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**Evaluating brand perceptions, attitudes and usage of Airbnb with the uses and
gratifications framework**

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Evaluating brand perceptions, attitudes and usage of Airbnb with the uses and gratifications framework

by

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Abstract

Evaluating brand perceptions, attitudes and usage of Airbnb with the uses and gratifications framework

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Airbnb and many technology platforms disrupt markets with superior customer functionality and reduced friction. However, as these technology platforms evolve from disruption to mainstream providers, it is imperative for them to also move from being perceived as a “facilitator” brand to a “gratifier” brand in order to retain and grow brand advocates and loyal consumers. This study applies the well-known uses and gratifications theoretical framework, coupled with qualitative research, to explore and understand consumer perceptions of Airbnb within the facilitation/gratification spectrum. This study revealed that consumers in the Gen-Z and college target market perceive Airbnb as a facilitator brand, but have clear aspirations for the brand as a gratifier. Airbnb may build on this study to evaluate and evolve marketing communications to demonstrate tangible gratifications of the brand more meaningfully to consumers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For decades, marketers have applied the uses and gratification theory to explain active, goal-driven consumer's media usage that builds affective connections with audiences (Ruggiero, 2000). Gratification of affective, cognitive, social, personal and relaxation needs are the opportunities when successful connections are made between media and people. But for the last decade, technology platforms such as Airbnb, Uber, and Paypal have disrupted industries by providing superior functional user experiences that reduce friction and eliminate intermediaries without full gratification. Even though these platforms have become wildly successful businesses through functional superiority, they have yet to build strong emotional connections through affective gratification, the consequence of which is higher digital interactions and stronger business performance (McInnis, Park & Thompson, 2005; Sciarrino & Prudente, 2016).

Airbnb, founded in 2007, has been a successful disruptor of the hotel and travel industry. With more than 2 million people booking with Airbnb each day, the sheer size of the service is testament to how it has changed the landscape (Airbnb, n.d.). The company's innovative platform facilitates and connects people with an easy way to search, book and stay. However, beyond outstanding transactional facilitation, the company does not appear to be offer gratification through media. Before, during, and after a stay is booked on Airbnb, the brand has the opportunity to fulfill a consumer's needs and intentions. This opportunity spans the online and offline interactions, which comprises the consumer journey that guests have with the brand (Edelman & Singer, 2015). In advertising, a story and experience connects a discerning consumer with representations of the company's brand promise. Thus, Airbnb can gratify users within a consumer journey through an advertising experience and deliver long-lasting brand success.

While there is no shortage of the application of uses and gratification theory in advertising, there have not been any comprehensive analyses that have explored Airbnb. Moreover, the existence of affective, cognitive, social, personal, and relaxation needs with respect to Airbnb media provides an important criteria to understand consumer perceptions and aspirations. To explore and understand Airbnb as either a “facilitator” or “gratifier” brand, we establish the theoretical framework, the market, and the brand’s position in it. We then evaluate consumer behavior and perceptions of Airbnb through a consumer survey. Finally, we explore consumer perceptions and travel aspirations more deeply through focus groups and mood boards. These methodologies uncovered latent consumer gratification needs and, through discussion and analysis, open up space for the brand to become a gratifier in advertising communications.

Chapter 2: Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications theory has classically defined that audience members are active participants in their media choices and use the media to achieve some goals. There are both internal and external motivations for media use, according to Papacharissi and Rubin (2000). There are three perspectives within U&G theory that sets it apart from others (Quan-Haase & Young, 2014). The audience is active, diverse, and fragmented. The theoretical framework focuses on what people do with media rather than the effects media has on them. Finally, U&G informs the study of media and audience interaction in terms of gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. These aspects highlight the expectation and actual experience interacting with media.

Interpersonal needs that individuals seek to satiate include affection, inclusion, and control. Audience goals for media use to achieve internal satisfaction include pleasure, relaxation, and escape. On social media and in the branding sphere, Gao and Feng (2016) found five categories for gratifications: “information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, and impression management.” These five categories may evaluate themes and compare to content that Airbnb produces. U&G allows for intense focus on the audience and its needs on a spectrum rather than a binary system to evaluate an audience as high or low involvement.

The pace at which audiences can access this information is obviously incredibly fast. Ruggiero writes that “networks are always ‘up,’ allowing 24-hour asynchronous or synchronous interactions and information retrieval and exchange among individuals and groups (Kiesler, 1997)” (2000). U&G argues that audience members, over time, have different goals while they are accessing media and after they have consumed it (Ruggiero, 2000).

However, different activity can be expected in the diverse settings and communication processes that our audiences exist in (Ruggiero, 2000). He writes that

some audiences are goal directed and some are curious about a topic. This spread of goals is especially relevant while we swim in a soup of digital media, from social feeds to augmented and virtual reality applications.

Consumers within this active audience seek an experience with a brand and have ample digital resources to research. One source confirms that “(Consumer) internet-sleuthing skills paired with detailed review sites and live video streams mean that they have visibility into almost anything your company does” (Lai, 2018). On the experience front, PriceWaterhouseCooper found that about half of consumers would pay more for a “friendly” experience and that good experiences with brands are “more influential than advertising.” The consulting company also found that functional benefits outweigh technology for technology’s sake (PwC, n.d.). Consumers will use media to create understanding of the brand, such as how the brand delivers satisfaction, information, etc. online. Because consumers are always interacting with the media on some level of engagement, branded touch points must be organized and intentionally targeted for the customer journey stage and level of interest.

U&G, finally, has a methodological perspective that will be useful to this investigation. Centering the audience in our understanding of new uses of digital media and technology, advertising research must begin with potential information sources and the needs that audiences have as they “(attempt)... to make sense of the world” (Dervin, 1980).

When technology companies fail to meet consumer needs, this misunderstanding translates into marketing communication and customer journeys. Tech companies don’t always communicate well because they don’t appreciate the goals, approaches, and constraints that customers face when they are on their journey (Epp & Price, 2011).

CUSTOMER DECISION JOURNEY

Edelman and Singer's conception of the consumer purchase funnel is the customer decision journey (2015). First, consumers eliminate products to suit needs or fix a problem before they even begin considering them — there are just too many to consider. Next, they begin to evaluate. At this stage, outreach is more likely to be listened to rather than push communication. Then, they make a decision to purchase. The evaluation to purchase stage may be significantly condensed due to the immediateness of online shopping and booking, especially in the travel and tourism category.

Post-purchase, consumers should be given reason (and resources) to enjoy, advocate and bond with the good or service. A Single Grain blog mentions that the customer must be provided with prompts and gifts to further the relationship along. It's not enough to court and date the consumer, you must continue to show that you understand them and like them back. Here is where relevant content is useful: "Because those great experiences that lead to delighted customers lead returning customers which lead to brand evangelists. These are the people who will go out of their way to promote your brand to their friends." (Siu, n.d.). This cycle includes understanding the consumers decision journey; determining which touch points are priorities and how to leverage them; and allocating resources accordingly. This understanding of what your customers need to help them along the journey is essential to make that leap between product or service understanding and the resonance that brands like Airbnb promise in their owned media. With more audiences turning to content for information, confirmation, and verification in the travel planning process, Airbnb cannot be quiet in their owned media. The brand must take advantage of consumer needs during this stage in order to make the customer the hero of their own journey to a new destination.

Luckily, there is a solution to the potential disconnect between consumer and brand: put the customer experience at the center of the offering, from end to end. This is a

commitment that must be made “by thinking like the customer, by understanding needs as well as wants, (so that) a customer-centric company can ensure that the long-term experience of the customer is optimized” (Poynter, 2019). One way that Conversant Media points to discover these themes is to “... access insight on both past and real-time consumer actions and decisions through a true single customer view” (2018). Of most interest to advertisers is the forward-facing owned media that the brand can control. This owned media is the best opportunity to address consumer needs as they arise in the purchase process. Because consumers are constantly engaged in media consumption in a journey towards purchase and enjoyment, an evaluation of Airbnb’s customers and the content ecosystem within media usage is foundational to understanding uses and gratification of the brand. Placing the user’s intent on a spectrum, in addition to acknowledging their uses and gratifications, is a strategic use of content marketing. By taking a user-oriented approach in a strategic way, Airbnb can leverage content creation in an established framework to gratify users from owned channels and co-create customer gratification.

