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**PERCEIVED VALUE IN THE SHARING ECONOMY:
THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL CULTURES**

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ABSTRACT

Multinationals are often torn between two polarizing internationalization strategies: offering standardized products on a global scale or adapting these products to the different institutional and cultural contexts in which they operate (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989). While this dilemma has been extensively examined in the literature for traditional companies, this question has not been raised for companies that are part of the sharing economy. Instead of producing goods and services, these companies connect private individuals so that they can share their existing resources. As a result, to build wide user bases, they must maximize the value these individuals perceive when using their platform. In this study, I investigated the influence of national cultures on the value perceived by users in the sharing economy by studying the case of Airbnb. To detect elements that influence perceived value, I conducted thirty face-to-face interviews which included an interactive search on the platform. Depending on their national culture, the respondents perceived different types of risk on the Airbnb platform, expected different levels of social interaction with their host and relied on different trust-building processes. Using Hofstede's model of national cultures, I was able to justify these differences. However, factors such as past experiences and economic contexts also influenced the respondents' perception. Future research combining a cultural and an institutional angle could provide additional insight on how the sharing economy is perceived by users around the world.

Key words: national cultures, sharing economy, perceived value, perceived risk, digital platforms, Airbnb, collaborative consumption

RÉSUMÉ

Les entreprises opérant à l'étranger sont souvent tiraillées entre deux stratégies d'internationalisation: proposer des produits standardisés à l'échelle mondiale ou adapter ces produits aux différents contextes institutionnels et culturels de leurs marches (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989). Bien que ce dilemme ait été largement examiné dans la littérature pour les entreprises traditionnelles, cette question n'a pas été posée pour l'économie de partage. Au lieu de produire des biens et des services, ces entreprises mettent en contact des particuliers afin qu'ils puissent partager leurs ressources. Par conséquent, afin d'attirer un nombre maximal d'utilisateurs, ces entreprises doivent maximiser la valeur que ces personnes perçoivent lors de l'utilisation de leur plateforme. Dans cette étude, j'ai utilisé l'exemple d'Airbnb pour analyser l'influence des cultures nationales sur la valeur perçue par les utilisateurs de l'économie du partage. Afin de produire une liste des éléments qui influencent cette valeur, j'ai mené trente entrevues qui comprenaient une recherche interactive sur la plateforme. En fonction de leur culture nationale, les répondants percevaient différents types de risques sur la plateforme, s'attendaient à différents niveaux d'interaction sociale avec leur hôte et s'appuyaient sur différents processus afin d'établir un lien de confiance. En utilisant le modèle d'Hofstede, j'ai pu justifier ces différences. Cependant, des facteurs tels que les expériences passées des répondants ainsi que les contextes économiques des pays étudiés avaient également une influence sur la perception des répondants. Des recherches futures combinant un angle culturel et un angle institutionnel pourraient fournir des informations supplémentaires sur la façon dont l'économie du partage est perçue par les utilisateurs de différentes cultures.

Mots clés: cultures nationales, économie du partage, valeur perçue, risqué perçu, plateformes digitales, Airbnb, consommation collaborative

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2017, on average, 86% of OECD households had access to the Internet (OECDa, 2018) and for every 100 inhabitants in the OECD area, there were 102.4 high speed mobile internet subscriptions (OECDb, 2018). Today, in developed economies, a significant volume of information is only a click away, giving consumers access to an almost infinite amount of knowledge and purchasing options. Individuals across the world can now connect and share content on global social media platforms; in 2018, the number of monthly active users has reached 2.27 billion for Facebook and 1 billion for Instagram (Statista, 2018). It has never been simpler to use smartphones to order food, catch a ride, book a flight, or find a place to stay. These advancements in information and communication technologies has allowed new types of companies to emerge and has recently given rise to a highly discussed phenomenon: the sharing economy. Understood by the literature as both a part of the capitalist economy and a remedy against its excesses (Richardson, 2015), the sharing economy can be defined as an ensemble of business models where "consumers [grant] each other temporary access to under-utilized physical assets" (Frenken, Meelen, Arets, & Van de Glind, 2015, para. 3). On the digital platforms of the sharing economy, private individuals are connected in order to share their existing resources, including their cars, their homes, or their tools.

As a result, the companies of the sharing economy, instead of producing new goods or providing services directly for their users, are now essentially supplying a platform for private individuals to interact and create contracts on. Uber and Airbnb, two well-known examples of the sharing economy, have proved to be major players in our current economic system; in 2017, Airbnb's revenue was $2.6 billion, and Uber's exceeded $35 billion (Zaleski, 2018; Associated Press, 2018). Besides, both companies have disrupted local industries in many parts of the world, sparking debates about the role of government regulations and the efficiency of traditional companies (Allen, 2015). Faced with vivid controversies, they have nonetheless been able to rely on their popularity among private individuals to establish a global presence. Users thus have a crucial role in the sharing economy, providing these companies not only with the resources to be shared on their platforms, but also with as a powerful tool against barriers to entry and outdated regulations (Allen, 2015). Thus, it is crucial for the companies of the sharing economy to build a wide user

base. To do so, they must attract individuals willing to share their resources with strangers, which can prove difficult.

However, most private individuals are still unfamiliar with the term "sharing economy" and the business models associated with it. A report revealed that 73% of American adults were not familiar with the term "sharing economy" (Smith, 2016). A similar report uncovered that while more than half of the respondents in the European Union had heard of platforms of the sharing economy, less than 20% of them had used at least one of these platforms before (Flash Eurobarometer, 2017). Moreover, some significant differences in usage were found between European countries: for instance, while 36% of French respondents and 35% of Irish respondents said they had used such a platform before, it was only the case for 8% of the respondents from the UK and for Portugal (Flash Eurobarometer, 2017). This could indicate decisive differences in the familiarity and acceptance for such models between countries, asking the question of whether or not these companies should take cultural differences into consideration when expanding their platform worldwide.

Traditional companies devising internationalization strategies are often torn between two polar mindsets: adapting their products to local contexts and cultures or distributing standardized products on a global scale (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989). Companies like Uber and Airbnb differ significantly from traditional companies, however, mainly because their products are purely digital. Therefore, to penetrate a foreign market, these companies only need foreign individuals to access and use their platform. To do so, most of them offer different languages options to their users; for instance, the Airbnb platform is available in 27 languages (Airbnb, 2018). However, taking part in the sharing economy and relying on individuals rather than on companies can be seen as a risky by many Internet users. To build a wide user base, these companies need to bring value to their users, the same way traditional companies bring value to their customers through the goods and services they produce.

