

TRUST ME, I'M AGREEABLE: THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED HOST PERSONALITY TRAITS IN AIRBNB BOOKING INTENTION

VJERUJTE MI, JA SAM LJUBAZAN: ULOGA PERCIPIRANIH OSOBINA LIČNOSTI DOMAĆINA U NAMJERI REZERVACIJE NA AIRBNB-u



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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the role of host personality traits in perceived host reputation, trustworthiness, and booking intention on Airbnb. Specifically, it explores the role of verbal (host description and personality) and visual cues (host photo, “Superhost” badge), grounded in the signaling theory as the theoretical setting.

Methodology – A quasi-experimental study was conducted using a convenience sample of 220 respondents. Host descriptions were pretested with the Apply Magic Sauce tool, developed by the University of Cambridge, to ensure alignment with specific personality traits. The main study used an online structured questionnaire to measure hosts’ perceived personality, reputation, and trustworthiness, as well as booking intention.

Findings and Implications – Perceived host trustworthiness and booking intention vary significantly depending on the personality of the host, but there is no effect on perceived host reputation. Perceived agreeableness had the strongest positive effect on booking intention, followed by openness, extraversion, and con-

Sažetak

Svrha Ovo istraživanje ispituje ulogu percipiranih osobina ličnosti domaćina u namjeri rezervacije smještaja putem platforme Airbnb. Isto se tako istražuje utjecaj značke Superhost, broja recenzija i ocjena domaćina povezanih s reputacijom domaćina. Osim toga, procjenjuje se kako fotografija domaćina utječe na percipiranu pouzdanost i namjeru rezervacije.

Metodologija Provedeno je kvazieksperimentalno istraživanje na prigodnom uzorku od 220 ispitanika. Opisi domaćina prethodno su testirani pomoću alata *Apply Magic Sauce*, razvijenog na Sveučilištu u Cambridgeu, kako bi se osigurala usklađenost s određenim osobinama ličnosti. Glavno je istraživanje provedeno strukturiranim online upitnikom koji je mjerio namjeru rezervacije, percipirane osobine ličnosti, reputaciju domaćina i pouzdanost.

Rezultati i implikacije Percipirana ljubaznost imala je najjači utjecaj na namjeru rezervacije, a slijede je ekstrasverzija, otvorenost, savjesnost te – iznenađujuće – neuroticizam koji je pokazao pozitivnu korelaciju. Reputa-

scientiousness. Neuroticism had a moderate negative effect. These findings offer practical value for Airbnb hosts and platform designers: emphasizing traits such as agreeableness and applying trust-enhancing imagery may boost bookings.

Limitations – The present study has several limitations, including the use of a convenience sample and an on-line setting that may limit generalizability and introduce response bias. Additionally, improvements in stimuli design and exploration of mediation models could enhance the clarity and depth of findings.

Originality – This study is among the first to integrate perceived host personality traits and visual design cues in the context of peer-to-peer accommodation, offering a novel interdisciplinary perspective on digital trust and consumer decision-making within the sharing economy.

Keywords: Airbnb, host, perceived personality traits, booking intention, sharing economy

cija domaćina bila je pod utjecajem Superhost značke i recenzija gostiju. Fotografija domaćina značajno je utjecala na percipiranu pouzdanost. Ovi zaključci nude praktične smjernice za Airbnb domaćine i dizajnere platformi, a to su naglašavanje osobina poput ljubaznosti te korištenje fotografija koje jačaju povjerenje i mogu potaknuti veći broj rezervacija.

Ograničenja Korištenje prigodnog uzorka ograničava mogućnost generalizacije rezultata. Opisi domaćina bili su simulirani, a ne preuzeti iz stvarnih profila, što smanjuje ekološku valjanost. Kulturni i kontekstualni čimbenici nisu bili kontrolirani i mogli su utjecati na odgovore sudionika.

Doprinos Ovo istraživanje među prvim povezuje percipiranu osobnost domaćina i vizualne signale u prezentaciji smještaja unutar ekonomije dijeljenja nudeći inovativnu interdisciplinarnu perspektivu digitalnog povjerenja i procesa donošenja odluka.

Ključne riječi: Airbnb, domaćin, percipirane osobine ličnosti, namjera rezervacije, ekonomija dijeljenja

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the growing demand for short-term rentals has led to the development of numerous online platforms that allow faster and easier booking (Zhang et al., 2023b). Among them, Airbnb has become the most popular platform, with over 250,000 satisfied users worldwide. This platform enables users to rent various types of accommodation, from private rooms to entire properties such as houses, creating a unique opportunity for hosts to offer their properties to a global audience (Shewale, 2023).

On platforms like Airbnb, user satisfaction is significantly influenced by the perception of the host, that is, the way hosts present themselves and their accommodation units on the platform (Sakr et al., 2024; Zhang, 2019; Liang et al., 2019; Guttentag et al., 2018; Chatterjee et al., 2019; Jiang & Lyu, 2021; Tumer Kabadayi et al., 2022). When booking accommodation, guests analyze a wide range of factors, including the host's kindness, communication skills, hospitality, responsibility, and goodwill (Puh, 2014). Furthermore, given the growing competition in the short-term rental market, hosts must pay

special attention to ways in which they can increase their chances of securing bookings. One key aspect of this process is establishing trust between the host and potential guests. The way hosts present themselves on Airbnb affects the establishment of trust and perceived safety, and trust has the greatest influence on booking intention (Mahdzar et al., 2021).