CONTENT MARKETING

According to the Content Marketing Institute, content marketing is educational content that does not specifically promote the brand, and it is content focused on an audience with common questions. The content must also be relationship-building and delivered to a customer at the most useful time in their decision journey. CMI goes further to define content marketing as a strategic program that is “valuable, relevant, and consistent” (Linn, 2018). It is different from paid advertising because it does not have a direct ask and is placed and spread on owned media. The central question for every brand-as-publisher is: what do you have for your audience that no one else can offer? Airbnb can use this opportunity to position themselves in the minds of consumers as a

gratifier with content that forms a relationship rather than a functional asset to book a place to stay.

Further, content created in a brand storytelling framework must be memorable and allow the customer to see themselves as central to the message. Once the audience identifies with the message, companies can establish themselves as a credible expert and “(build) authentic, open and long-term relationships based on trust and partnership” (Kowalska, 2016). With an established relationship in the ever-present media that consumers interact with, Airbnb will be trusted when it comes time to evaluate the service and make a purchase decision. Again, orienting branded communications towards audience need for gratification, Airbnb can present itself within media ecosystems as a gratifier and relevant voice in the category.

Content marketing is storytelling that can show consumers the final benefit of product use, especially within the Millennial generation. Marketers need to segment and adjust to millennial preference. One source recommends using language, tone and imagery to inform WOM recommendations (BCG, 2013). Further, millennials are not merely embracing digital tools and resources, they’ve come to expect brands to leverage technology that removes friction, adds efficiency and simplicity and enhances their overall planning experience (FutureCast, 2016). Lastly, it’s crucial to enable this demographic to tell their own stories. TripAdvisor writes that “When it comes to marketing strategies, Millennials are far more likely to take hotel advice from their peers than from traditional marketing channels” (McIver, 2013). Convincing consumers that the brand is a gratifier within the story of travel and tourism will lead to greater brand loyalty and identification.

Lodging brands should arm their millennial guests with shareable content that they can use to share their lives. On the marketing side, websites and social media should accommodate for group travel and booking, and small event planning services should be

more easily accessible (BCG, 2013). However, only about one third of millennial travelers have been influenced or actually booked a trip because of social media content (Manoukian, 2018). Positioning the brand within a story on social media can help the brand stand out in the myriad options that consumers have. When the brand moves to “gratify” consumers, a story will help them place their use rather than forcing them to identify and make assumptions about what Airbnb can provide to them.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There are more than 70 million millennials in the U.S. as of 2017, a group that was born from 1981-96. 56 percent are non-Hispanic white people, and 88 percent of the entire generation lives in metro areas. \$72,500 was the median household income in 2016 (Fry, Igielnik, & Patten, 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 39.9 percent of people ages 25-29 have at least a bachelor’s degree (2017).

Fromm and Garton propose six different types of millennials. The most applicable to this study is that of the “Hip-ennial.” This group consists of 29 percent of the demographic, is female-led and aspirational (2013). While this segment is more aspirational than anything else, owned media reaches this audience more than any other as they use social media the most. Relevant publishers that reach this demographic include BuzzFeed, reaching 83 percent of all millennials. Refinery29 will reach 62 percent of women between 18 and 34 and over 88 percent of women between 21 and 24 (Nielsen, n.d.).

Back in 2009, 46 percent of millennials fell into a creative segment compared to 24 percent of the total population (Millennial Marketing, 2009). According to the report “The Consumer Redefined: The Creative Class” more “educated, tech-inclined consumers want boundless options at their fingertips” (Rana & Pedigo, 2017).

For those in arts and media careers of all ages, there are 1.1 million jobs as of 2014 and they made more than the average income as millennials also do (Vilorio, 2015). Millennial media usage is also concentrated in online media. According to a report “The Consumer Class: Redefined,” 22 percent of the creative class are 18-29, and they lead the shift towards experience-based consumerism (n.d.). The mindset of this consumer is one of experience over the material, and the report shows that a sizable number of millennials fall into a creative mindset and class itself.

As a bird’s eye view of the travel and tourism category, the United States hotel industry made \$193 billion in 2018. Smaller hotels and motels account for 77.4 percent of that total and are the biggest competition to Airbnb’s growth (Hyland, 2018). A small segment of the offerings are boutique or luxury hotels that are somewhat more removed from the life and times of the areas in which they inhabit. There is low concentration in this mature industry, with “Marriott International Inc., Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc., InterContinental Hotels Group PLC and Wyndham Hotels and Resorts, account for an estimated 13.8% of industry revenue, excluding their franchised establishments” (Hyland, 2018).

Travel is part of the millennial identity for more than 70 percent of the demographic (Airbnb, 2016). It’s an overwhelming part of the generation’s identity. It tracks that “in 2015, 82 percent of millennials took a vacation...” (Anderson, n.d.). The Airbnb study also found that the demographic enjoys staying and experiencing local, being active, and taking control of their experience. It’s so important to note that this demographic will spend \$4,400 per person on travel overall in 2019 (Leonhardt, 2019).

Fromm and Garton write that “Millennials express an overwhelming desire for adventure, and they pursue these opportunities as if they are keeping a scorecard and checking off experiences as they go” (2013). Not only is it part of their identity, but they take the concerted effort to travel. A report from Statista included that millennials would

like to take 2.1 international trips and 4.1 domestic trips in 2018 (AARP, 2017). These trips can sometimes arise in the form of a smaller vacation. For example, “(It) has become increasingly popular since it allows Millennials to go somewhere for less money and fewer days out of the office” (Romano, 2019).

Millennials are limited financially, yet the group has a higher purchase intention of travel online than other generations (Amaro, et. al, 2016). People weigh cost as much as safety when they choose where to travel, but still want to get out of their comfort zone. Going solo and spending more on experiences are one way to keep costs down (Resonance Consultancy, 2018). Millennials, as travelers and working adults, “56 percent have gone on travel for business and 32 have added vacation to that business travel time” (Millennial Travelers, 2016).

There’s a movement within the cheaper and younger generation to find a less expensive option to travel. That means they’re motivated and prompted by a deal. For example, “16% being prompted to think about their trip because of a bargain... 46% of participating 18-24 year olds having decided on their destination before starting their research” (TripAdvisor, n.d.).

One survey suggests that Millennials value spaces where they can easily transition from one activity to the next and have accessibility to a range of different environments (relaxing to social) at their convenience (Lindner, 2017). Further, shopping, events, and outdoor excursion are the top reasons millennials travel (BCG, 2013). Knowing this, lodging brands must recognize that millennials are highly influenced by brands that are able to help them create a unique and meaningful experience outside of the four walls of their lodging accommodation (FutureCast, 2016).

Women, specifically, make 80 percent of travel decisions. A large majority of millennials take health and wellness on their travel experiences, and hotels are adapting their spaces to include natural wellness and exercise experiences. (Resonance

Consultancy, 2018). Of principal concern to hospitality and travel professionals is that the current study suggests that the 18-30 age group of the American population is not homogenous in its perceptions of the travel experience (Torres, 2015).

The target market is interested in using tried and true methods if they are also digitally ready. Surprisingly, “Millennials, who have grown up using digital technologies, are more likely to use a travel agency to book travel if a mobile app with customized notifications are available” (Varricchio, Kosciulek and Stickles, 2019). WEX 2019 U.S. Travel Trends Report found that “57% of consumers feel companies should adapt their information “based on personal preferences or past behaviors exhibited” (WEX Travel, 2019).