It is thus essential to determine if national cultures could play a role in an individual's' decision to participate in the sharing economy. If so, companies of the sharing economy could benefit from adapting their platforms to the cultural preferences of countries where they have yet to gain wide popularity. Instead of

determining the exact value perceived by the potential participants on the sharing economy platform, this study will aim at questioning whether or not the differences in perception between individuals could be explained by cultural variables. My research question is as follows:

How do national cultures influence the perceived value of participating in the sharing economy?

To answer this question, I chose to examine the case of Airbnb, a well-known sharing economy company that operates in more than 190 countries (Airbnb, 2018). Therefore, in this exploratory qualitative study, I will first analyze the characteristics of sharing economy before defining the concepts of perceived value and national cultures. Next, in the methodology section, I will explain in detail how I prepared and conducted 30 interviews with users or potential users of the Airbnb platform, and how I analyzed the data collected during these interviews. Then, I will present the results of these interviews by examining all the benefits, sacrifices and benefits perceived by the respondents discussed with the respondents. Finally, in the last section, I will discuss these results using Hofstede's model of national cultures, providing additional theoretical concepts if needed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following literature review, I will explore the concepts necessary to the construction of my conceptual framework. First, I will establish the scope of my study by clarifying how access-based consumption models differ from traditional economic models (section 1) and by defining the sharing economy (section 2). Then, the concept of perceived value will be presented (section 3) and applied to the sharing economy (section 4). Finally, I will discuss how national cultures and cultural framework have been and can be used to explain differences on how individuals perceive value (section 5).

2.1. Access over Ownership: The Rise of New Consumption Models

In academic and non-academic journals, a great variety of digital platforms have been classified under the umbrella term "sharing economy". Many authors interested in defining the sharing economy point out definitional difficulties (Allen & Berg, 2014; Allen, 2015; Richardson, 2015; Frenken & Schor, 2017), resulting from a "semantic confusion" (Belk, 2014b, p. 9) surrounding economic models based on the notion of sharing, such as access-based and collaborative consumption. In order to clearly define the scope of this study, it is thus necessary to understand the consumption models with which the sharing economy shares characteristics and to specify how authors have differentiated them.

Access-based consumption encompasses "transactions that may be market-mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place" (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 881). Thus, sometimes through rentals or membership fees, consumers in access-based consumption models gain the right to temporarily use a product; they are paying for the experience of using it instead of buying it (Lawson, Gleim, Perren, & Hwang, 2016). When accessed, an object will provide satisfaction to the consumer, but will then be transferred to another consumer whose needs will be satisfied in turn. Instead of only satisfying its owner occasionally, the object will thus consecutively satisfy the needs of multiple consumers (Schaefers, Lawson, & Kukar-Kinney, 2016). In the case of market-mediated access, the customer pays an access fee that grants them temporary access to an object, without becoming its owner (Schaefers et al., 2016).

On the other hand, collaborative consumption can be defined as "people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation" (Belk, 2014a, p. 1597). This definition excludes activities that do not involve any sort of compensation - such as Couch Surfing - but also activities that transfer ownership permanently (Belk, 2014a). Thus, in collaborative consumption and access-based consumption, individuals choose to access objects temporarily; no permanent transfer of ownership is undertaken. Collaborative consumption can be considered a subgroup of access-based consumption (Belk, 2014a). However, while the definition of access-based consumption focuses on the fact that there is no ownership transfer, the definition of collaborative consumption emphasizes the role of individuals in coordinating resources; by definition, for consumption to be collaborative, two or more individuals need to be working together towards a common goal (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). If an individual decides to rent a car from a car-rental company, no permanent ownership is granted; it is thus part of the access-based economy. However, the transaction is made with a company, isolated from other private individuals. To belong to the collaborative consumption economy, there needs to be a "sharing" or "coordinating" aspect in the transaction. This would be the case if the individual turns to a model such as Snappcar, an app that lets Deutsch individuals rent each other's cars (Boztas, 2017).

Consumption models relying on access instead of ownership have historically been present before the appearance of platforms like Airbnb (Frenken & Schor, 2017). Individuals have been renting cars or apartments, way before the emergence of internet services; moreover, in the public sphere, access has always been an important part of consumption, as private individuals pay fees to access museums or borrow books in libraries (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). However, Western capitalistic societies have historically preferred ownership, depicting access as a lesser consumption mode, not providing individuals with the pride and benefits attached to ownership (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

The rise of access as a viable consumption model is due to many demographic and social factors. Among them, the urbanization process taking place in many developed countries and the sustainable development concerns attached to it have pushed individuals to review their ownership choices, and to rely on access in order to save space; moreover, the global economic crisis which started in 2008 has also

had a substantial impact on individuals' spending habits (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). By accessing products and services instead of owning them, consumers are thus able to avoid the financial, performance, and social risks associated with ownership - for example repairing and maintaining costs (Schaefers et al., 2016). Moreover, in a recent quantitative study, access-based consumers were divided into four different segments according to their motivations: "Fickle Floaters", a segment economically conscious and thus driven by prices; "Premium Keepers", a segment looking for variety and status, but also economically conscious; "Conscious Materialists", a segment concerned with the environmental impact of their consumer habits; and "Change Seekers", a segment defined by its low materialism and by its search for variety (Lawson et al., 2016).

Thus, culturally, access has been enjoying a rise in popularity, defining itself as a sustainable alternative to ownership. The emergence of access as a consumption model has however been made possible by digital technologies. The Internet, and more specifically peer-to-peer matching services and social media, has facilitated large-scale connections between lenders and borrowers, and have also created new ways to access products and services (Belk, 2014a). Collaborative consumption relies even more heavily on technologies, as virtually all the transactions in collaborative consumption are made through online platforms (Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2015). Because of this, some authors view collaborative consumption not as a simple consumption model but as a technological phenomenon, a "peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services" (Hamari et al., 2015).

This revolution in consumption is dramatically linked to the emergence of Web 2.0 which occurred after the dot-com bubble burst in 2001 (Belk, 2014a). Coined in 2004, the notion of Web 2.0 was first articulated by Tom O'Reilly in 2007. O'Reilly attempts to define Web 2.0 by listing a list of features and competencies shared by Web 2.0 companies: "services, not packaged software, with cost-effective scalability… control over unique, hard-to-recreate data sources that get richer as more people use them,… software above the level of a single device, … lightweight user interfaces, development models, and business models, [that trust] users as co-developers, … [harness] collective intelligence, …. [and leverage] the long tail through customer self-service" (O'Reilly, 2007, p. 37). Web 2.0 gives the

opportunity and encourages users to generate and share content, while connecting them, allowing for the emergence of collaborative models. In contrast, Web 1.0 was mainly providing one-way information to its users instead of creating interactions between users and between websites. Web 1.0 was basically a gigantic book that could be accessed and read by an Internet user, and where each page was independent and did not interact with other pages.

