18,740	1,407	,072
	Within Groups		1531,710	115	13,319		
	Total		3718,812	164			

Figure 1: Linearity test between *Perceived Authenticity* and *Consumer Behavior*

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PA * Origin	Between Groups	(Combined)	32530,642	25	1301,226	27,999	,000
		Linearity	30987,801	1	30987,801	666,775	,000
		Deviation from Linearity	1542,841	24	64,285	1,383	,126
	Within Groups		6459,903	139	46,474		
	Total		38990,545	164			

Figure 2: Linearity test between *Perceived Authenticity* and *Origin*

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PA * Projection	Between Groups	(Combined)	32729,193	23	1423,008	32,045	,000
		Linearity	31657,969	1	31657,969	712,909	,000
		Deviation from Linearity	1071,224	22	48,692	1,096	,357
	Within Groups		6261,353	141	44,407		
	Total		38990,545	164			

Figure 3: Linearity test between *Perceived Authenticity* and *Projection*

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PA * Singularity	Between Groups	(Combined)	28888,724	18	1604,929	23,196	,000
		Linearity	28350,470	1	28350,470	409,745	,000
		Deviation from Linearity	538,254	17	31,662	,458	,967
	Within Groups		10101,821	146	69,191		
	Total		38990,545	164			

Figure 4: Linearity test between *Perceived Authenticity* and *Singularity*

Structural Equation Model

Coefficients[a]

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Projection	,565	1,771
	Singularity	,565	1,771

a. Dependent Variable: Origin

Figure 5: Multicollinearity test (1)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Singularity	,588	1,701
	Origin	,588	1,701

a. Dependent Variable: Projection

Figure 6: Multicollinearity test (2)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Origin	,508	1,967
	Projection	,508	1,967

a. Dependent Variable: Singularity

Figure 7: Multicollinearity test (3)