This digital trend carries through to the airline booking experience, which commonly is the most expensive part of the trip (Price). When the target market decides to book a flight to a destination, “The most common method for booking air travel is directly through an airline’s website (30 percent) followed by a fare aggregator website (21 percent), such as Priceline or Expedia” (Varricchio, Kosciulek, & Stickles, 2019).

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SHARING SITES

College graduates and high income Americans are more likely to use home sharing sites such as Airbnb. Young people are more likely to book shared rooms, describe home sharing as good for adventurous travelers, and are twice as likely to have had a bad experience when using these apps (Smith, 2016). A full 51 percent of Airbnb users are younger than 34, and 15 percent are younger than 24 (Morgan Stanley, n.d.). About half of all the demographic use sharing staying sites, 22 percent regularly (Resonance Consultancy, 2018).

One report states that “25 percent of millennials surveyed are interested in using sites like AirBnb” (Millennial Travelers, 2016). A report on the creative class found that

70 percent of the Creative Class is aware of and/or has used the sites (Rana and Pedigo, 2017).

However, among the target consumer, 63 percent said they would use sharing sites to book lodging during the summer 2019 travel season, down from 77 percent in 2017. Also, trust of the sharing sites is down from 83 percent to 71 percent from 2017 to 2019 (Allianz Global Assistance USA, 2019).

Mintel reports that “The underlying reason for this interest may range from price consciousness with branded hotels to those seeking a more local, homey experience” (Millennial Travelers, 2016). There are two motivation factors that influence purchase intention. The first reason that millennials book Airbnb is financial; the second reason is subjective norm. Perceived usefulness and risk do not influence intention (Amaro, et. al, 2017). Statista reports that 55 percent of respondents booked with Airbnb because it was less expensive, with about one third using Airbnb because of the authentic experience. These numbers have held steady since 2015 (Morgan Stanley, n.d.).

In addition to reduced prices, consumers also benefit from increased variety provided through peer-to-peer platforms. Furthermore, consumers on the supply side benefit through additional income generated by providing goods and services through peer-to-peer platforms (Zervas, et. al, 2017). Gutentag, et. al argue that the first motivation is to save money and secondary attractions include the experience and live like a local (2018).

Research identifies that Airbnb guests generally use the same accommodation attributes associated with hotel stays to assess their experience, while the order of importance of these attributes might be different. Three main attributes, location, amenities, and host form the majority of content of the written comments on Airbnb users’ online review portal (Cheng & Jin, 2019).

One study found that our target segment that was more interested in staying in a shared room were more likely to be low income males with a low concern for cleanliness and open to social interaction with the host (Lutz and Newman, 2018). In a review of online comments for Airbnb stays, authors found that privacy and safety are valued by guests, and guests were likely to use the host's name were significantly more likely to have a favorable review (Cheng and Jin, 2019).

AIRBNB

In *The Airbnb Story: How Three Ordinary Guys Disrupted an Industry, Made Billions ... and Created Plenty of Controversy*, Leigh Gallagher writes, “When travelers leave their homes, they feel alone. They reach their Airbnb, and they feel accepted and taken care of by their host. They then feel safe to be the same kind of person they are when they’re at home” (2017). This passage describes the Airbnb experience, from the initial arrival to eventual immersion in a place. This process of becoming into yourself during a vacation is not new, but the process by which you decide is brand new. Airbnb can assist their target consumer, who is surrounded by useful media and actively searches out more information about their future travel experiences. The brand’s role in this planning experience could be revolutionary. At its most aspirational, Airbnb’s brand, customer journey, and eventual gratification is a way to feel accepted and belonging.

In 2018, AirBnb was valued at \$31 billion and earned \$100 million in 2017 from \$2.6 billion in revenue (Carson, 2018). The company was founded in San Francisco in 2007 and rented three air mattresses to three guests for \$80 each. In 2011, AirBnb was in 89 countries and hit 1 million nights booked (Carson, 2016).

There are more than 5 million listings on the site, 3.5 million people stayed in an Airbnb on its best night, and more than 400 million people have stayed in an AirBnb since it was founded (Carson, 2018). Their advertising spend is 90 percent focused on

attracting guests. Their competitors are Booking Holdings (2017 revenue: \$12.6 billion) and Expedia (2017 revenue: \$10 billion) (Carson, 2018).

Through the company's growth, the brand went through one big refresh in 2014. Airbnb's head of brand, Nancy King, gives this reasoning for the acceptance and stay here themes in the company's advertising. An internal team noted that the "accept" button on the homepage was the most-used of all the options. She said, "This video originally was not meant to be an ad; it was supposed to be on the site. But we recognized the power of the idea of acceptance, especially within the cultural narrative that was taking place" (Safian, 2017). This point is of course emphasized by CEO Brian Chesky. He said, "For so long, people thought Airbnb was about renting houses. But really, we're about home. You see, a house is just a space, but a home is where you belong" (Marion, n.d.).

Following a 2014 audit of the brand, "(Airbnb) found that when people come into contact with Airbnb they typically have a strong, emotional sense of purpose and affection for the community they're a part of, yet this spirit wasn't communicated through the brand" (Airbnb, n.d.). The content strategy area of the brand was built out to follow suit. The language and position of the content is as such, according to the head of content strategy at Airbnb: "Our guests should see the world at their fingertips and have confidence in choosing Airbnb for their next trip... In the end, we decided our voice is straightforward, inclusive, thoughtful, and spirited" (Phillips, n.d.).

Despite this 2014 rebrand and commitment to those higher-order values, Airbnb can fail when attempting to connect with their consumers. At first, there is a tendency to design the best technology and release it into the world. Engineers and product designers are flawed in their assumption that consumers immediately understand product benefits. Lindsay Pederson, Airbnb's brand strategist, is quoted in the Harvard Business Review as saying: "There's a belief within technology companies, especially software companies, of

‘We have this awesome product, and the task is just to get dumb people to know how awesome our product is’” (HBR, 2020). The combination of a flawed belief and awesome product is where advertising opportunities in the planning and strategy departments abound. The HBR article continues, stating that “Marketers are trained to convert insight about the market, consumers, and competitors into product strategies that can drive growth” (HBR, 2020). Marketers can help consumers understand the role of a new technology product with content and advertising that fits into the uses and gratifications theory of media and audiences. While owned brand communications can help as individual touchpoints, the communications must be designed with the customer journey at the fore.

Functional delivery of the product and experience is the first step. The brand must also consistently deliver on higher order values. Foremost in the minds of the up-and-coming subset of Airbnb’s target market is their place in the world and relationship to it. Gemic, a global growth strategy firm, writes that “On the one hand, (tech has) created a new culture of personal choice, mobility and convenience... On the other hand, the digital age is beset by a profound crisis of meaning... Amongst them are community, connection with nature, time, and deep connections with material objects” (Howarth and Harnoss, n.d.). These higher order values are no small potatoes. With such a deep anxiety as a current in the target market, Airbnb’s content and media output must address, with empathy for the consumer, this “crisis of meaning.” A robust content infrastructure, delivered as a relationship building process, is one way brands can build from functional excellence to value-based brand identification.

In order to consistently deliver a brand promise online, de Chernatony and Christodoulides write that companies must nurture customer relationships, involve customers in brand production, and engage customers in online communities (2003). This process, while foundational in the 2014 Airbnb rebrand, may have failed on some levels

with a select target consumer. Without an active stance in brand and relationship building, past investments in brand will fail to evolve and be relevant to new consumer segments. This emotional connection of gratification as a next step for the brand within the consumer's minds is central to achieving the theoretical goals of uses and gratifications theory. Simply put, the brand's movement must be to transform their communications so that this emotional connection puts the users and their needs first.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to explore and understand Airbnb as either a “facilitator” or “gratifier” brand, we used a mixed-method qualitative research approach. First, consumer behavior, travel associations, and media usage were measured via a quantitative survey. Next, consumer perceptions and travel aspirations were explored more deeply through focus groups and mood board projection activities.