The ideas encompassed by models such as access-based and collaborative have existed before the emergence of Web 2.0. However, the scales on which they can be used today are far beyond what was possible before the rise of digital technologies. This past decade, these ideas have given birth to refined business models that are now defined as part of the sharing economy. In the next section, I will expound the main characteristics of these companies.

2.2. Defining the Sharing Economy

The term "sharing economy" is often used interchangeably with the concepts of "collaborative consumption" and "access-based consumption" (Belk, 2014a; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). This is because the "sharing economy" is a broad term that covers many characteristics of collaborative and access-based consumption models. Follows are definitions that emphasize the commonalities and differences between the sharing economy and the consumption models that have been developed. The sharing economy is defined as follow:

"a suite of emerging software platforms acting as an intermediary between private buyers and private sellers, allowing them to share their existing resources*"* (Allen, 2015, p. 25)

"an economic system based on sharing underused assets or services, for free or for a fee, directly from individuals" (Botsman, 2015, para. 8)

"consumers granting each other temporary access to under-utilized physical assets ("idle capacity"), possibly for money" (Frenken et al., 2015, para. 3)

"an emerging set of business models, platforms and exchanges [whose] distinguishing characteristics include decentralized exchange, a focus on access over ownership of resources, firms becoming the facilitator of exchange (rather than

acting as a producer), and mechanisms of self-governance" (Allen & Berg, 2014, p. 4)

This list of definitions sheds light upon important aspects of the sharing economy. First, Allen and Berg (2014) mention that the sharing economy focuses on "*access over ownership of resources*", which was the central element of access-based consumption and collaborative consumption. Moreover, the sharing economy, just like access-based and collaborative consumption models, relies heavily on digital technologies and on Web 2.0 to coordinate the resources of individuals. Indeed, the rapidly improving information and communication technologies have allowed users across the globe to connect in a quick and simple way, leading them to exchange and share assets just as easily (Hamari et al., 2015). The sharing economy can thus be considered as a sub-part of both consumption models: it does not include transactions where a permanent transfer of ownership is undertaken and uses digital technologies to coordinate resources on scales never-seen-before. However, while access-based consumption also included transactions made between rental companies and individuals, the sharing economy only encompasses exchanges made between individuals. Just like in collaborative consumption, these exchanges can be market-mediated but must be made between private individuals.

More importantly, the sharing economy differs from the previous models by focusing on coordinating resources that are underutilized. Consumer goods such as "houses, cars, boats, clothing, books, toys, appliances, tools, furniture, computers, etc." (Frenken & Schor, 2017, p. 5) often have what is called "excess capacity"; they are not used at all times by their owner, which means they could be used by someone else when their owner is not using them. For instance, the owner of a car might only use it during the week but use alternative transportation during the weekends. The car is thus underutilized during weekends and could be rented to another individual who wishes to use a car on weekends. The goal of the sharing economy is thus to give access to under-utilized goods that are temporarily not used by the private individuals who own them (Allen, 2015). Instead of producing new goods that will, in turn, be underutilized, business models in the sharing economy are focusing on peer-to-peer lending and are able to "unlock the value" of pre-existing goods (Botsman, 2015, para. 4).

The fact that the exchanges in the sharing economy are made between private individuals does not mean that companies are excluded from participating. On the contrary, when discussing the sharing economy, companies such as Airbnb are often cited as key actors. Companies are not producers in the sharing economy; instead, they act as middlemen between individuals seeking to gain or give temporary access to existing goods (Munger, 2016). The products of these companies are their digital platforms, on which individuals can be matched, usually using powerful algorithms. On these platforms, the companies provide extensive information to their users but also assume a policing and enforcement role; they usually provide "self-regulation mechanisms such as insurance for guests and hosts, a secure payment system, and reputation-based accountability" (Allen, 2015, p. 25). As a result, companies of the sharing economy do not need to establish direct relationships between them and suppliers, consumers and governments, and their role is limited to the features their platform provides (Mair & Reischauer, 2017).

Sharing economy companies can be for-profit or non-profit, and often offer disruptive alternatives to traditional industries, rarely fitting with current regulation. The examples of Airbnb and the hotel industry, as well as the occasionally-violent fight between Uber and taxi drivers, come to mind when discussing the impact of such models on traditional services. However, these disruptive models often persist, despite governments' and industries' discontent and criticisms. Indeed, as two-sided marketplaces, companies of the sharing economy need to attract both supply and demand of resources before coordinating them, which means that building a wide user base is necessary to their success. So instead of establishing a physical presence and tearing down barriers to entry, these companies build a strong user base in order to develop their platform (Allen, 2015). Once it's established, this large-scale user base can then be used as a political leverage when disrupting traditional industries, sometimes pushing governments to adapt their current laws (Allen, 2015).

Because they rely almost exclusively on their user-base to develop and internationalize their platforms, companies of the sharing economy are highly dependent on their users. Even more so than their traditional counterparts, these companies need to recognize what kind of value they bring to individuals; only by understanding how to attract users on their platform, can they gain and maintain a

user-base wide enough to implement their model across the globe.

2.3. Understanding Perceived Value

In the 1990s, researchers and practitioners started recognizing the importance of studying customer value as a way for companies to achieve higher performance. Among them, Woodruff described customer satisfaction measurements (CSM) as a way to "bring the voice of the customer into quality efforts" (Woodruff, 1997, p.139). However, he also insisted that companies needed to build additional knowledge on top of these measurements to gain a long-term competitive advantage, and that offering quality was not enough to attract and retain customers (Woodruff, 1997). This is especially observable in industries with low or non-existent switching costs, the 'onetime costs that customers associate with the process of switching from one provider to another" (Burnham, Frels, & Mahajan, 2003, p. 110). For instance, a hotel might make its guests fill out a short form at the end of their stay, asking them if it was satisfactory, but even overall satisfied customers could choose to stay at another hotel during their next trip. Similarly, a customer might be satisfied with a bike bought from company A, but still turn to company B for its next bike purchase. A satisfied customer will easily turn to a competitor if the competitor's products or services provide comparatively more value to them and if the switching costs are low; indeed, while a customer's satisfaction might impact their perception of value, it is not the only aspect to consider to truly bring value to customers.

There is thus a need to not only provide high-quality products and services but also deliver customer value that is superior to the one provided by its competitors. To do so, a company needs to determine what aspects are valued by its customers, which ones it should focus on, how well it delivers this value in the eyes of its customers and how it will change in the future (Woodruff, 1997). Once these questions are answered, the company can start changing its processes to provide its customers with more value and gain a competitive advantage.