More recently, research on peer-to-peer accommodation (e.g. Airbnb) has begun to uncover how host personality traits and self-presentations impact guests' trust and booking behavior. Scholars have examined host personality through various lenses—from formal models like the Big Five (Zhang et al., 2023a) to broader perceived traits like warmth and competence (Fan, et al., 2025). Most studies focus on Airbnb as the prototypical platform, using empirical (quantitative and mixed method) approaches to link host personality cues with outcomes such as booking intention, number of bookings/reviews, guest ratings, and satisfaction. Table 1 presents a summary of empirical studies that have examined host personality factors in the context of online short-term bookings and the positioning of our research.

TABLE 1: Summary of empirical studies on the role of host personality

Authors (Year)	Methods	Personality assessment model	Trust	Reputation	Visual cues	Booking outcomes
Ert et al. (2016)	Lab experiment and field data analysis	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Zhang et al. (2023a)	Text mining and analysis of host bios	Big Five (text-inferred)	No	Yes	No	Yes
Rahman and Liang (2024)	Text mining and analysis of host bios	Big Five (text-inferred)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Zhang et al. (2025)	Computer vision analysis of host profile photos (smile detection) + bookings data	Non-verbal warmth/ competence cues (smiling)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fan et al. (2025)	Scenario experiments manipulating host type	Warmth and competence perceptions	No	No	No	Yes
Our study	Quasi-experimental design manipulating host personality	Big Five (stimuli and perceptions)	Yes	Yes	Yes (host photo)	Yes

Source: Authors' own research.

The studies presented in Table 1 dominantly rely on established taxonomies (Big Five) or ad-hoc constructs (e.g., warmth, honesty) derived from host cues. Key findings show consistent advantages for hosts projecting warmth, trustworthiness, and conscientiousness, while overly dominant or exuberant traits can be a liability in some cases. Overall, the emerging scholarship indicates that host personality matters in the success of online short-term rentals.

However, much remains to be learned about the nuances of these effects. As the sharing economy evolves, hosts and platforms alike can benefit from deeper research into how personal attributes and their presentation impact the marketplace. To this end, Table 1 also helps identify several gaps and open questions that we aim to answer with our study. First, most studies rely on secondary data and text mining to determine host personality and its role and impact on various outcomes. However, most studies lack a deeper understanding of whether such host descriptions are intentional, and more importantly, whether potential guests perceive these descriptions as initially intended. We respond to this gap by using primary data acquired through a quasi-experimental study. Second, as demonstrated in Table 1, most studies focus on either trust, reputation, or booking outcomes while not developing and testing a more comprehensive set of variables. We respond to this gap by exploring personality traits of the host combined with visual cues and their impact not only on booking intention but on perceived host trustworthiness and reputation as well. Finally, while most studies do not present an overarching theoretical framework, this research study is based on signaling theory that provides a new research perspective.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we present the theoretical framework, key concepts, and rationale guiding our study. In Section 3, we introduce the research methodology and describe the stimuli and data collection procedures. Section 4 is devoted to the presentation of the results and

analysis. In Section 5, we discuss the findings relating to our research and contrast it with the existing literature. Finally, Section 6 outlines the main contributions, implications, and limitations of the work.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We use signaling theory as the main theoretical lens for our research and complement it with the concepts of trust, reputation, and booking intention in the unique context of the sharing economy. Signaling theory explains how individuals or organizations communicate unobservable qualities through observable indicators, particularly in situations characterized by information asymmetry (Spence, 1973). The core premise is that one party (the signaler) possesses information that another party (the receiver) lacks and conveys this information through signals that are costly or difficult to fake. These signals help receivers make more informed decisions and reduce uncertainty in transactions or relationships.

Within the sharing economy, signaling theory has become particularly relevant as hosts and service providers attempt to convey trustworthiness through profile elements such as photos, self-descriptions, and reviews (Ert et al., 2016; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018). This is not surprising, as the host profile represents the first point of contact between a potential guest and the host, thus playing a key role in forming the first impression. Moreover, recent research suggests that information presented by the host is one of the key factors influencing the decision to book accommodation (Han et al., 2019). Building on this line of reasoning, signaling theory can be used to explain how Airbnb hosts signal their personality traits through verbal and visual cues in their profile descriptions in an otherwise information-sparse environment with information asymmetry. These signals reduce uncertainty

and perceived risk for potential guests and play a critical role in influencing decisions such as whom to trust, which service to choose, and how much to pay (Rosenthal et al., 2020).

The following sections explore each of these components in depth, beginning with how host personality is communicated through verbal cues such as written descriptions, followed by the effects of visual cues such as profile picture with eye contact or “Superhost” badge, and culminating in their combined influence on trust, reputation, and booking intention.

2.1. Host personality traits and verbal cues in the sharing economy

The personality of the host plays a key role in shaping the guest experience and influencing the decision to book accommodation on platforms such as Airbnb. Host’s personality traits can significantly shape perceptions of the service among users, with the potential of certain traits to affect the connection between users and service providers more strongly than others (Leri & Theodoridis, 2020). Consequently, traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and emotional stability (or neuroticism, as its counterpart) may contribute to increased booking likelihood and a generally more positive guest experience. Their influence on booking decisions is discussed below.

Extraversion is a personality trait associated with sociability, talkativeness, and energy (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Extraverted hosts often make a strong first impression because they tend to be open, friendly, and willing to engage with guests. According to Rahman and Liang (2024), extraverted hosts can increase guest trust and booking likelihood by fostering a warm and social atmosphere; nevertheless, it is important to balance sociability with respect for guest privacy.

Agreeableness refers to a host’s capacity to be kind, empathetic, and cooperative (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Hosts high in agreeableness often

create a sense of welcome and safety for guests. Rahman and Liang (2024) suggest that agreeable hosts who show care and concern for their guests are more likely to build trust and be perceived positively. As a result, they are also more likely to receive favorable reviews, which in turn enhance their reputation and attract new guests. Guests value hosts who are empathetic and willing to offer support during their stay, making this trait an important factor in booking decisions.