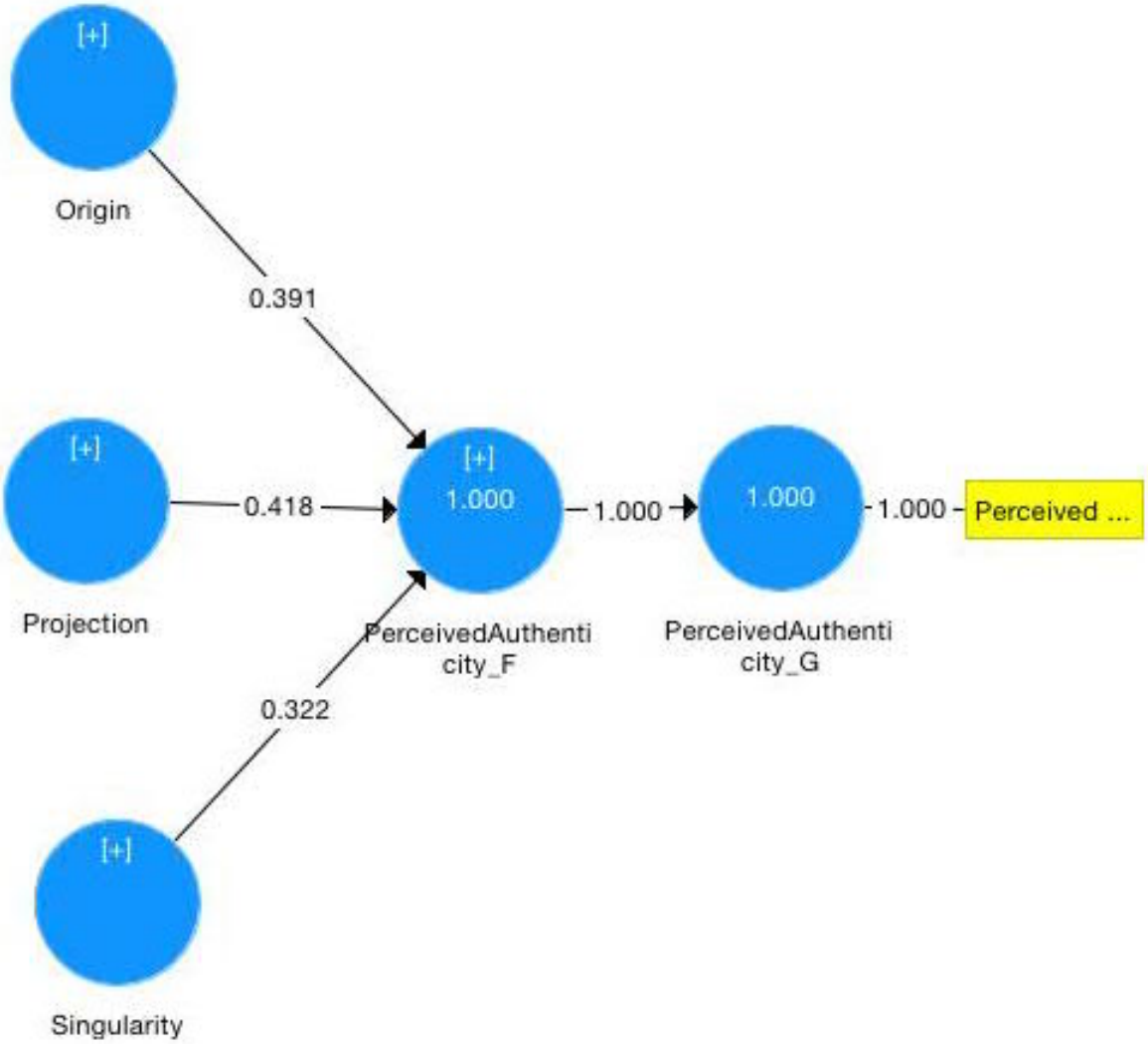

Figure 8: Convergent validity - *Perceived Authenticity*

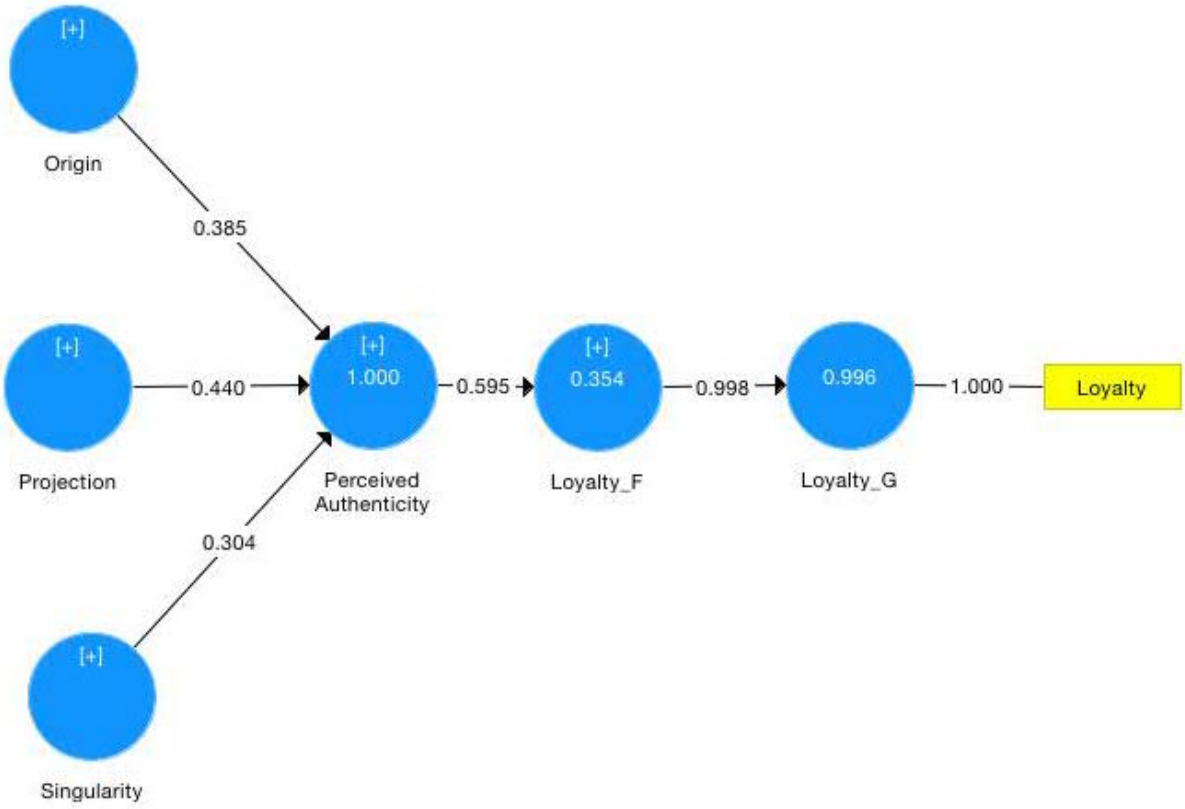

Figure 9: Convergent validity - *Consumer Behavior*

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