Many researchers have followed Woodruff's footsteps in positioning customer value as a central concept for marketing practitioners (Smith & Colgate, 2007). Understanding the value a company is providing to its customers is even more

crucial today, especially in online behavior (Holbrook, 1994); our globalized economy and the exponential rise of information and communication technologies have given potential customers access to an sea of information and thousands of competitors spread around the world, increasing the risk of them turning to a competitor if they provide them with more value. This is particularly important for companies of the sharing economy that rely on individuals to build both the supply and demand sides of their platform. However, measuring customer value can prove to be a complex task.

While other indicators might be used to determine a company's value (often based on the value it brings to its shareholders), perceived value focuses on how each of the company's customers individually values its services and products. It can be defined as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). Simply put, perceived value is the difference between the benefits and the sacrifices that would result from a purchase, as perceived by a prospective customer.

What a customer receives and what he must give up during a purchase is in no case limited to financial aspects. Benefits can encompass such aspects as volume, quality, convenience, or ease of use (Zeithaml, 1988; Wu, Chen, Chen & Cheng, 2014). The higher the perceived benefits, the higher the perceived value for a given individual. On the other hand, the sacrifices perceived by a prospective consumer can be evaluated in terms of money, time or effort spent on the purchase (Zeithaml, 1988). The higher the amount of time, money, or effort needed to make a purchase, the lower the perceived value before purchase.

The amount of sacrifice taken into consideration when determining perceived value is also influenced by the risk perceived by the individual. Perceived risk is understood as the "subjective expectation of loss before a purchase" (Sweeney, Soutar, & Johnson, 1999, p. 81). The amount and the kind of risk perceived differ between individuals and is not the same for each product; it is a multidimensional construct, as individuals can perceive financial, performance, physical, psychological, social or time-related risks (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972; Stone & Gronhaug, 1993). A high level of perceived risk has been shown to have a negative impact on perceived value; when faced with uncertainty, an individual perceives a potential sacrifice in the future, which impacts their perception of the value

provided by a product or service (Sweeney et al., 1999). A higher level of uncertainty will lead consumers to search for more information to reduce said uncertainty, which, in turn, will increase the time and efforts made by the individual, reducing the overall value they perceive in the good or service (Wu et al., 2014).

Perceived value is a personal evaluation, not only based on facts but on perception. "Consumers are like fingerprints, [...] no two are exactly the same" (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2000, p. 185), which means that customers' perception can be influenced not only by many variables such as values, personality, lifestyle, knowledge, motivations, but also by their past experiences with the company (Blackwell et al., 2000; Cho & Bokyeong, 2016). As a result, it differs from one customer to the other and is influenced by many factors. Perceived value is not a single number determined by a company, but infinite evaluations made by the individuals using its products or services, that can vary in time and depend on the context within the purchase is made (Woodruff, 1997).

While companies have little control in setting such an indicator, they can influence it by accumulating knowledge on their customers. A company that is aware of its value proposition and how its customers react to it, can attempt to increase the perceived value found in its products or services. In turn, a greater perceived value will increase the probability of users or customers returning rather than turning to a competitor (Sabiote, Jamilena & Castañeda, 2012). Decreasing the sacrifices perceived by their prospective consumers is particularly important for companies. As previous research has shown, one unit of loss, or sacrifice, has a bigger impact on overall perceived value than a unit of gain, because of the loss-adverse tendencies of consumers (Wu et al., 2014). As such, reducing the time, effort and money necessary for a purchase, by reducing uncertainty for instance, has a bigger impact on value than attempting to provide more benefits to their customers (Mao & Lyu, 2017).

Whether companies of the sharing economy can be described as an alternative to the capitalist economy (Richardson, 2015), they differ greatly from their traditional counterparts in terms of values and ideas; their platforms are built around the ideas of community, sharing, and underutilization (Botsman, 2015), and thus bring value to their users in ways that would not always be possible for traditional companies.

As a result, it is necessary to analyze what their users perceive as valuable when using their platforms, in order to truly understand how perceived value can be impacted in the sharing economy.

2.4. Bringing Value to Users in the Sharing Economy

Individuals can be drawn to the sharing economy for not only economic, but also social or environmental reasons (Böcker & Meelen, 2017). First, the sharing economy focuses on access over ownership: why buy something if you only intend on using it once or twice? Accessing goods instead of buying them greatly diminishes costs, including the financial, performance and social risks attached to ownership (Schaefers et al., 2016). Moreover, since the production and the distribution of goods is decentralized in the sharing economy, individuals have access to more variety (Lawson et al., 2016). Since every transaction of the sharing economy is made between two individuals instead of between many individuals and a company, there is an infinite number of contracts available to the user, including one that will match their personal preferences to the letter (Allen & Berg, 2014). Second, the social benefits of participating in the sharing economy and the community that results from it are often highly promoted on digital platforms. There, individuals interact and build trust in order to share their underutilized goods, and usually meet in person at some point during the exchange. Finally, in addition to economically and socially conscious users, the sharing economy also attracts environmentally conscious users; in a world where resources are finite, accessing existing goods instead of owning them could also mean producing less, and thus lead societies towards a more sustainable economic philosophy (Allen & Berg, 2014; Richardson, 2015; Lawson et al., 2016).

The benefits perceived by the participants of the sharing economy can differ greatly depending on their motivations when engaging in such a consumption model. In their recent empirical study, Böcker and Meelen (2017) showed that the importance of these motivations can differ between socio-demographic groups: women are more likely to participate in the sharing economy because of environmental concerns, while young people with low-income will be likely to do so for economic reasons. However, these differences were slim compared to the differences observed between the sectors of the sharing economy: while car sharing is

environmentally motivated and meal sharing is socially motivated, people using the sharing economy for accommodation were mostly economically motivated (Böcker & Meelen, 2017).

The perceived benefits of participating in the sharing economy are diverse and can differ according to not only the user but also the type of sectors within the sharing economy. However, these perceived benefits would not be enough if the risks and sacrifices that can be perceived by users were not lowered by these platforms. Sharing goods between individuals instead of purchasing or renting them from traditional firms was not possible on a large scale until recently; while it is not in question that sharing has always existed between individuals, the sharing economy differentiates from traditional models of sharing due to the fact that people are now willing to share their resources with complete strangers, rather than just their own families, friends, and communities (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). The platforms of the sharing economy have been able to allow these types of exchanges by reducing transaction costs and by fostering trust between strangers (Allen & Berg, 2014; Henten & Windekilde, 2016; Munger, 2016; Frenken & Schor, 2017).