Conscientiousness, characterized by organization, responsibility, and attentiveness, also contributes to guest satisfaction. Conscientious hosts often maintain their properties to a high standard of cleanliness and professionalism, and they communicate their expectations clearly. Rahman and Liang (2024) found that, like agreeableness, conscientiousness builds trust among guests. These hosts are appreciated for their attention to detail and reliability, helping guests feel secure and well cared for.

Openness to experience refers to a host’s creativity, curiosity, and openness to new ideas. Hosts high in openness are more likely to offer unique and authentic stays that enrich the overall guest experience. Those who embrace cultural diversity and provide personalized services often attract positive reviews and appeal to guests seeking meaningful travel experiences (Cohen et al., 2013). Guests value hosts who are imaginative and willing to offer something beyond a standard stay.

Emotional stability, or the ability to manage one’s emotions and remain calm in stressful situations, also contributes to a positive hosting experience. Emotionally stable hosts provide a calm and reassuring environment for guests. According to An et al. (2019), such hosts inspire trust and increase the likelihood of booking. Guests feel safer and more relaxed when they stay with hosts who can handle stress effectively and offer support when needed. Conversely, hosts who portray neurotic traits will not elicit feelings of safety or trustworthiness due to their low capacity for emotional regulation.

Beyond these five traits, authenticity also plays a key role in the guest experience. Authentic hosts share positive emotional values, personal stories, and lived experiences that guests greatly appreciate (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2017, citing Lashley et al., 2004). Authenticity refers to a host's ability to be genuine and consistent in both words and actions. According to Lalicic and Weismayer (2017), hosts are central to the creation and delivery of authentic experiences. As such, host authenticity can increase guest trust and satisfaction significantly, ultimately raising the likelihood of booking. Hosts who provide additional services—such as breakfast, local tips, airport transfers, or excursion planning—can further increase the attractiveness of their offering. These extras reflect the host's commitment to delivering an exceptional guest experience, which can heavily influence booking decisions (Haarhoff & Gany, 2017).

In addition to personality and authenticity, professionalism and communication skills are also essential. Professionalism includes a host's ability to manage their listing efficiently, remain organized, and adapt to guest needs. According to Ma et al. (2017), highly professional hosts often receive more positive reviews and attract more bookings. Communication style also matters: Özen et al. (2023) found that a formal, brief communication style can reduce perceptions of sincerity, whereas a more informal, detailed style fosters honesty and increases guest satisfaction.

In summary, the host's overall personality plays a critical role in shaping the guest experience and influencing booking decisions. Positive personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and emotional stability—alongside authenticity, professionalism, and communication style—can meaningfully impact how guests perceive the host, booking intention, and overall satisfaction with the stay. We therefore hypothesize:

H1. There is a statistically significant difference in booking intention depending on host personality. Specifically, hosts described as high in

Agreeableness/openness, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion will elicit higher booking intentions compared to hosts described as high in Neuroticism.

2.2. Role of visual cues in building reputation and trust in the sharing economy

Recent research has shown that Airbnb host photos appearing more trustworthy or attractive have been shown to significantly boost guests' confidence and willingness to book, even translating into price premiums for those hosts (Ert et al., 2016; Barnes & Kirshner, 2021).

Specific visual cues play a significant role: a profile picture with direct eye contact tends to elicit higher perceived trust, which in turn raises booking intentions (Broeder & Remers, 2018). Similarly, smiling facial expressions signal warmth and approachability, leading to greater trust and booking likelihood, whereas unwelcoming expressions or obscured eyes (e.g., by sunglasses) can undermine trust (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017; Banerjee et al., 2022). Notably, such visual trust signals can outweigh other reputation information, with one study finding that a trustworthy-looking photo had a stronger impact on choice than even perfect review scores (Ert et al., 2016).

These findings align with broader sharing-economy patterns, wherein reputation badges, reviews, and personal disclosures all function as signals that build the host's reputation and positively shape booking intentions (Xie & Mao, 2017; Rosenthal et al., 2020). We therefore argue that the presence of visual cues in the form of a profile picture with eye contact and a "Superhost" badge will elicit trust, enhance reputation and lead to a higher booking intention on Airbnb.

2.3. Host reputation in the sharing economy

Host reputation is considered one of the most important factors influencing guests' decisions to book accommodation, particularly on platforms like Airbnb. According to Bente, et al.

(2012), a positive reputation fosters greater trust, which in this context leads to stronger booking intentions. Factors such as guest reviews, host engagement with such reviews, length of presence on the platform, and consistency in maintaining service quality all contribute to shaping the guest's perception of the host, significantly affecting the host's overall reputation.

Potential guests often consult the experiences of previous visitors to assess the quality and reliability of a host's service. As found in the study by Sparks and Browning (2011), positive reviews and high ratings enhance trust and increase booking intention among potential guests. Therefore, hosts who consistently receive favorable reviews and maintain high ratings are more likely to attract new guests and sustain high levels of trust. Teubner et al. (2016) note that a greater number of reviews contributes to higher perceived reliability, as a small number of reviews could be provided by close friends or family members, potentially distorting the accuracy of the information. A larger volume of reviews generally leads to better host ratings, which are considered crucial to establishing trust between hosts and potential guests (Teubner et al., 2016; Bente et al., 2012). Similarly, Zhang et al. (2018) found that guests are most likely to trust hosts who have accumulated a high number of reviews.

