Standing out from the crowd: exploring online information cues on Airbnb gastronomy experiences

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Introduction

With the rising of sharing economy in the hospitality and tourism industry, online peer to peer (P2P) platforms such as Airbnb have been at the center of discussions among scholars and practitioners on promoting tourism events and entrepreneurship. The business patterns have a great impact and drive the fast speed of growth on the industry (Dogru et al., 2019). Among all the experiences, gastronomy experiences and events are booming, pushing the sector revolution. On Airbnb, there are more than 3,000 gastronomy experiences are exclusively dedicated to the gastronomy worldwide. One the one side, having the growing gastronomy sector positively influenced the uniqueness and innovative of the experiences. However, with the growing competition, how to stand out from the listings and what information cues consumers value more when searching the gastronomy experiences remain uncovered. Therefore, this study focuses on consumers' information processing, aiming to elaborate tourists' selections based on information cues displayed through online platforms. In addition, image has long been discussed as one of the key determinators for people making decision, especially for food related products (Lai et al., 2018). Hence, all the factors that might potentially influence the consumers' decisions are considered in our research, including image.

Literature review

The definition of the gastronomy experience vendor has been transformed because vendors are now regular consumers as well as merchants, they deliver value, create brand image, share responsibility, and set prices (Liang et al., 2018). One of the most successful cases of a P2P travel marketplace is Airbnb, and two successful value propositions are: Experience value proposition: "led by locals"; credibility proposition: easy access and the establishment of a trusted marketplace through community engagement (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). Therefore, in this study, we showcased how listing Airbnb gastronomy experiences can affect the purchasing intention.

3.Methods

This study's method contains two steps. In the first step, researchers scraped the data from Airbnb experiences website with all the gastronomy experiences based in the U.S. and performed text mining to decide on attributes' discrete levels. This provides a strong foundation for conjoint analysis design. Specifically, this study first reviewed the information displayed on

SERPs of Airbnb experiences with a selection of food and drink category and closely examined the layout and attributes displayed through the SERPs page, including featured images. The second step contains a survey design aimed to simulate Airbnb experiences through the Airbnb app and ask participants to choose the ideal options. Further analyses were taken place to understand the online selection behavior, where the logit model was incorporated to calculate the part-worth utilities, Hierarchical Bayesian (HB) analysis to estimate the importance of attributes, and LCA to segment the market based on heterogeneity and homogeneity.
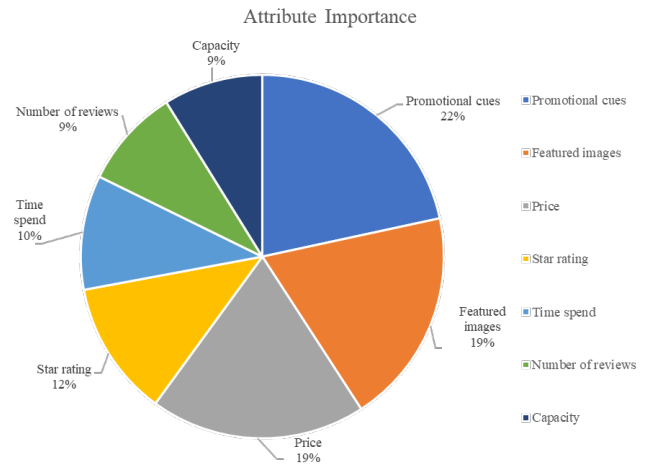
4. Results

585 gastronomy experiences were included in the Airbnb dataset, which included all the food and drink activities located in the U.S. by June 2021. Conjoint analysis includes a total of 581 respondents. Essentially, this study has two sets of findings. The first relates to the importance of promotional cues in Airbnb gastronomy experiences, especially the Superhost badge. For instance, we find evidence that potential tourists prefer to have some validation on host credibility, as Superhost badge is the most preferred level, and promotional cues are the most important attribute. This is especially not surprising as the Airbnb platform is a peer-to-peer platform, and Superhost status provides validation on host service quality, experiences, and ratings (Ert & Fleischer, 2019). In our study, Superhost badge's signaling effect is empirically verified in Airbnb experiences setting, and its impact on gastronomy experiences booking intention is manifest.

In addition to promotional cues, featured image and price have all proven to be excessively relevant to Airbnb gastronomy experiences selection. Images again demonstrated the ability to attract demand. On top of that, from the featured image utility scores, preferences on image themes further provide insights and guidance to Airbnb hosts on how to enhance their attractiveness through SERP on Airbnb. It turns out people prefer to see indoor group activities, food and drink categories, and layout spacing. With gastronomy-related experiences, people are naturally more curious about the surroundings and intrigued by the food and drink-related image. As far as the most preferred level, "indoor group activities," people can easily connect with the images because they'd like to picture themselves in the same settings. Due to the nature of the peer-to-peer platform, the experiences are also considered as value co-creation (Casais et al., 2020). Therefore, group indoor activities images satisfy the curiosity of the surroundings and show the interaction among hosts and tourists to reproduce the co-creation process and display a certain level of authenticity. Please see table 1 and 2 for details.

Table 1. Part-worth utilities for the segments

Attributes and levels	Rescaled Utilities (Zero-Centered Differences)		
featured images	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Food and drink	-9.76	28.53	8.39
Group walking tours	-44.67	-52.22	-11.16
Host demonstration	20.25	-26.10	-13.46
Indoor group activities	15.65	83.83	27.96
Layout and spacing	15.42	6.71	0.84
Outdoor nature view	3.10	-40.75	-12.57
Star rating			
4.8	-17.10	-64.03	-19.86
4.9	-32.38	-0.38	-1.16
5	49.48	64.40	21.02
Number of reviews			
61	-33.80	-8.35	-6.24
172	18.90	-8.97	-3.81
655	14.90	17.31	10.05
Time spend			
75 mins	-1.20	-0.22	2.97
90 mins	5.64	21.98	9.28
150 mins	-4.44	-21.76	-12.24
Capacity			
5 people	-18.51	-16.01	-7.80
8 people	22.43	17.16	9.02
10 people	-3.92	-1.15	-1.22
Promotional cues			
Availability is rare	-4.30	-70.94	-19.98
Usually sells out	-14.19	-108.19	-40.44
Superhost badge	-1.95	196.55	61.40
Blank	20.44	-17.42	-0.98
Price			
$22	187.60	-0.02	28.78
$65	39.67	13.80	9.30
$163	-227.27	-13.78	-38.09

Table 2. Average attribute importance.

Attribute Importance

- Promotional cues 22%
- Featured images 19%
- Price 19%
- Star rating 12%
- Time spend 10%
- Number of reviews 9%
- Capacity 9%

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