Coase (1937) described the firm as a suite of repetitive contracts over the long term, or, said differently, the sum of the relationships and transactions under the aegis of an entrepreneur. According to Coase, firms have emerged to overcome the market's imperfections; in a perfect market, individuals would not be faced with uncertainty and would be able to rely on their perfect knowledge to create an infinity of small contracts directly with other individuals (Coase, 1937). In reality, they are faced with transaction costs, "frictions" occurring during transactions, such as misunderstandings and conflicts surrounding the contract (Williamson, 1981). These costs can be divided into three broad categories: search and information costs, bargaining and decision costs, policing and enforcement costs (Dahlman, 1979). In order to reduce the repetitive costs of finding, creating and enforcing contracts, the traditional firm has thus emerged as an alternative to market exchanges.

Today, information and communication technologies have made knowledge easily accessible but dispersed across the globe. Companies of the sharing economy have emerged as coordinators of information - a role that was traditionally fulfilled by the price mechanism (Allen & Berg, 2014). Thus, instead of coordinating contracts

to produce goods and services -like traditional firms- the sharing economy platforms provide and organize the extensive information necessary to engage in individual transactions. On these platforms, users can locate goods and services around them or in specific locations, to use filters and to compare them without leaving the app. The search and information costs that would normally occur if an individual were to look for and create a direct contract with another individual are reduced. By facilitating the search for information, these platforms reduce the sacrifices made by users, including the time and efforts spent on looking for information, which in turns greatly increases the perceived value of participating in the sharing economy. Reducing transaction costs is particularly important for online decisions, as the information search costs have the most impact on the users' overall perceived value and on their intention to reiterate their decision in the future (Wu et al. 2014). As a result, companies of the sharing economy are able to bring higher value to its users by collecting and organizing information helpful to their decisions, especially on a platform with great usability - that is "efficient, effective, engaging, error tolerant and easy to learn" (Quesenberry, 2001, para. 5)

However, without trust, a transaction with a stranger might still be perceived as too risky (Munger, 2016; Frenken & Schor, 2017). In addition to making the search for contracts easier for dispersed individuals, the platforms of the sharing economy also need to foster trust between their users. Trust is defined as the "willingness to rely on another party and to take action in circumstances where such action makes one vulnerable to the other part" (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998, p. 604). Trust is necessary for our economic and social exchanges because individuals have limited knowledge about the people they interact with; when individuals are faced with uncertainty and thus risk, trust is an important tool to lower transaction costs (Doney et al., 1998). Companies of the sharing economy reduce risk and uncertainty, and foster trust through various systems integrated into their platforms. They rely on online payment systems and enforcement rules surrounding the contracts created between their users (Frenken & Schor, 2017). More importantly, they almost always use reputational rating systems, which reduce the costs of "social reputation knowledge" (Allen & Berg, 2014, p. 23). Before engaging with a stranger, a user will be able to look through a series of comments and ratings that other users left after dealing with the stranger in question. A user will thus be able to rely on

comments and ratings left by previous users to decide if an individual should be trusted. As a result, trust between strangers is facilitated through a self-governance system based on the participation of their peers (Allen & Berg, 2015). Even though comments and ratings are user-generated, they represent an important part of the value that can be perceived on the platform. Indeed, trust is a necessary requirement for participating in the sharing economy (Frenken & Schor, 2017).

In the sharing economy, digital platforms reduce transaction costs and foster trust, which reduces the risks and sacrifices perceived by users. They also bring various kinds of economic, social and environmental benefits to their users depending on their activities. The difficulty in evaluating perceived value, for traditional companies and sharing economy platforms alike, is due to the fact that it is intrinsically subjective. Their perception of value can thus be influenced by their personal system of values and beliefs, their personality, their lifestyle, their knowledge, their motivations, and their attitudes towards the company (Blackwell et al., 2000; Cho & Bokyeong, 2016). However, all of these elements may be impacted by their cultural upbringing; users in different countries could perceive different levels of value for the same platform and services.

2.5.   Cultures and Value

Culture can be defined as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9), or, put differently, "a system of values and norms that are shared among a group of people and that when taken together constitute a design for living*"* (Hill, 1997, p. 67). According to these definitions, people from the same culture share core values and beliefs that differentiate them from other cultural groups. Cultures differ from each other the same way personalities differ from an individual to the next and shape the way a group will respond to its environment (Hofstede, 2001).

Friedman (2005) explored a series of forces that have participated in the 'flattening of the world', including but not limited to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of connectivity made possible by the Internet, and the growing outsourcing and offshoring decisions that have led to the rise of global supply chains. As a result, geographically distant countries and their citizens are now able to trade as if they

were neighbors (Friedman, 2005). While this 'flattening' might be seen as an eventual homogenizing force between cultures on a global scale, Friedman also recognizes that there is 'an even greater potential to nourish diversity to a degree that the world has never seen before' (Friedman, 2005, p. 506).

For practitioners, cultural differences lead to the widespread internationalization dilemma between global standardization of products and adaptation to local contexts and consumers (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Moreover, researchers in international business domains (e.g. strategy, management, marketing) have used cultural differences between countries as a key variable in explaining companies' performance abroad. According to Nakata (2009), the number of articles appearing in business journals and focusing on cultural differences quadrupled in less than 30 years, going from around 600 between 1980 and 1990 to more than 2200 between 2001 and 2007; most of these papers used the Hofstede model as their main analysis instrument (Nakata, 2009).

The Hofstede model was created in 1980 in order to analyze the cultural traits of worldwide IBM employees and has since been used to compare countries according to country-wide cultural preferences (Hofstede, 2011). While the model initially only comprised four dimensions, each country is now given a relative score based on six dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. The number of research papers using Hofstede's work has increased steadily since the model was first published (Ferreira, Ribeiro Serra, & Frias Pinto, 2014), elevating this model to an essential paradigm for cross-cultural studies (Nakata, 2009).

Hofstede's model, however, has drawn criticisms for its limitations. First, some researchers criticize the fact that Hofstede's model is restrained by national borders, qualifying it as too simplistic (McSweeney, 2002). Assuming national homogeneity also excludes individual, group, organization or global levels of culture that can all impact a person's set of values (Erez & Gati, 2004). Second, while the Hofstede model considers cultures as static, some researchers have felt the need to create cultural models that would acknowledge cultures as dynamic, changing at the contact of other cultures and through individuals' life experiences (Erez & Gati, 2004; Viegas-Pires, 2011). As a result, assuming that a set of unique cultural traits

will be present in every individual within a nation appears utopian, as great variances can be found between individuals' set of values within national borders (McSweeney 2002). These criticisms have become particularly potent as globalization has made cultures more fluid than ever; national cultures are now "traversing national borders, co-mingling, hybridizing, morphing and clashing" with each other through global exchanges of information and people (Nakata, 2009, p. 4).