Active engagement with reviews, irrespective of whether they might be positive or negative, is also crucial for reputation-building (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Hosts who express gratitude for positive feedback and respond constructively to negative reviews demonstrate a high level of professionalism and commitment. According to von Briel and Dolnicar (2021), hosts who replied to guest reviews using a positive tone were more likely to receive new bookings, whereas hosts who failed to respond had a lower likelihood of attracting potential guests. Thus, engagement with reviews significantly contributes to reputation building, positively influenc-

ing booking likelihood and reducing perceived booking risk.

Teubner et al. (2016) also highlighted the importance of the host's duration of membership on rental platforms such as Airbnb. Longer membership duration may instill greater trust in potential guests, whereas hosts who are newer to the platform may evoke less confidence, which can negatively impact booking intentions.

On Airbnb, a host's reputation can also be enhanced through the "Superhost" badge that encompasses all previously mentioned factors building a strong reputation. More specifically, the "Superhost" badge is awarded to hosts who are among the most successful on the platform based on several key criteria, namely: (1) hosts who have completed at least 10 bookings (length of presence), maintain (2) a response rate of 90% or higher (host engagement), (3) a cancellation rate below 1% (consistency), and (4) an overall rating of at least 4.8 (consistency, reviews) (Airbnb, 2024; Han et al., 2019). According to Han et al. (2019), guests are more likely to choose a host who holds the "Superhost" designation, as they are perceived to be higher-quality and more reliable, which contributes to a strong reputation while also being critical in building a stronger booking intention (Teubner et al., 2016).

In the context of our research, the "Superhost" badge is used as a visual cue to signal high positive reputation to potential guests with the objective to build trust and enhance booking intention. We therefore hypothesize:

H2. There is a statistically significant difference in perceived host reputation depending on host personality traits. Specifically, hosts whose profiles dominantly include cues associated with Agreeableness/openness, Conscientiousness, or Extraversion will be perceived to be more reputable than hosts whose profiles do not include these traits. By contrast, hosts described as neurotic will be perceived as having lower reputation.

2.4. Host trust as a determinant of booking intention

The trust that a host inspires in guests is one of the key factors influencing the decision to book accommodation, particularly on platforms such as Airbnb. All factors discussed in the previous sections, that is, perceived host personality, verbal and visual cues, and reputation also contribute to building host trust. According to Zhang et al. (2018), on platforms such as Airbnb, trust is shaped by reviews, ratings, verification status, host descriptions, profile photographs, and more. Additional factors that influence host trust include the transparency of information, alignment between what is promised and what is delivered, and the provision of a safe environment.

According to Bente et al. (2012), transparency—specifically, the disclosure of all necessary information—enhances trust. Their study indicates that a lack of information creates distrust among guests, whereas high-quality and clear information fosters trust. Transparency serves to reduce uncertainty for potential guests. A complete absence of information results in a complete lack of trust, whereas the presence of information—even negative—does not necessarily lead to distrust (Chaw & Tang, 2019; Bente et al., 2012). Therefore, hosts who wish to build trust with their guests should clearly present the terms of service and any other relevant details.

Additionally, Bente et al. (2012) emphasize that photographs and positive reputation contribute significantly to trust. A growing body of research has also shown that profile photographs influence perceived trustworthiness. Broeder and Crijns (2019) found that guests are more likely to perceive hosts as being trustworthy when their eyes are visible in the profile photo.

Ert et al. (2016) argue that guests form judgments about a host's reliability based on the host's photograph. When potential guests view the host's photo, they generate a first impression of trustworthiness, a phenomenon Ert et al. (2016) refer to as "visual-based trust." According to their research, visual-based trust can have an

even greater influence than reputation-based factors. The host's appearance in the profile photograph is extremely important, as both appearance and self-presentation—for example, how the hosts describe themselves—can trigger either skepticism or trust among guests (Zhang et al., 2018).

To establish strong host trust, it is essential that the host's stated policies be consistent with the services they provide. For instance, when a guest makes a reservation, they want to be confident that the booking will be honored. On booking platforms, it is not uncommon for hosts to cancel reservations at the last minute. According to Sthaphit and Björk (2019), last-minute cancellations undermine trust in the host and can lead to financial losses for guests. For this reason, it is important to clearly inform guests of all policies that might impact their booking so that they can make an informed decision and develop greater trust in the host.

Providing a safe environment also contributes to host trust. Clearly indicating the presence of safety equipment in the accommodation demonstrates the host's concern for guest well-being and fosters a sense of security. In their study, Walsh et al. (2020) reported that Airbnb offers safety workshops for hosts and provides smoke and carbon monoxide detectors for accommodation units free of charge. Such efforts contribute to a positive perception of the host and help build trust by making guests feel safe. We therefore posit as follows:

H3. There is a statistically significant difference in perceived host trustworthiness depending on host personality traits. Specifically, hosts whose profiles dominantly include cues associated with Agreeableness/openness, Conscientiousness, or Extraversion will be perceived to be more trustworthy than hosts whose profiles do not include these traits. By contrast, hosts described as neurotic will be perceived to be less trustworthy.

In summary, the existing literature clearly demonstrates that host characteristics play a

central role in shaping guests' booking intentions, particularly in the context of peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb. Elements such as a host's profile presentation, perceived personality, visual cues, and reputation significantly influence trust and, ultimately, booking intentions. Given that these cues are often the only available proxies for assessing reliability in digital marketplaces, understanding how they function is not only academically valuable but also highly relevant for practitioners. For platform designers, property managers, and hosts themselves, critically evaluating how host characteristics shape guest perceptions can inform more effective trust-building strategies, enhance reputation management, and drive competitive advantage in a saturated marketplace. Therefore, we also anticipate:

H4. Positive perceived personality traits (i.e., agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion), perceived trust, and reputation will have a positive effect on booking intention. Conversely, negative personality traits (i.e., neuroticism) will have a negative effect on booking intention.