SURVEY

Research question: Who travels, is artistic, and gets information from brands?

First, a screener survey was fielded to capture data on the sample and invite participants to focus groups conducted in fall 2019 and spring 2020. We recruited via the UT Advertising Participant Pool, emailed departmental advisors across the UT campus, and connected with teaching assistants in the advertising department and across campus. In spring 2020, we also asked participants to provide their UT EID and phone number for extra reminder and tracking purposes. Finally, we asked that respondents in the fall 2019 survey not take the 2020 survey.

The sample captured about 400 responses. The first block of the survey [Appendix 1] included questions about the frequency of travel and where the respondent stayed. The second block of questions inquired about participant preference of trip activity and how organized these travelers like to be when they take trips. The third block of questions asked about participation in a creative activity such as drawing. This set also asked about creative appreciation activities such as visiting a museum. We used the third block to qualify participants as creative on some level. Finally, we asked the participant to drag and drop media types (blog, social media) into categories of “I get most of my information from here,” “I get some information from here,” and “I never get information here.”

The following conditions screened participants into the final demographic block (without seeing subsequent question blocks) if they answered questions in the following way:

1. Planned on taking 0 trips in the next year, or if they most recently traveled a year ago or more than a year ago.
2. Disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I derive joy from experiences more than material goods.”
3. Created games, apps, or coded. Also, if the individual selected “None,” indicating they did not participate in any creative expression.

FOCUS GROUP

Research question: How do participants feel about travel, and what are associations that Airbnb can use to ladder up from facilitating to gratifying?

We invited qualified participants who RSVP'd to the fall 2019 focus groups to create a mood board during open office hours in the Advertising Graduate Student Lounge during several days in fall 2019. During spring 2020, we conducted the mood board activity immediately before the focus group. Instructions [Appendix 2] were given and artistic materials were provided, such as colored pencils and markers. We also provided magazines [Appendix 3] for would-be travelers to cut out and paste five images of a dream trip they'd like to take in the next three years. Three images described what participants want to experience on their trip, and we asked for two images that described what they would not like to do. Individuals then wrote a sentence describing a trip and one word to sum up that trip. The mood boards were shared during the first 10 minutes of the focus groups and can be found in supplemental files.

The mood board activities primarily warmed up the participants to thinking about the travel category in general. During the 45-minute focus groups, it allowed participants

to introduce themselves in a very specific and relevant way, and also allowed them to share something personal with the group.

The first block of focus group questions [Appendix 4] after the projection activity asked the groups about past trips. What was the experience, and how did they come to travel there? One question was “What brands, websites, apps, etc. do you rely on when you plan your travel? Where do you get inspired?” That led into the next section of planning trips in general, where we tried to get a feel for tone, feeling, emotional resonance, and other perceptions of content that students interact with.

Next, we moved into asking about Airbnb specifically. We asked participants to share if they had used the app or website; if not, why they have not; and for any projective ideas about when they might use Airbnb when they travel. Finally, we showed participants the “Belong” Super Bowl commercial and asked for reflections on that piece of advertising. Likes, dislikes, and main ideas were asked about and participants, by this time, were ready to evaluate if the brand’s overall promise of “acceptance” and “belonging” matched with student’s individual experience with the brand.

We offered a \$50 Amazon gift card to those who successfully completed the full experience. The gift card recipient was selected by random drawing.

Chapter 4: Findings

SURVEY

For the survey highlights [Appendix 5] we restricted participants to those that were qualified for the focus-groups. Specifically, these respondents completed all the questions including travel interest, creative activities, media usage, and demographic information. The full dataset in supplementary files includes all respondents who took the survey, however.

Participants were most likely to be 20 years old, white, and employed part time. This reflects an upper-middle class cohort that has also plans to travel two or more times in the next year. In terms of travel planning data, Airbnb ranked third with most of these respondents saying they would stay with friends/family or at a hotel before selecting an Airbnb. Experiences and immersion in other cultures were top-ranked for this set of participants, while informational and adrenaline-inducing experiences were more bell-curved. The similarity between immersion and experience points to the inter-question reliability for this survey section.

Media usage was focused on active, search-related platforms. Video, user generated content, and social media were the most likely to be used to get travel information. Other information sources were not popular with this dataset, but billboard was the most selected as a media option that they never got information from.

FOCUS GROUPS

The focus group discussions revealed four major themes that confirmed and extended the literature and survey findings. Attitudes towards experience and cultural immersion are confirmed. Travelers in the target market are interested in seeing authenticity in content and media during their search. Functional attributes of trip planning are taken for granted as an essential component, and travelers actively look for

their trips to be represented accurately in media. The focus groups also uncovered the motivations and emotions associated with staying at Airbnb. Finally, the focus groups provided necessary attitudinal context for Airbnb advertising and content marketing stimuli. Each of these findings are summarized in detail below.

THEMES

Isolation versus crowds

Crowds were panned in the focus groups, but certain activities were deemed essential for participants despite the potential for touristy activities. 170 shared that “there are just certain spots you have to go see, and just kind of have to brave the crowds and it is what it is.”

So while there is a calculus to visit a destination that is overall dense with activities, group members were honest about what they thought might be annoying. Participant 608 shared, among other dislikes when traveling, that “I don't like whenever there's a ton of people in my vicinity.” Crowded beaches, traffic, and cruise ships were all things to be “braved” rather than enjoyed. Avoidance and strategies to cope were shared in the focus groups, as well. Participant 78 directly connected the natural world with relaxation and rejuvenation, which is a goal more associated with older generations looking to get away from their busy lives and responsibilities. Again, this participant highlighted that there are less flashy and material-oriented activities when interacting with wildlife.

Most often, as a reflection on the mood boards, there was an oppositional quality to activities, settings, and overall themes that was best expressed by one female participant 620: “Then I put call of the wild just cause like it's more outdoorsy type than like the standard like touristy like museums and statues and like just urban settings I guess.” While there were many oppositional statements shared during the mood board

introductions, cultural immersion was one theme that stood out among the groups. Participant 251 connected independence and exploration in “physically exploring the land.” They also bridged this experience with cultural immersion and balanced immersion and exploration with avoiding crowded places. They preferred to make their own way in situations such as museums and local food and beverage.

Participant 604 had more specific locations in mind, highlighting the mountains or the sea — both of which had to be “off the beaten path.” It is this penchant for individualism that they decided could be found in an isolated location away from touristy places.

Most of the mood boards were centered on isolation in nature. These themes emerged again and again, but we’d like to call out boards by participants 83 and 78. Respondent 83 highlighted in direct terms that the outdoors, generally, were a desired location with active engagement in nature and activities on the beach and in a forest. Crowds and expensive trips were highlighted as undesirable activities to this person. Nature is probably associated with inexpensive activities as there are not tickets or attractions that are decided by tour operators or tourist-centric activities.

Participant 880 shared: “And then I also want to make myself understand the culture better. I feel the best way to do that is through food... And then I prefer to see things more natural and not necessarily man-made.” There is a definite sustained interest in the idealized notion of cultural immersion with international attractions, in nature, and through food. However, travelers are tuned in to the realities and discomfort of most destinations being crowded and full of tourist traps.

Cultural immersion

Cultural immersion, overall, was a way for participants to control their experience. The destination was a focus in this activity rather than a place to stay or planning the trip overall. This projection activity related consumer imagination to tactile

images and words, and participants decided that immersion was high on the list of desired activities. Also, many participants highlighted local food as a way to be immersed in culture.

Participant 170 wanted to experience history and culture outside of their comfort zone, an important distinction. Food, culture, and exploration were ways they listed in imagery and words as part of their immersion plan. Participant 608 wanted food and drink to be incidental in their exploration, and associated it with relaxation and a different aspect of their trip.

Planning and inspiration

Participant 170 relies on friends and word of mouth when she is interacting, and thinks about travel even when not actively planning a trip. She shared that “when I hear that a friend has gone there or I know someone is going there, I make a mental note.” This is supported by the U&G theory that people have motivations when they are interacting with media after a socially supported idea takes root in their future travel plans.