Hofstede's work has been considered by many to be simplistic and unrealistic when it comes to predicting individual behavior, as individuals are complex and influenced by many different contexts and situations (McSweeney, 2002). However, researchers have not rejected the influence of national cultures on individuals' behavior; they are instead looking to establish models that go deeper into understanding the complexity and the interaction of cultures. Culture can be understood as a set of shared values, but also as a shared meaning attached to events and symbols. Intuitively, it can thus influence the way individuals interact with their environment and process the information coming from it (Nakata, 2009). Thus, while it would be ill-advised to rely exclusively on cultures to explain how users from different countries value their participation in the sharing economy, recent studies suggest that differences in cultures could explain, to some extent, the differences between users' perceptions of a company or platform.

Besides, the Hofstede model is still widely used in research to explain how and why consumers might differ according to their national cultures, especially using the first four dimensions that were historically proposed. Tourism and hospitality researchers have shown a growing interest in analyzing how national cultures influence tourists' perceptions of quality and value using Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hsieh & Tsai, 2009; Sabiote et al., 2012). Quantitative data has shown that the overall value perceived by tourists was influenced not only by their levels of uncertainty avoidance and individualism, but also by their purchase experience on the hotel's website: for instance, individuals from individualistic cultures placed a higher value on the website effectiveness than their counterparts, and perceived risk had a bigger impact on perceived value for individuals from high-uncertainty avoidance countries (Sabiote et al., 2012).

Cultures can also have a moderating effect on how individuals acquire information

and build trust before making a purchase. Since cultures influence the value and norms of individuals and how they interact with their environment, they indirectly impact the way information is processed and used during decisions (Doney et al., 1998). In individualistic cultures with low power distance, individuals tend to consult friends and use various media before making decisions, while in collectivistic and high-power distance cultures, they will rely on a larger and more implicit network, using unconsciously gained knowledge and their emotions (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Moreover, individuals in individualistic and masculine cultures are likely to build trust through a "calculative process"; they will make a personal calculation of costs and rewards before engaging in a transaction with a seemingly untrustworthy individual. On the other hand, individuals in collectivist and feminine cultures will rely more on "transference processes" to build trust; they will rely on trusted individuals and institutions to indicate to them if they should trust a seemingly untrustworthy individual (Doney et al., 1998).

In addition to influencing how individuals perceive the sacrifices and benefits provided by a company or a platform, national cultures have been shown to impact the way individuals perceive companies. Faced with a globally standardized brand, individuals from different cultures will perceive "different brand personalities" (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 92). Depending on their national cultures, individuals will use different words to characterize the same global brands - "prestigious" in high power distance cultures versus "friendly" in low power distance cultures for instance (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Moreover, within the sharing economy, cultures act as a filter on what is considered appropriate for platforms. For instance, American users believe it is perfectly normal for these platforms to collect a profit, while in Germany, it is seen as inappropriate. As a result, the sharing economy platforms, their actions, and their structures are shaped by the cultural expectations of the countries where they operate (Mair & Reischauer, 2017). Considering that perceived value is influenced by the previous experiences of the user or customer with the organization, their perception of the organization could also have an impact on their overall perceived value.

National cultures and their influence on individual behaviors are complex. Cultures are shaped by various institutions and transform in contact with other cultures. However, by carefully considering the limitations of Hofstede's model, it could still

be possible to consider culture as an element of individuals' perception, and thus as a potential influence on how they will perceive value in the sharing economy.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I present the conceptual framework that was built according to the theories and concepts that were developed in the literature review. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of this conceptual framework:

Figure 1 : Conceptual model

Personal Evaluation of Value and Risk
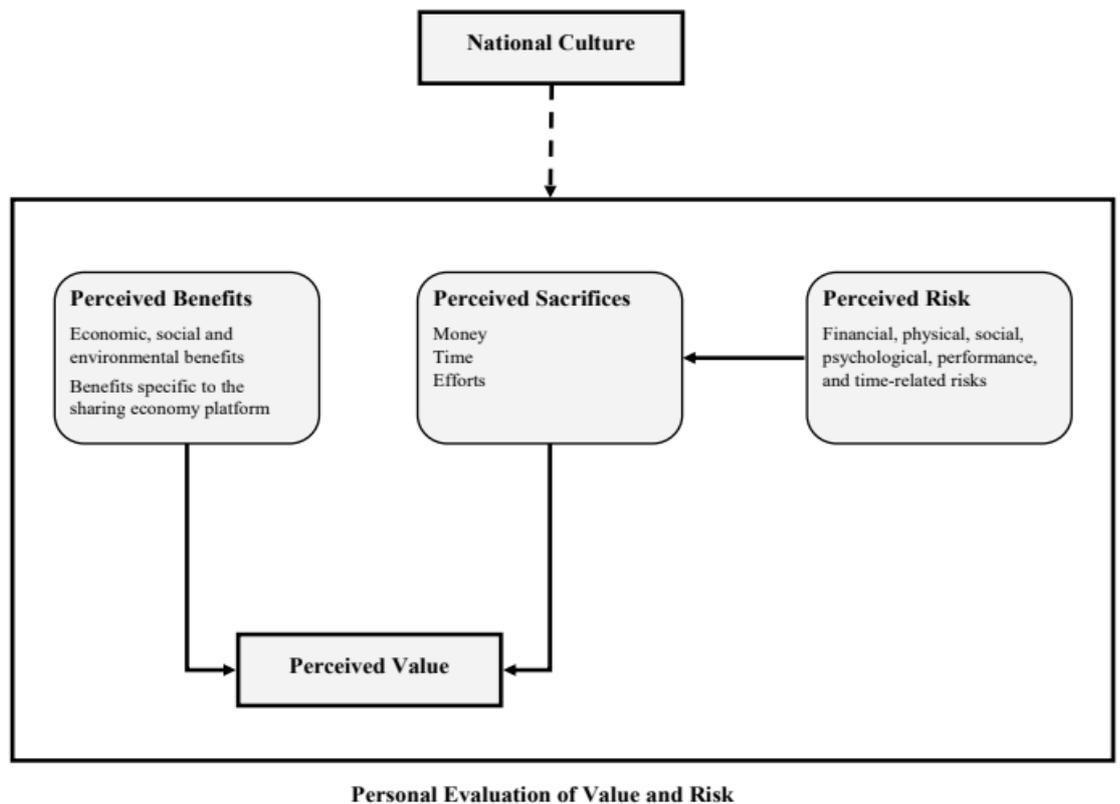
3.1. Perceived Value and its Components

As stated in the third part of my literature review, perceived value is "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). Before a purchase, a potential consumer will thus evaluate the trade-off between the potential benefits and sacrifices that could result from said purchase. The benefits and sacrifices perceived can differ greatly from one individual to the other; in traditional industries, perceived benefits can encompass aspects such as volume, quality, convenience, or ease of use (Zeithaml, 1988; Wu, Chen, Chen & Cheng, 2014), while perceived sacrifices can be measured by the amount of money, time or efforts spent before

deciding to purchase a product (Zeithaml, 1988). A high level of perceived benefits will impact perceived value positively, while a high level of perceived sacrifices will have a negative impact on perceived value. Perceived sacrifices, and thus perceived value, are also greatly influenced by the uncertainty and risks perceived by a given individual (Sweeney et al., 1999). When faced with a higher level of perceived risks, individuals will tend to spend more time and efforts looking for information, which in turn will reduce the overall value they perceive (Wu et al., 2014).