3. METHODOLOGY

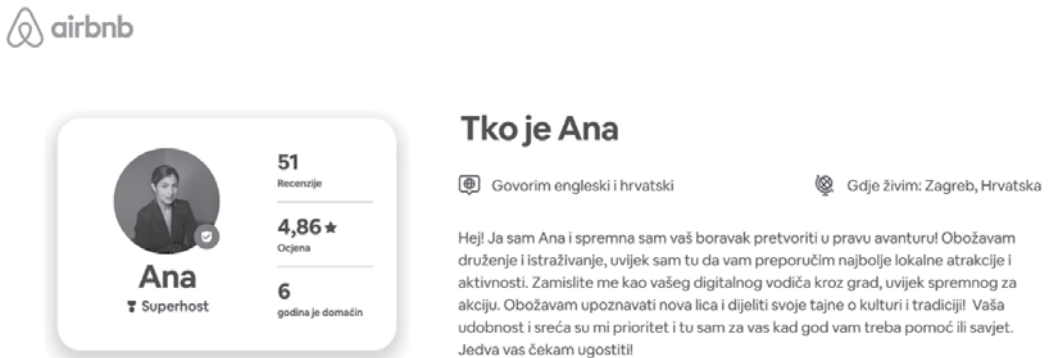
We conducted a between-subjects experimental design to test the impact of perceived host

personality traits on trust, reputation, and booking intention.

To design the stimuli, we used generative AI (ChatGPT and Canva) to create four host descriptions. More specifically, we prompted ChatGPT to create four Airbnb host descriptions that dominantly reflect four personality traits according to the Myers-Briggs taxonomy: extroversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and agreeableness/openness to experience. Descriptions were adjusted to fit Airbnb's bio character limits. Visual representations (profile photos) were created using Canva and adjusted to Airbnb's visual standards. Sample stimuli are presented below in Picture 1.

Host descriptions (stimuli) were then pretested using the Apply Magic Sauce software, developed by the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre, to confirm alignment with specific personality traits. For the extroverted host description, the extraversion score was 91%, followed by lower scores in openness (77%), conscientiousness (68%), agreeableness (67%), and neuroticism (31%). Based on these results, it can be concluded that the description reflects an extroverted personality, as extraversion is the most dominant trait. According to the software, only 9% of individuals demonstrate a higher level of extraversion than the one described.

PICTURE 1: Sample stimuli (host descriptions and visual cues)



Source: Authors' illustration using Canva.

For the neurotic host description, the score for neuroticism was 91%, openness (75%), agreeableness (35%), conscientiousness (30%), and extraversion (7%). Based on these results, it can be concluded that the description corresponds to the neurotic personality trait, as neuroticism is the most prominent trait. For a description representing a conscientious host, the score for conscientiousness is a dominant 70%, followed by extraversion (47%), agreeableness (38%), openness (37%), and neuroticism (14%). Based on this result, it is evident that conscientiousness is the most prominent personality trait, and we can associate the description with this trait. Finally, the last description represented traits of agreeableness and openness to experience. The percentage of agreeableness was 89%, and openness was 78%, with lower percentages recorded for extraversion (65%), conscientiousness (55%), and neuroticism (18%). Based on this result, it is evident that the traits of agreeableness and openness to experience scored highly, and for that reason, this host description can be associated with both personality traits.

Key variables included booking intention (Broeder, 2022), host reputation (Zhang et al., 2018), and perceived trust (Broeder, 2022; Ert et al., 2016). As a manipulation check, we added a measure of perceived host personality based on Mlačić and Knezović (1997) for each condition. Furthermore, in addition to standard attention checks in the main study, we also account for common method bias following recommendations from MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012).

Data was collected using an online questionnaire on a convenience sample of respondents over 18 years of age. The sample consisted of 220 respondent, 55 respondents per condition. Of these, 67.7% identified as female ($n = 149$), 31.8% as male ($n = 70$), and 0.5% ($n = 1$) chose not to disclose their gender. The majority of the respondents were aged 20–29 (67.3%), followed by those aged 30–39 (25.0%). Smaller proportions were aged 40–49 (5.5%), under 20 (1.4%), and 50–59 (0.9%). No respondents were aged 60 or older. In terms of education, 43.2% held a uni-

versity degree (bachelor's level), 39.1% completed secondary education, and 17.7% held a master's or doctoral degree. No respondents reported primary education only or no formal education. Regarding Airbnb usage, 35.0% of respondents reported using the platform occasionally, 26.8% rarely, 20.5% never, and 17.7% frequently. When asked about typical travel companions, 44.5% reported traveling with a partner, 21.4% with family, and 20.0% selected "other." Traveling alone (9.5%) and with business colleagues (4.5%) were less common. Respondents were also asked to select the most important factors when booking accommodation. Price was the most frequently selected (26.2%), followed by cleanliness and maintenance (22.5%), location (21.9%), communication with the host (15.2%), and comfort (14.3%).

4. RESULTS

Before conducting the main analyses, reverse-coded items were recoded, and the assumption of normality was assessed for each dependent variable using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Results indicated that the distributions for trust, reputation, and booking intention were approximately normal across the four personality conditions, with some minor deviations from normality observed. According to the Central Limit Theorem, parametric tests such as MANOVA and ANOVA are robust to moderate violations of normality when group sizes are sufficiently large (total sample size is 220) and approximately equal (55 respondents per group/condition). Finally, we tested scale reliability using Cronbach's alpha, and all scales exceeded the recommended threshold (0.60) for internal consistency.