Participant 620 echoed the sentiment that it’s a group activity. She said. “So I want to get people together and like, Oh look, it's really cheap to go to Seattle. Just like figure it out that way.” There is a constant yearning for travel and tourism. Thus, in a socially embedded consumer, the triggers are price that drive them to connect and share their interests with friends.

Finally, participant 996 shared her hesitation with planning trips and the inspiration to begin. The “... anxiety for me comes with the planning part, but once everything is set in stone then a weight is lifted, and I'm like, ‘Yes, I can breathe finally,’ it's all okay.” Set in stone, of course, after searching and asking for content on social platforms. What do consumers look to, and where do they look?

Travel content and authenticity

Some participants are looking for text-based resources, such as participant 170: “I don't know a lot of people [buy travel] books anymore, but I like having those. I'll look through, and mark things and that kind of stuff, and that sort of helps me.” Another, 251, echoed those sentiments. She said: “But ultimately I'm looking for texts.” One participant, 608, shared the most rote research method that is also text-based: “When you Google things to do here, or places to eat here, these blogs are usually the first thing that come up, and they're pretty helpful so I've found myself looking at those a lot.”

However, the authenticity of travel, even from an influencer or a brand, is paramount to some participants. From friends to trusted travelers that share their experience online, participants turn to social media to verify their assumptions and research after they begin planning and during their daily media usage.

Friends and family are important to participant 170, especially because she is interested in travel. She uses social media to “hear how their trip went, or check Facebook, or Instagram to see how that went for them.” Additionally, participant 251 shares why she does not turn to branded accounts: “Just because I feel like it's not as authentic as a real person giving a review on a website or something.”

However, some participants were interested in attractive scenes for their social media feeds. Participant 996 shares that “I follow a lot of travel bloggers, just because it's pretty, and I'm scrolling through and I can see pretty things. Not necessarily because I want to travel, just I want to see pretty things in my feed.” These travelers are interested in the category, but may not have an existing or urgent need to find a destination or activities to do once they're in place. Participant 620 also looked to bloggers and trusted social media accounts to verify the places that they are interested in. She shares, “You look for a blogger that lives like in a certain city. Like go visit this place and then they were trying to like look into it and it was a fake place.”

This veracity and truth seeking extends to video content, which participants shared as necessary when doing travel research. Participant 713 started with “Also whenever I am going to a resort style place, I'll usually look it up on YouTube,” and focus group member 880 responded that “Yeah, I was gonna say YouTube as well because it's just, you don't really necessarily have to come up with the vision yourself, you can literally see it.” At this point in the process, when content is used as a research support, consumers will use content to co-create their “vision” for travel experiences.

To the “trust, but verify” point we made earlier, video is a great way to prove to consumers that their investment will pay off. Participant 713 shares that, with video, “... you're getting someone's perspective, you're not just getting a great photo from their website. It's more like, ‘Oh, this is actually what I'll be experiencing.’”

Why stay in Airbnb?

We asked participants about the difference between hotels and Airbnb because few people had stayed in a hostel. Additionally, we did not concentrate on “staying with a friend or family member” because, as it is a free option for traveling, does not compete on the same level as an accommodation that you'd want to pay for.

Groups and friend traveling were one reason that participant 251 chooses to use Airbnb. She shares that “Generally, when we would stay in a hotel unless it's an experience like that where we're going with a group... I guess more personalized to what you're looking for.” We'll come back to that personalized aspect later in this section. Participant 787 also shared the practical reasons: “And if there's a bigger group of friends that we can't fit in one hotel room, so that's more convenient to get Airbnb.” Convenience from a selection standpoint continues into the actual use of the product, but it's important to emphasize that Airbnb's technological advances are just assumed as part of the experience.

However, there were a few holdouts for hotels because it is a family habit. Participant 170: “I grew up going to hotels. If I can swing a hotel, I would prefer that.” However, participant 934 shares the one thing that Airbnb has classically capitalized on against hotel chains. She says that “being a hotel you feel like you're like traveling like an outsider.” This does contribute to two other negative feelings. Participant 942 shares that “So we just want to be like kind of like independent. We have our own schedule. So being in a hotel kind of fits with that feeling.” Being able to come and go with full-service tended to be an underlying theme. The formality of a hotel, also, contrasts with participant 608, saying that “I felt like I was staying someone else's house.” Family photos and other accessories made the place feel “lived-in.” The upside to this format, however, is shared by participant 252, in Airbnbs: “So, I feel like you feel both more comfortable and also more immersed in that place.” The contrasts between the standard, established hotel experience and the more informal, stay-by-stay unique experience is something that Airbnb has to deal with as a baked-in part of their offering.

The uniqueness, of course, is what Airbnb offers. Especially in consumer ability to personalize and control. From adaptability to stay features, focus group members were positive about their ability to customize and personalize. Participant 713 summed it up by saying that she could “... kind of go in with all these details in mind since there's such a variety of different kind of places you can stay.” She continued that “We heavily relied on the photos, obviously, and also just proximity. 880: It's like, oh, price, it's like, oh, what are the ratings, how many beds are there. So yeah, we started from location and went from there.” In addition to the location map being a prime feature of Airbnb, the calendar and photos are highlighted as well. Participant 996 says of her experience with other travelers in her group that: “We just look at pictures and we're like ‘Okay, that's gonna fit all of us,’ or ‘we're gonna have to share of bed,’ stuff like that.” Customers have established what they can look for based on the categories that Airbnb offers, including

price, location, and photographic evidence. Participants did not mention one of the service's main quality control features: the reviews of the hosts and accommodation.

There is an opportunity for Airbnb to offer more customization and personalization, however. Participant 880 shares that "I kind of like to have the sense of control of what I want to do and I can go ahead and do it the way I want to." While there are quite a few options that consumers can use, there is a small demand for the ability to get into more detail rather than allow the service to choose based on a limited set of data. The trust of digital offerings is not at a level that can be assumed by consumers, and different people will want different "proof" and opportunities to verify their stay to suit their needs.

Airbnb ad

When we showed the :30 advertisement for Airbnb that only shows (presumably) the faces of hosts and guests, along with words that the commercial wants consumers to associate with Airbnb, participants were both familiar and agreeable to the message. Participant 934 shares that "I had already seen it and I saw that it like blew up on Instagram and like on social media. I loved it." Along the same lines, participant 996 agreed that the message resonated with the experience they had. She shares that "And every host that I've stayed at the Airbnb, they're so kind, and they're always available to call or text." Some focus groups were more critical of the advertisement in theory, but could not come up with specific examples of how the brand had betrayed the message shared in the video.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results confirm and extend the model of an active participant pursuing uses and gratifications in a media environment. The extension in this paper's findings are that consumers are extremely attuned to the veracity and truthiness of the claims made by brands, friends, family, and influencers. Not only do consumers actively use media, but their gratification needs extend into the type of content and mediums they seek.

The literature suggested that millennials would want to be immersed in the culture of their travel destination and Airbnb location, but we did not find any literature pointing toward the need for escape or isolation from crowds. Intuitively, crowds and tourist traps are something to be avoided on trips, but the mood board projection activities were almost universal in the avoidance of crowds. In fact, participants will search for a secluded, natural, space to unwind and be immersed in. This activity did not focus on marketing or media usage, but confirms another data point that warrants further investigation for travel brands to make use of.