3.2. The influence of Cultures on Perceived Value and its components

As stated in the last section of my literature review, national culture can be defined as "a system of values and norms that are shared among a group of people and that when taken together constitute a design for living" (Hill, 1997, p. 67). As a result, an individual's national culture will impact how they perceive and interact with their environment (Nakata, 2009). Because of the intrinsically subjective nature of perceived value, it can be influenced by many factors specific to each individual, such as their personal values, motivations, and knowledge, but also their personality, lifestyle and their past experience with the company (Blackwell et al., 2000; Cho & Bokyeong, 2016). All these factors could, to some extent, be influenced by national cultures. Recent studies have shown that perceived value and its components could indeed be influenced by the national cultures of potential consumers: national cultures have explained differences in how individuals perceived overall value (Sabiote et al., 2012), how they built trust and acquired information (Doney et al., 1998; de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010), and how they perceived companies (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). In my conceptual model, national culture is considered to be an influencing variable on perceived sacrifices – especially because of its impact on how individuals will manage risk -, perceived benefits and thus overall perceived value.

3.3. Intent of this Study

While some recent studies have shown the impact of national cultures on perceived value, the literature on this subject is still underdeveloped. Moreover, none has

focused on the sharing economy and more importantly on how the perceived value of participating in a sharing economy model could be impacted by the individual's national culture. Companies taking part in the sharing economy differ greatly from their traditional counterparts in many respects, notably because of the importance of their users in their business model. As a result, perceived value should be considered a key aspect in building their user base. Besides, the sacrifices and benefits perceived by their users will be different from the ones perceived before purchase in more traditional models.

In order to partly fill this literature gap, this exploratory study aims at detecting trends on the influence of national cultures on perceived value in the sharing economy. Keeping in mind that other factors such as traveling habits or lifestyle might greatly influence the perceived value of participating in the sharing economy, the goal of this study is thus to show that the value a potential user perceives from a sharing economy platform might vary depending on their cultural background. In the next chapter, I will present the methods that will be used to do so.

4. METHODOLOGY

Following the literature review and the conceptual framework derived from it, this chapter exposes and justifies the methodology used to answer my research question: how national cultures influence the perceived value of participating in the sharing economy. First, I will justify the use of a qualitative case study and present my unit of analysis (Section 1). Then, after presenting the case I selected for this study (Section 2), I will describe my data collection methods and my data sample (Sections 3 and 4). Finally, I will present the methods I used for my data categorization and analysis (Section 5).

4.1. Qualitative Case Study and Unit of Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research is adapted when a phenomenon has not been analyzed by the literature (or not sufficiently) and when the goal of the investigation is to comprehend this phenomenon and build concepts and theories about it. Instead of testing existing hypotheses, qualitative studies thus aim to collect data in order to provide foundations for theory building (Merriam, 2009; Myers, 2013). As demonstrated in my literature review, very few studies have studied the influence on cultures on perceived value; besides, none of these existing studies have conducted their research in the sharing economy. A qualitative method is thus adapted to my research question.

Yin (1994) recommends using a case study as a research method when "a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin, 1994, p. 9). Moreover, a case study can bring to light concepts and causality that are unknown, potentially leading researchers to revaluate their understanding of the phenomenon being analyzed (Stake, 1981). My research question is indeed a « how » question about a contemporary phenomenon that I can not control; it is also related to individual perceptions which can not be completely predicted and should partially emerge during my data collection and analysis. A case study is thus appropriate considering my research question.

Since perceived value is a personal evaluation made by each user, I chose to rely exclusively on interviews. Interviews are "an essential source of case study

evidence" (Yin, 1994, p. 85); they allow respondents to provide the research with their personal insights, and the researcher to collect data that is directly related to their research question (Yin, 1994). This method allowed for an exploration of the perception, feelings, opinions and beliefs of each respondent, which would not have allowed with a simple survey. Focus groups were also put aside to avoid groupthink, which could have prevented some individuals from expressing their opinions and feelings freely and without being influenced by other participants.

Finally, while this case study focuses on one company of the sharing economy, my research question implies that my unit of analysis is the perceived value of using its platform in the eyes of its users. According to Yin (1994), different units of analysis entail different research designs and collection strategy. If my goal was to evaluate the value perceived by customers in a traditional industry, my research design would have been extremely similar to the one presented in this study; however, if I chose to evaluate the frequency of use or the motivations of users in the sharing economy, my data collection and my research design would have been significantly different. The concept of perceived value was at the center of my data collection, and its components served as guidelines for coding and analyzing the data collected for this study. This confirms my unit of analysis: the value perceived by users. It was however evaluated within the framework of a single-case study.

4.2.   Overview of the Case: Airbnb

In a previous work of research written for a MSc course, I used the example of Airbnb to illustrate the internationalization of the sharing economy platforms. This short case study aimed at evaluating the potential institutional and cultural obstacles a company such as Airbnb could face when internationalizing its platform. It focused on the public debates surrounding the company since its arrival in Quebec and was a compelling way to shed light upon the institutional pressures faced by Airbnb. However, it brought little insight on how cultural differences could impact the adoption of such a consumption model by individuals around the world. In the present study, I wish to explore not how Airbnb was accepted in a specific regulatory context, but how national cultures can influence how its users will perceive the risks, sacrifices and benefits of using Airbnb instead of an alternative

mode of accommodation. Therefore, I will continue to use Airbnb as representative example of the sharing economy.

In 2018, Airbnb users can rent a room, an apartment, a house or any other type of accommodation listed on the platform in more than 190 countries (Airbnb, 2018). There are more than 5 million Airbnb listings dispersed in more than 80,000 cities and, on average, more than 2 million guests stayed at an Airbnb every night (Airbnb, 2018). The company has physical offices in more than 30 countries, where Airbnb employees such as engineers, customer service specialists, data analysts, or even crisis management specialists work together to provide users with a usable and secured platform. On this platform, homeowners and travelers can meet and create direct contracts. Airbnb was built around the idea of sharing idle resources; it gives individuals access to unoccupied private homes.