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics across the four personality conditions are presented in Table 2, showing the means for reputation ratings relatively consistent across conditions, ranging from 11.98 ($SD=2.89$) in Condition 4 to 12.53 ($SD=2.62$) in Condition 3. Trust scores were the highest in

Condition 3 ($M=10.65$, $SD=2.08$), while Condition 2 had the lowest mean ($M=10.22$, $SD=1.79$). Booking intention was also the highest for Condition 1 ($M=4.02$, $SD=1.16$) and the lowest for Condition 2 ($M=3.45$, $SD=0.92$).

Perceived extraversion (target trait for Condition 1). A one-way ANOVA revealed a large effect of condition on perceived extraversion, $F(3, 216) = 50.20$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .41$. Tukey HSD tests showed Condition 1 ($M=48.95$, $SD=4.65$) as be-

TABLE 2: Means and standard deviations of dependent variables by personality condition

Variable	Condition 1 (Extraversion)	Condition 2 (Neuroticism)	Condition 3 (Conscientiousness)	Condition 4 (Openness/ agreeableness)	Total
Reputation	12.25 (2.01)	12.53 (2.45)	12.53 (2.62)	11.98 (2.89)	12.32 (2.51)
Trust	10.20 (1.99)	10.22 (1.79)	10.65 (2.08)	9.60 (1.85)	10.17 (1.95)
Booking Intention	4.02 (1.16)	3.45 (0.92)	3.85 (1.10)	3.67 (1.20)	3.75 (1.11)

Source: Authors' own research. Note: Entries are M (SD). Scales: reputation and trust (3–5 items summed), booking intention (3 items summed, 1–5 Likert).

4.2. Manipulation checks

Before testing our substantive hypotheses, we verified that the personality manipulations embedded in the four Airbnb host profiles produced the intended perceptual differences. Specifically, we asked participants to rate each host on the Big-Five dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness. These ratings served as manipulation checks: each condition was designed to heighten one focal trait (or the agreeableness–openness pair) while holding the others relatively constant. The analyses below confirm that the manipulations were largely successful, generating clear shifts on the targeted traits without violating the statistical assumptions required for the main tests. The main conclusions are summarized in Table 3.

ing judged more extraverted than Condition 2 ($M=34.31$) and Condition 3 ($M=42.44$), both $ps < .001$. Although not statistically distinct from Condition 4 ($M=46.29$, $p=.161$), the pattern confirms that the extraverted-host script was effective, with some spill-over into the Agreeable/Open profile.

Perceived neuroticism (target trait for Condition 2). A one-way ANOVA likewise produced a strong effect of condition on neuroticism, $F(3, 216) = 40.45$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .36$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that Condition 2 ($M=23.15$) was rated markedly more neurotic than Conditions 1, 3, and 4 (mean differences = 8.13–9.09, all $ps < .001$), whereas those three conditions did not differ from one another ($ps \geq .75$). This confirms the success of the neurotic-host manipulation.

TABLE 3: Summary of conditions and manipulation check results

Intended profile	Condition code	Target trait(s) from manipulation check
Extraverted host	Condition 1	Extraversion ↑
Neurotic host	Condition 2	Neuroticism ↑ & (Agreeableness ↓, Openness ↓)
Conscientious host	Condition 3	Conscientiousness ↑
Agreeable / Open host	Condition 4	Agreeableness ↑ & Openness ↑

Source: Authors' own research.

Perceived conscientiousness (target trait for Condition 3). A one-way ANOVA showed a modest effect of condition on conscientiousness, $F(3, 216) = 4.01$, $p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. Condition 3 ($M=43.36$) surpassed Condition 4 ($M=39.76$; $p=.004$) but did not differ from Conditions 1 or 2. Thus, the conscientiousness manipulation was only partially effective.

Perceived agreeableness (elevated in Condition 4, suppressed in Condition 2). A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant effect of condition on agreeableness, $F(3, 216) = 10.06$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$. Condition 2 ($M=45.11$) was rated less agreeable than Conditions 1, 3, and 4 (mean differences = 4.96–6.16, all $ps < .001$), which did not differ among themselves ($p \geq .762$). This pattern shows that the Agreeable/Open profile achieved the intended high agreeableness, and the Neurotic profile successfully lowered it.

Perceived openness (elevated in Condition 4, suppressed in Condition 2). A one-way ANOVA also found a significant effect of condition on openness, $F(3, 216) = 13.85$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$. Condition 2 was perceived as being less open than Conditions 1, 3, and 4 (mean differences = 3.06–6.49, $ps \leq .016$). Condition 1 exceeded Condition 3 ($p=.005$) but was marginally higher than Condition 4 ($p=.054$). Accordingly, the Agreeable/Open script raised openness relative to the low-openness profile, even though the Extravert script elicited the highest openness overall.

Overall, the manipulations worked best for neuroticism and the agreeableness–openness pair, while being strong but somewhat diffuse for extraversion, and only partly effective for conscientiousness. These nuances should be considered when interpreting the main outcome analyses.

4.3. MANOVA and ANOVA

To test hypotheses 1–3, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the effect of host personality on a linear combination of trust, reputation, and

booking intention. Box's test of equality of covariance matrices was not significant, Box's $M = 26.803$, $F(18, 164870.28) = 1.45$, $p = .097$, indicating that the assumption of equal covariance matrices was met. Likewise, Levene's tests showed homogeneous error variances for each dependent variable (all $ps \geq .467$).