Finally, Airbnb usage and associations were mostly functional, with the app and website use flagged by participants as a facilitator. However, the reactions were satisfied rather than delighted or bonded to the experience in any emotional sense. Participants did not have a clear sense of how the guest and host should interact, but did sense a difference between Airbnb's brand and individual experiences they or their friends had with the service. This gap in perception allows Airbnb to invest in branding to build on the positive functional associations. These conclusions form the basis of managerial recommendations. While there is functional understanding and no overwhelming negative emotion associated with the brand, Airbnb must move quickly to invest in a gratification model. The investment in consumer-focused uses and gratifications is a structured set of advertising that will build the brand within a consumer journey

framework. Further, the confirmation of media usage by travelers in this target market supports a content marketing strategy for successful advertising.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Two major categories of managerial advice came from this research. First, a continued focus on customers in marketing communications. Second, we found that certain features and mediums would be a worthy investment on the part of Airbnb.

We propose that Airbnb use branded content to amplify spheres of influence. Consumers shared that their primary instigation of trip planning and verification came from their friends and other people that they trust. Therefore, replicating this level of authenticity by sharing other users similar to those in target markets would leverage this existing trust that consumers already have. Users trust those that seem authentic as a heuristic for their own experiences. Also, we found that Airbnb is associated with group travel. Airbnb could efficiently guide the group travel experience as an introduction, then leverage the post-purchase process to encourage repeat purchase.

Focus group participants were excited about the levels of usability in the Airbnb website and app, but indicated a desire for further customization and control over what properties and experiences served to them by Airbnb. In current mass marketing and communication, the “end” is currently emphasized while a new promotion of the “means” could encourage new customers to use Airbnb. Finally, video should be included in the customer journey and associated content marketing. While video is an important and expensive investment, targeted promotions in the post-purchase, pre-use time could support consumers while they are excited for their trip. Overall, authenticity and targeted messages are the two main takeaways for Airbnb marketing.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations for this research included data collection, both secondary and primary sources were hard to select in a measured way.

Complete data breakdowns are not available for the entire market sector because there are many paywalls and expensive services that collect and warehouse this kind of data. Additionally, internal Airbnb data is not available publicly, and the marketing documentation does not include specific consumer attitudinal data that could have been useful to focus this research. Thus, a qualitative and exploratory methodology is taken in order to capture possible interests, attitudes, and perceptions.

Sampling is another limitation common to student research. We used snowball sampling here at the University of Texas at Austin, but the captured sample may not represent travellers or a segment that is most useful to Airbnb. Additionally, recruiting focus groups was a learning process for us as researchers, and the participants may not have been the most useful to match up with more specific demographics and psychographics for Airbnb. Finally, the focus group methodology is not replicable, but serves as a springboard for many advertising applications.

Appendices

SURVEY

Consent Form

Title of the Project: The Creative Millennial's Expectations and Evaluations of AirBnb Content Marketing

Principal Investigator: Peter Northfelt, Master's Degree Candidate, Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations

Faculty Advisor: JoAnn Sciarrino, Director and Isabella Cunningham Chair in Advertising, Stan Richards School of Advertising & Public Relations

Consent to Participate in Research

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you in choosing whether or not to participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent document.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to measure how consumer expectations map with content marketing in a large travel and lodging service.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

First, you will fill out a survey that asks about your travel interest, participation in creative activities, and interest in either experiential or material products. This can be accessed on the Advertising department's participant pool webpage.

If you meet certain criteria, you will be invited to a focus group.

How long will this study take and how many people will be in the study?

Participation in this survey will take 10 minutes for the survey.

What risks and discomforts might you experience from being in this study?

There are some risks you might experience from being in this study. They are sharing your personal beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about products in a group setting moderated by a graduate student. While your privacy is guaranteed in this study, the semi-public nature of the focus group means we cannot guarantee your confidentiality in the focus group portion of the study.

How could you benefit from this study?

If you are screened out in the survey, you will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the field of content marketing will be furthered by understanding your wants and needs as a consumer. This could potentially result in a more engaging purchase and post-purchase experience.

What data will we collect from you?

As part of this study we will collect your interest in travel and tourism; your interest in experiential or material products; your social and traditional media usage; your travel booking and planning beliefs; and demographic questions. We will also ask focus group participants about their travel aspirations and themes via a mood board.

How will we protect your information?

We will protect your information by using confidential storage methods after we collect your information. Your name and any other information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from the data collected as part of the project. The data that we will collect about you will not be shared with any other researchers.

Information about you may be given to the following organizations:

Representatives of UT Austin and the UT Austin Institutional Review Board

We plan to publish the results of this study. To protect your privacy, we will not include any information that could directly identify you.

What will happen to the information we collect about you after the study is over?

We will not keep your research data to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from the research data collected as part of the project.

How will we compensate you for being part of the study?

You will not receive any type of payment for your participation in the screening survey.

Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin. You will not lose any benefits or rights you already had if you decide not to participate. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, your data will be deleted from our records.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

Peter Northfelt

Principal Investigator

Phone: 480-294-8145

Email: peter.northfelt@utexas.edu

or

JoAnn Sciarrino

Faculty Sponsor

Phone: 512-471-8558

Email: joann.sciarrino@austin.utexas.edu

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

The University of Texas at Austin

Institutional Review Board

Phone: 512-232-1543

Email: irb@austin.utexas.edu

Please reference study number 2019-07-0025.

Your Consent

By signing below, you are agreeing to take this survey and potentially be invited to a focus group.

If at any time you wish to stop participating, simply close your browser window.

Please sign:

SIGN HERE

clear

Definitions

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. It will take about 10 minutes to complete. If you meet some qualifications, you may be invited to an on campus focus group with other UT undergraduates.

Definitions:

Travel: Leaving your primary residence for more than one night.

Experiences: An activity that you participate in while you are traveling, such as visiting a museum or attending a cooking class.

Travel

Select the timeframe within which you last traveled.

- A month ago
- Six months ago
- A year ago

- More than a year ago

I plan to take this many trips in the next year.

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

Please rank the lodging you prefer to stay in when you travel.

- Other
- With friends or family
- Airbnb
- At a hostel
- At a hotel

Demographic

How old are you?

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26

In addition to being a student, are you...

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Unemployed looking for work
- Other

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Other

Experience

Rate your level of agreement with the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel
	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

I prefer experiences that are adrenaline-inducing	I prefer experiences that are adrenaline-inducing Strongly agree Agree	I prefer experiences that are adrenaline-inducing Somewhat agree	I prefer experiences that are adrenaline-inducing Neither agree nor disagree	I prefer experiences that are adrenaline-inducing Somewhat disagree	I prefer experiences that are adrenaline-inducing Disagree	I prefer experiences that are adrenaline-inducing Strongly disagree
I prefer experiences that are informational	I prefer experiences that are informational Strongly agree Agree	I prefer experiences that are informational Somewhat agree	I prefer experiences that are informational Neither agree nor disagree	I prefer experiences that are informational Somewhat disagree	I prefer experiences that are informational Disagree	I prefer experiences that are informational Strongly disagree
I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture Strongly agree Agree	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture Somewhat agree	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture Neither agree nor disagree	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture Somewhat disagree	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture Disagree	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture Strongly disagree
I derive joy from experiences more than material goods	I derive joy from experiences more than material goods Strongly agree Agree	I derive joy from experiences more than material goods Somewhat agree	I derive joy from experiences more than material goods Neither agree nor disagree	I derive joy from experiences more than material goods Somewhat disagree	I derive joy from experiences more than material goods Disagree	I derive joy from experiences more than material goods Strongly disagree

agree nor
disagree

Rate your level of agreement with the following from strongly agree to strongly disagree (five point scale)

0 4 6 8 10
2

I prefer
activities
planned on an
itinerary

I read reviews
about travel
destinations,
lodging and
experiences
before I go

I research my
trip before I go

I like to travel
with a group

Artistic

I have participated in one or more of the following in the last month:

- Create games, apps or experiences. Creative that may involve coding or creating new worlds for audiences
- Other
- Writing. Journalistic, poetry, long form or short form writing in a creative way

- Performance. Dancing, acting, or making music in front of an audience
- Painting or drawing. Using materials on a canvas or screen to create art
- Filmmaking or photography. Taking pictures or film for creative expression
- None

Have you attended one of the following in the last month? Check all that apply.

