

Hospitality industry should standardize safety, improve perceptions of sophistication

5 April 2017, by Nathan Hurst

In recent years, "experience-based" hospitality companies, such as Airbnb, have experienced a meteoric rise in revenue and new customers. Experience-based hospitality companies allow travelers to book homes and apartments rather than hotels, currently is the second-most profitable hospitality brand, only trailing Hilton Hotels and Resorts. Now, University of Missouri researchers have found significant differences in how men and women view the experience-based hospitality industry, and the findings could help the young industry continue to grow.

Dae-Young Kim, an associate professor of hospitality management and Seunghwan Lee, a doctoral student in the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, performed a national survey to determine [consumer perceptions](#) of the experience-based hospitality industry by studying the Airbnb [brand](#). They found that the more often men used Airbnb, the more positively they perceived the brand. However, they found women's perceptions of Airbnb to be more dependent on individual experiences.

"Women seemed to have much more complicated perceptions of Airbnb and were particularly sensitive to specific experiences and locations," Kim said. "While men seem to have an overly positive outlook about the brand, women's perceptions swing positively or negatively depending on the individual [location](#) where they stay on a specific trip."

Kim said that one important factor for women was safety. Kim and Lee found that if women perceived a specific location to be less safe, they would have more [negative perceptions](#). Likewise, locations that were perceived as more safe were found to contribute to more positive overall brand perceptions.

"One of the best features for this brand of hospitality is the uniqueness of each location and that customers aren't subjected to standardized hotel rooms," Lee said. "However, it is clear that some things need to be standardized, such as safety, among all locations in order to improve brand perceptions and ensure long-term economic success."

Kim and Lee also found three primary themes, or "brand personalities" —excitement, sincerity and competence—scored highly among customers of experience-based hospitality. A fourth [brand personality](#) that scored low among customers was sophistication.

"Many competitors such as Hilton and Hyatt are starting to move into this same 'unique experience' space," Kim said. "Large corporations have money to create unique experiences while maintaining high levels of perceived sophistication. If Airbnb and other similar companies want to continue their success, they may want to consider marketing themselves as more sophisticated in order to appeal to customers who would otherwise lean toward more established hotel brands."

The study, "Brand personality of Airbnb: application of user involvement and gender differences," was published in the *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

APA citation: Hospitality industry should standardize safety, improve perceptions of sophistication (2017, April 5) retrieved 23 May 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-04-hospitality-industry-standardize-safety-perceptions.html>

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