Using Wilks' Λ , the multivariate effect approached significance, $\Lambda = .925$, $F(9, 520.97) = 1.88$, $p = .053$, partial $\eta^2 = .026$. Roy's largest root reached significance, $\Theta = .050$, $F(3, 216) = 3.58$, $p = .015$, suggesting that at least one linear combination of the three outcomes differed by condition.

Follow-up univariate ANOVAs were conducted to examine the effect of host personality on each dependent variable separately. There was no significant effect of host personality on reputation, $F(3, 216) = 0.59$, $p = .620$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$. However, we found a significant effect of host personality on trust, $F(3, 216) = 2.77$, $p = .042$, partial $\eta^2 = .037$ and booking intention $F(3, 216) = 2.67$, $p = .049$, partial $\eta^2 = .036$. For perceived trustworthiness, post hoc analysis revealed the existence of a statistically significant difference between conscientious and open/agreeable hosts (Mean difference = 1.055, $p=0.023$). This indicates that hosts showcasing more conscientious traits are perceived to be more trustworthy than hosts demonstrating more open/agreeable traits.

For booking intention, post hoc analysis found a statistically significant difference in booking intention between extraverted and neurotic hosts (Mean difference = 0.564, $p=0.039$).

Based on the presented results, we can conclude that there is partial support for Hypotheses 1 and 3, while Hypothesis H2 that assumes a statistically significant difference in perceived reputation based on personality traits is rejected.

4.4. Regression analysis

Finally, five separate regressions were estimated to test Hypothesis 4 and determine whether each perceived variable predicted booking intention (Table 4).

TABLE 4: Regression analysis

Model	Main predictors	Sig.	B	Standardized β	Adjusted R2	P
1	Extraversion	<.001	.041	.322*	0.091	<.001
	Reputation	.644	-.014	-.031		
	Trust	.603	-.020	-.035		
2	Neuroticism	<.001	-.066	-.375*	0.122	<.001
	Reputation	.711	-.011	-.024		
	Trust	.168	-.052	-.092		
3	Conscientiousness	<.001	.056	.280*	0.059	<.001
	Reputation	.807	-.007	-.016		
	Trust	.190	-.053	-.093		
4	Agreeableness	<.001	.065	.400*	0.138	<.001
	Reputation	.493	-.020	-.044		
	Trust	.114	-.060	-.105		
5	Openness	<.001	.065	.338*	0.096	<.001
	Reputation	.692	-.012	-.026		
	Trust	.186	-.051	-.090		

Source: Authors' own research. Note: Booking intention is the dependent variable for all models.

Trust and reputation were not significant predictors in any of the five models. All personality traits had a statistically significant impact on booking intention with moderate effect sizes ($0.322 < |\beta| < 0.400$). Among the five personality traits, agreeableness was the strongest predictor ($\beta=.400$, $p<.001$), with the model (Model 3 in Table 4) explaining 13.8% of the variance in booking intention, followed by neuroticism ($\beta=-.375$, $p<.001$, adjusted $R^2=0.122$), openness ($\beta=.338$, $p<.001$, adjusted $R^2=0.096$), extraversion ($\beta=.322$, $p<.001$, adjusted $R^2=0.091$) and finally, conscientiousness ($\beta=.280$, $p<.001$, adjusted $R^2=0.059$).

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed at determining whether personality cues embedded in Airbnb host descriptions influence guests' assessments of host reputation and trustworthiness and, in turn, their booking intentions. Drawing on signaling theory as the main theoretical foundation for our study, we manipulated Big-Five personality traits across four conditions and measured per-

ceived trustworthiness, reputation, and booking intention. Because trust is critical in peer-to-peer markets (Ert et al., 2016), understanding the route by which trait signals influence booking can help clarify how online marketplaces function and how hosts might craft profiles more effectively.

Manipulation checks showed that the personality cues operated as intended, albeit with unequal force. Neuroticism and the agreeableness–openness pair were perceived to be substantially higher in their targeted conditions, extraversion shifted robustly but partially overlapped with the agreeable/open host description, and conscientiousness exhibited only a modest separation from other personality cues. These patterns confirm that the participants were sensitive to the textual personality cues while also demonstrating how easily personality cues can overlap when traits are conveyed through natural language. This is an important finding as it underscores that hosts' intention to convey a specific personality trait may not necessarily translate to the same personality perceptions on behalf of potential guests.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) approached, but did not fully reach, the conventional 5%-threshold on Wilks' Λ , whereas Roy's largest root—being more sensitive when one dimension dominates—did achieve significance. This discrepancy hints that condition differences existed but were concentrated along one or two composites of the three outcome variables rather than being distributed evenly across them. Follow-up ANOVAs clarified that reputation was unaffected by the manipulations of host personality, which contradicts existing findings (e.g., Ert et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018). However, both trust and booking intention registered small but significant condition effects ($\eta^2 \approx .04$). Post-hoc analysis revealed that perceived host trustworthiness is significantly higher for conscientiousness than openness/agreeableness in hosts, whereas extraversion contributes significantly more to booking intention than neuroticism, which is in line with An et al. (2019). This finding is not surprising given that conscientious hosts tend to be well organized, attentive, and reliable, helping guests feel secure and well cared for, which elicits trust. Similarly, extraverted hosts who are open, friendly, and willing to engage with guests at first glance will increase booking likelihood, as opposed to neurotic hosts who demonstrate highly unfavorable characteristics and lack emotional stability (Rahman & Liang, 2024).

Finally, regression analysis points to perceived host agreeableness as the strongest predictor of booking intention, followed by openness, extraversion, and conscientiousness. Expectedly, neuroticism had a moderate negative effect on booking intention, which is in line with An et al. (2019). Generally, the results for the effect of personality traits on booking intention converge with existing findings in the literature (e.g., Rahman & Liang, 2024; An et al., 2019), albeit with different effect sizes. Taken together, it appears to come down to “warmth” over “competence”, with positive personality traits predicting booking intention, which is in line with past studies (Fan et al., 2025).