- Museum
- Theater
- Other arts event
- None
- Concert

Media

Drag and drop the information source into the category it matches most.

Items

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| | I get a lot of information from here |
| ● Travel blogger | I get some information from these sources |
| ● Influencer's social media | I never get information from here |
-
- Email from an airline, hotel or car rental service
 - Billboard
 - Social media recommendations from friends
 - Video (on subscription TV, YouTube, or other OTT)
 - Print media
 - Hotel website like Marriott.com
 - Branded booking websites like Airbnb or Expedia
 - User-generated review site like Yelp or Google

Focus Group invitation

Thank you for participating in this short survey. I am pleased to invite you to a short focus group about you. Advertising Participant Pool participants may receive two credits for attendance.

After the 45-minute focus group and 15-minute activity, you may be entered into a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift certificate.

- Yes
- No

Scheduling

Are you available for a 45-minute focus group? Select a session to be held in the Center for Sports Communication and Media, CMB 3.110.

- Feb. 18 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Feb. 19 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Feb. 20 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Here is your survey identification number: `{e://Field/Random%20ID}`

Please enter your EID and to be entered into the Amazon gift card drawing.

Please enter your email address for a reminder email.

Please enter your phone number.

Powered by Qualtrics

MOOD BOARD PROMPT

Thanks for coming to this arts and crafts activity prior to the November focus groups!

Use these materials to create a collage that illustrates a trip you'd like to take in the next three years. Here are some instructions:

1. Flip through a few magazines.

2. Cut and paste
 - a. 3 images that make the trip **enjoyable**.
 - b. 2 images that picture something you'd **hate to experience**.
3. Use your 11x17 piece of paper, colored pencils, and crayons.
4. When you're done, write a sentence describing the destination, experience, or even how you might change from traveling to this place.
5. Put your survey ID on the back of the paper.

MOOD BOARD MAGAZINES

Title	Issue	Type
Tribeza Austin Curated	No. 217	Style
Austin Monthly	June 2017	Lifestyle
Doubletake	Summer 1998	Photography
Wired	November 2005	Tech
National Geographic	Vo. 210 Issue 3	Travel
Houstonia	June 2019	Travel
Portland Monthly	August 2019	Travel
Afar	September/October 2019	Travel
Sunset	May 2016	Lifestyle
Sunset	June 2016	Lifestyle
Sunset	April 2016	Lifestyle
Sunset	March 2016	Lifestyle
Sunset	February 2016	Lifestyle
Sunset	January 2016	Lifestyle
Sunset	December 2015	Lifestyle
Sunset	November 2015	Lifestyle
Sunset	October 2015	Lifestyle
All Natural	August 2019	Health
Sunset	September 2015	Lifestyle
Sunset	August 2015	Lifestyle

Sunset	July 2015	Lifestyle
Bon Appetit	August 2019	Cooking
Austin Woman	September 2019	Lifestyle
Austin Family	September 2019	Parenting
Edible Austin	No. 66	Cooking
Austin Fit	September 2019	Health
Society Texas	October 2019	Fashion
National Geographic	April/May 2018	Travel
National Geographic	June/July 2018	Travel
National Geographic	August/September 2018	Travel
National Geographic	October/November 2018	Travel
National Geographic	December 2018/January 2019	Travel
National Geographic	February/March 2019	Travel

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Welcome to this focus group. I'm Peter Northfelt, and I'm getting my master's degree in advertising here at the Stan Richards School for Advertising and Public Relations.

Our topic today is to talk together about your travel experiences, behavior, interests, and associations. I'm interested in what you think about the travel category and Airbnb. Also, I would like you to share your feelings about each stage of the travel process, from deciding to planning, actually travelling and then how you feel when you return home. You were selected because you are frequent travellers and you are creative in some way.

Before we introduce ourselves, I'd like you to note that we are audio and video recording this session. That information will be completely confidential, and only be shared inside my research team. My final report will only include information that references your survey ID number. No personal identifiers will be used.

Let's go around the table and introduce ourselves by first name only as well as tell the group what your favorite creative outlet is. I'll start us off... my name is Peter. I am the moderator, as you know. My favorite creative outlet is writing poetry. Please also share your mood board with us, explaining what the images represent and end with a single word or phrase that explains your dream travel. Hold it up and tell us where you want to go, why you want to go there, and what inspirational information sources to plan a trip like this. No need to go into a lot of depth.

Thank you. Now we will begin our group discussion about travel experiences and interests. There are no right or wrong answers in this room, but I do ask that you respect each other's contribution, even if you disagree.

I'd like to start by talking about the past.

Where do you like to go, and why do you like to go there? Anyone!

- How do you feel when you're there? What does it smell, taste, look like?
- Where do you typically stay? Who do you go with?
- 1. OK, how do you decide where to go when you decide to travel. Is it in one moment or over a period of time?
- 2. What brands, websites, apps, etc. do you rely on when you plan your travel? Where do you get inspired?
- If nobody says brand, then prompt with: are there any brands or companies that help you **plan** your travel?
 - a. What do you like best about [NAME]?
 - b. How do you interact with that outlet/source? What information do you get from them?
- 3. How do companies or brands talk to you when you're planning a trip?
 - a. What are you interested in — tone, frequency, what medium, platforms, text/video?
 - b. How are companies doing — what do you remember when you're planning a trip? What was the discovery, how did you come to it?
 - c. Emotional resonance of this content.
 - d. What about when you're not interested — what catches your eye?
- 4. Do you like to share your trip with anyone? How do you do that online or even after your trip?
- 5. Remember: Get some information on companies and brands [help in planning, what they like about that brand, interaction and inspiration - either way].

Airbnb questions:

1. How many of you have used a home share site like Airbnb?
 - a. OK, I see some of you do, and some don't. For those of you who have used it, when did you and what did you — then why. Do you use the app or website version?
2. Why haven't some of you used Airbnb?
3. When you see or hear about Airbnb, what **adjective** (one word, push) comes to mind?
 - a. Whiteboard activity.
4. When and where did you first learn about Airbnb?
 - a. What has been your experience about using is? (clarify: app, website)
5. When you plan a trip, why might you choose Airbnb?
6. What is the most memorable content from Airbnb?

Please view Airbnb content marketing...

- Pull three types of content from Airbnb. [Earned](#), [paid](#), owned.
- I'm going to show you three pieces of content from either the company or from the people who have used the service.

Short discussion about that activity.

- View: first, second, and third.
- Go over likes, dislikes and main ideas.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Q3.1 - Select the timeframe within which you last traveled.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Select the timeframe within which you last traveled.	1.00	2.00	1.34	0.47	0.22	183

#	Answer	%	Count
1	A month ago	66.12%	121
2	Six months ago	33.88%	62
3	A year ago	0.00%	0
4	More than a year ago	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	183

Q3.2 - I plan to take this many trips in the next year.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I plan to take this many trips in the next year.	2.00	5.00	3.76	0.97	0.95	183

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0	0.00%	0
2	1	10.38%	19
3	2	31.15%	57
4	3	30.60%	56
5	4 or more	27.87%	51
	Total	100%	183

Q3.3 - Please rank the lodging you prefer to stay in when you travel.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Airbnb	1.00	5.00	2.47	0.83	0.70	183
2	With friends or family	1.00	5.00	1.86	0.99	0.97	183
3	At a hotel	1.00	5.00	1.97	0.89	0.80	183
4	At a hostel	1.00	5.00	4.10	0.59	0.35	183
5	Other	1.00	5.00	4.61	0.86	0.74	183

#	Question	1	2	3	4	5	Total					
1	Airbnb	13.66%	25	33.88%	62	44.81%	82	7.10%	13	0.55%	1	183
2	With friends or family	48.63%	89	24.04%	44	21.31%	39	4.92%	9	1.09%	2	183
3	At a hotel	34.97%	64	38.80%	71	21.86%	40	3.28%	6	1.09%	2	183
4	At a hostel	0.55%	1	0.55%	1	8.20%	15	69.95%	128	20.77%	38	183

5	Other	2.19%	4	2.73%	5	3.83%	7	14.75%	27	76.50%	140	183
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Q4.1 - How old are you?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How old are you?	1.00	9.00	2.67	1.39	1.93	178

#	Answer	%	Count
1	18	22.47%	40
2	19	22.47%	40
3	20	34.83%	62
4	21	13.48%	24
5	22	3.93%	7
6	23	0.56%	1
7	24	0.56%	1
8	25	1.12%	2
9	26	0.56%	1
	Total	100%	178

Q4.2 - In addition to being a student, are you...

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	In addition to being a student, are you... - Selected Choice	1.00	4.00	2.72	0.83	0.70	178

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Employed full time	1.12%	2
2	Employed part time	49.44%	88
3	Unemployed looking for work	25.84%	46
4	Other	23.60%	42
	Total	100%	178

Q4.2_4_TEXT - Other

Other - Text

not employed, not looking

Not looking for work during schoolyear
unemployed
Unemployed
unemployed
none
Not employed and not looking for work
Unemployed looking for an internships
Full time student
Full time student
intern
intern
Unemployed
Not looking for work
not looking for work
unemployed
just a student
not looking for work
in a fraternity
unemployed
unemployed, not looking for work
Unemployed
unemployed
Working for an agency
Just unemployed
Exchange student
Have a job at home

School Full Time only
Unemployed not looking for work at the moment
Unemployed, not looking for work
Focusing on school
Unemployed, but guaranteed a summer job
Focusing on school
Not looking for work at the moment
Unemployed not currently looking for work
Not employed, not looking (just a student)
unemployed

Q4.3 - What is your ethnicity?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your ethnicity ? - Selected Choice	1.00	6.00	2.33	1.74	3.03	178

#	Answer	%	Count
1	White	61.24%	109

2	Black or African American	1.69%	3
3	American Indian or Alaska Native	0.00%	0
4	Asian	18.54%	33
5	Hispanic	16.85%	30
6	Other	1.69%	3
	Total	100%	178

Q4.3_6_TEXT - Other

Other - Text

Italy

Mixed

white and hispanic

Q5.1 - Rate your level of agreement with the following

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I derive joy from experiences more than material goods	1.00	4.00	1.70	0.81	0.66	183
2	I prefer experien	1.00	7.00	2.58	1.35	1.82	183

	ces that are adrenalin e-inducing						
3	I prefer experiences that are informational	1.00	7.00	3.07	1.27	1.62	183
4	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a different culture	1.00	4.00	1.72	0.78	0.61	183
5	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	1.00	5.00	1.96	0.99	0.98	183

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
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1	I de riv e jo y fr o m ex pe rie nc es m or e th an m at eri al go ods	48 .0 9 %	88	37 .1 6 %	68	10 .9 3 %	20	3. 83 %	7	0. 00 %	0	0. 00 %	0	0. 00 %	0	18 3
2	I pr ef er ex pe rie nc es th at ar e ad re na lin	24 .0 4 %	44	27 .8 7 %	51	30 .0 5 %	55	6. 56 %	12	7. 65 %	14	3. 28 %	6	0. 55 %	1	18 3

	e-inducing																
3	I prefer experiences that are informational	8.74%	16	24.59%	45	38.25%	70	13.66%	25	10.93%	20	2.19%	4	1.64%	3	183	
4	I enjoy experiences that immerse me in a	45.90%	84	39.34%	72	12.02%	22	2.73%	5	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	183	

	different culture															
5	I enjoy activities that are relaxing when I travel	38.25%	70	36.61%	67	19.13%	35	2.73%	5	3.28%	6	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	183

Q5.2 - Rate your level of agreement with the following

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I prefer activities planned on an itinerary	0.00	10.00	3.68	2.76	7.59	183

2	I research my trip before I go	0.00	10.00	2.45	2.97	8.80	183
3	I read reviews about travel destinations, lodging and experiences before I go	0.00	10.00	2.67	3.09	9.58	183
4	I like to travel with a group	0.00	10.00	2.49	2.69	7.21	183

Q6.1 - I have participated in one or more of the following in the last month:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Performance. Dancing, acting, or making music in front of an audience	13.50%	44
2	Painting or drawing. Using materials on a canvas or screen to create art	24.23%	79
3	Filmmaking or photography. Taking pictures or film for creative expression	24.23%	79
4	Writing. Journalistic, poetry, long form or	26.38%	86

	short form writing in a creative way		
5	Create games, apps or experiences. Creative that may involve coding or creating new worlds for audiences	0.00%	0
6	Other	1.84%	6
7	None	9.82%	32
	Total	100%	326

Q6.1_6_TEXT - Other

Other - Text

produce music

playing musical instruments for pleasure

Music. Playing instruments, singing in the shower

Learning/speaking a foreign language

Learning/speaking a foreign language

Graphic Design

Q6.2 - Have you attended one of the following in the last month? Check all that apply.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Museum	31.23%	99
2	Theater	28.71%	91

3	Concert	33.12%	105
4	Other arts event	6.94%	22
5	None	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	317

Q6.2_4_TEXT - Other arts event

Other arts event - Text

A lecture on campus

Cinema

dance performing arts

Asian Festival

Festival, art exhibitions

Bboy City

Art show

Dance Performance

Art Show

Poetry Recital

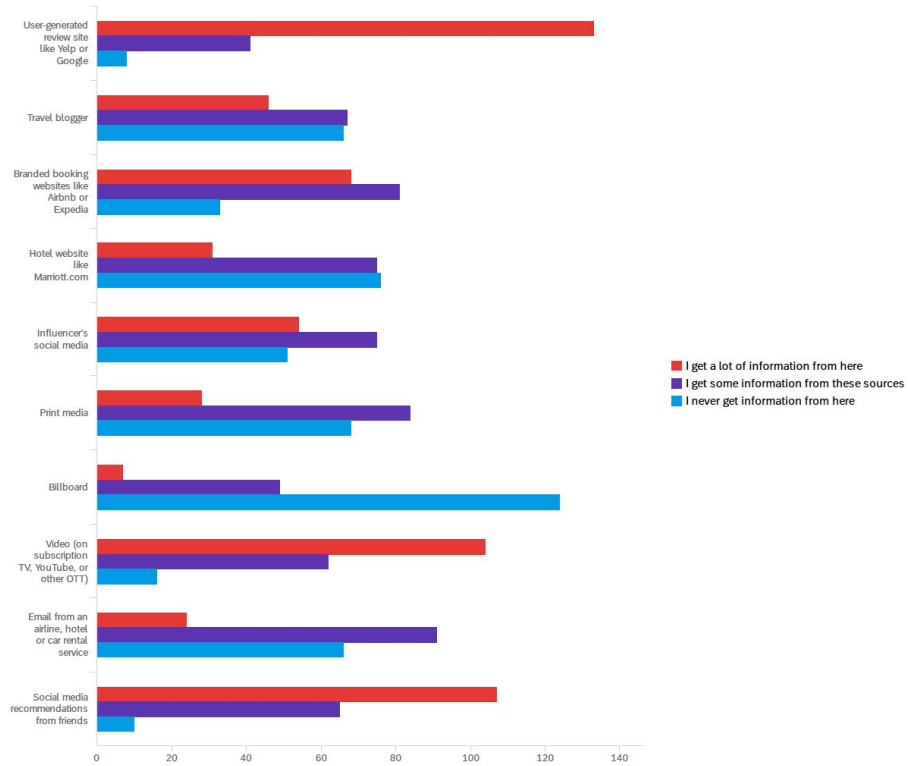
Fashion Show, Movie Theater

Performance Art Event for SkyDance

Q7.1 - Drag and drop the information source into the category it matches most.

Q7.1 - Drag and drop the information source into the category it matches most.

Drag and drop the information source into the category it matches most.



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