In summary, our findings suggest that the role of host personality in online short-term rentals, such as Airbnb, is significant in influencing host trustworthiness and booking intention. The study found perceived host personality, particularly agreeableness, to be a strong predictor of booking intention, overshadowing the impact of reputation and trustworthiness in the immediate decision-making process. This suggests that how hosts present themselves, especially through their bios and profile pictures, is crucial in establishing initial trust among potential guests. Traits such as openness, extraversion, and conscientiousness also contribute positively to booking intentions, whereas neuroticism has a negative effect. While the research revealed differences in trust and booking intention based on perceived personality, it found no significant impact on reputation, implying that reputation might rely more on accumulated reviews and indicators like the “Superhost” badge, rather than just the perceived personality traits shown in a profile. Finally, given the non-significant effects of reputation and trust in the regression analysis, the results also indicate that a potential full mediation model (host personality \rightarrow reputation \rightarrow trust \rightarrow booking intention) should be taken into consideration.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the role of host personality traits and visual cues in building trust, reputation, and booking intention on platforms like Airbnb. Research in this context is vital because it provides in-depth insights into the dynamics of trust and decision-making in the ever-increasing sharing economy. Understanding how online trust is developed and maintained in peer-to-peer exchanges can enhance efficiency and satisfaction for all sides, thus becoming increasingly important. With the growing number of Airbnb hosts, consumers may find it difficult to navigate this digital landscape. Because of the abundance of information available and frequent time constraints, host personality traits

and visual cues can be extremely helpful in the decision-making process.

6.1. Theoretical contribution

The paper offers several theoretical contributions. First, we apply signaling theory within the context of the sharing economy, specifically Airbnb. Second, the use of Big Five personality traits and visual cues as signals provides a new perspective and adds granularity to previous research. The finding that traits focused on warmth (like agreeableness) are more important than competence-based signals when predicting booking attention shows that, in the sharing economy, personal interaction is a key component. Signaling theory could also be used to explain why there is no significant impact of personality traits on host reputation and a clear influence on trust and booking intention through the speed at which different signals are processed in consumers' brains. This indicates that, when choosing a place to stay, immediate trust is influenced by perceived personality, while reputation may require more longitudinal evidence, such as accumulated reviews and "Superhost" status.

6.2. Managerial contribution

The findings offer important managerial insights for multiple stakeholders in the sharing economy. The findings indicate that host personality traits significantly influence perceived host trustworthiness and booking intention. For Airbnb hosts, if their main objective is to elicit trust, our findings suggest emphasizing conscientiousness in their profile descriptions by appearing reliable, detail oriented, and attentive. However, if the hosts' main aim is to increase booking intention, they should emphasize agreeableness through warm, cooperative, and friendly language, demonstrating they are approachable, responsive, enthusiastic, and willing to go the extra mile for their guests. Accordingly, in direct communication with potential guests and when addressing reviews they should strive for prompt, positive, empathetic, but professional responses. Profile pictures that

the host uses should convey approachability through direct eye contact and a sincere smile.

This research can also be beneficial for platform designers and managers. As its results clearly show, host personality traits are important criteria for host and property selection; therefore, they should focus more on providing additional features so hosts can better showcase their personality. Platforms could introduce video introductions or enable more detailed personal sections for hosts. Providing additional instructions and training for hosts on how to craft profiles that convey desired traits (e.g., conscientiousness, agreeableness) could ultimately lead to better matching between guests and hosts. Relatedly, refining platform search algorithms and recommendation systems to account for host (rather than just property) characteristics such as personality and prioritizing certain host traits can lead to enhanced satisfaction, increased trust, and higher booking rates, thus benefiting both hosts and platforms alike.

6.3. Limitations and future research directions

Despite the contributions described above, the research also has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the stimuli design could be improved to create more distinct representations of the targeted personality traits. Overlap in perceived traits could be avoided by clearly defined descriptions and visual cues that would strengthen the manipulations and avoid potential multicollinearity issues in multiple regression analysis. Second, the convenience sample of 220 respondents, while providing sufficient power for some analyses, cannot provide generalizability of research results. Additionally, our research was conducted in an online setting without the presence of the researcher that could limit the respondent's comprehension or lead to response bias. A larger random sample would offer more precise results and enhance the study's external validity. Finally, the study did not fully explore mediation models. Examining trust and reputation as mediators between

host personality and booking intention could lead to deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play.

Although this research provides valuable insights, there is still room for additional investigation. First, there is a need to further explore the temporal dynamics of signaling cues in online marketplaces. This could shed more light on the notion that personality traits have a significant impact on trust and booking intention but not reputation. Conducting an eye-tracking study or a field experiment on Airbnb would provide more realistic data on how users interact with host profiles and make their booking decisions.

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AI-Assisted Statement

Generative AI (ChatGPT, Canva) was used to create experimental stimuli for this study, as re-

ported in the main text. Additionally, AI-assisted technologies were employed for language editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the authors to ensure accuracy and integrity.

Authorship Statement

All authors meet the criteria for authorship, as outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Their specific contributions are as follows:

- Morana Fudurić: Conceptualization of the study, supervision of experimental design and data collection, original manuscript drafting, data analysis, data interpretation.
- Elena Puljić: Literature review, creation of experimental stimuli (with the assistance of generative AI), data collection.
- Sandra Horvat: Literature review, interpretation of results, reference management, manuscript editing (with AI-assisted tools), and critical revision of the manuscript.

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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