In the appendices, you can find extracts of my previous case study, including a short presentation of the company, its platform features and its roles on that platform (Appendix A), its internationalization strategy and top markets (Appendix B), and its history in Quebec (Appendix C).

4.3.   Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews were conducted over the course of three months - August, September and October 2018. Three types of approaches can be used during interviews: the researcher can conduct an informal conversational interview, use an interview guide, or choose a standardized approach (Patton, 2002). I decided to design a standardized interview guide (see Appendix E for Interview Guide). This ensured that major elements of my conceptual model would at least be discussed once during each interview and that every respondent would be confronted with the "same stimuli […] in the same way and the same order" (Patton, 2002, p.344).

During interviews, answers can be influenced by the way the question were constructed, creating a bias (Yin, 1994). To avoid it, the words in each of my question were carefully chosen to not limit the possible set of answers respondents could think of, and dichotomous questions were avoided (Patton, 2002). For example, instead of asking respondents "Would it bother to not meet your host?", I asked "Suppose the host could not meet you in person to give you the keys. How would you feel about that?", which generated a wider range of answers and

prevented respondents to answer by a simple "yes" or "no". Moreover, before each interview, a consent form was signed by the respondent and contained a short summary of the study's subject and goals (see Appendix D for complete Consent Form). No additional information on my units of analysis were provided to the respondents in order to avoid reflexivity (Yin, 1994).

Participation in the interviews was voluntary and did not involve any sort of compensation. The location and time of the interviews were selected by the respondents in order to make them feel at ease during the interviewing process. Respondents were interviewed in English or French according to their preferences, allowing them to express their feelings and opinions in the most spontaneous way possible. On average, interviews lasted 30 to 35 minutes and were audio recorded with the authorization of the respondent. Each interview was divided into three distinct parts:

a. First, I asked each respondent to answer a few background questions concerning their age, the national cultures they had been in contact with in their life, and their past use of the platform.

b. Then, I asked the respondents to take part in a fictional search scenario on the Airbnb platform. They were tasked to find accommodation on the Airbnb platform with a few rules: a budget of 1000 dollars, for two guests, for an entire week. The destination was entirely their choice. I asked them to be vocal about their decisions and their general thought process during this activity. While some respondents were able to talk me through their entire decision process without any intervention, I asked some short questions during the scenario to make some respondents more vocally active. The use of a scenario where the respondents had to actively browse through the listing on the platform and reach a decision allowed for the interviews to be less restricted; since what is valued or considered risky is specific to individuals, all possible comments and perceptions were not possible to predict prior to interviews. Following their train of thought with minimal structure allowed me to give them enough freedom to express their thoughts in the most spontaneous way possible and to let new concepts emerge.

c. Finally, once a listing was chosen by the respondent, I asked them direct standardized questions to make sure I had covered all the aspects needed for my analysis. Depending on the information shared during the second part of the interview, I dismissed some questions during that part to avoid a high level of redundancy.

In total, 30 interviews were conducted for this study. In the following part, I provide a detailed description of the data sample I used for these interviews.

4.4. Data Sample

All the respondents interviewed for this study belonged to one of three cultural groups: Canadian citizens who were raised in Quebec, French citizens who now live in Quebec, and Canadian citizens who were raised in a Canadian province other than Quebec and who also now live in Quebec. I created two separate groups for Canadians and Quebecers because Hofstede distinguishes the two cultures; according to him, Quebecers are "more formal, hierarchical, moderately relationship focused, and more emotionally expressive" (Hofstede Insights, 2018). As a result, the score for Quebec on each dimension is always between the scores of France and Canada:

Figure 2: Hofstede's Country Comparison: France, Québec, and Canada
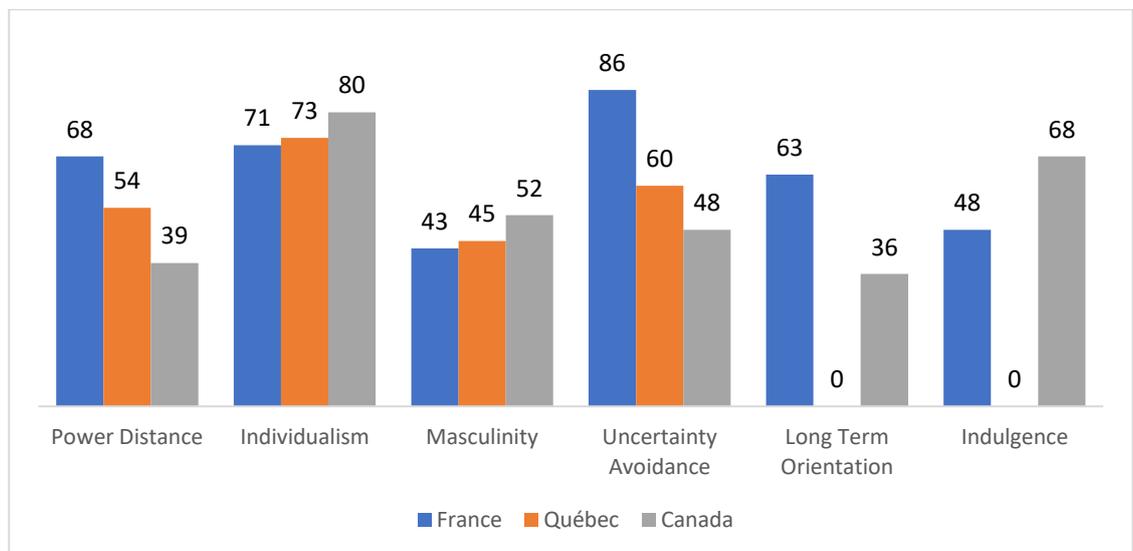
Adapted from https://www.hofstede-insights.com. Retrieved on November 12th, 2018.
Long term Orientation and Indulgence data for Quebec are not available.

Table 1: Detailed List of Respondents

Code	Age	Gender	CG	QC	Other cultural influences	Stayed	Used
FM1	26	M	FR	4 years		>10	>10
FM2	29	M	FR	4 years	Asia (SK, Taiwan, HK), 1 year	<10	<10
FF1	28	F	FR	2 years	UK, 7 months	>10	>10
FF2	24	F	FR	7 months	Germany, 1 year; USA, 6 months	<10	<10
FM3	28	M	FR	5 years		<10	<10
FM4	28	M	FR	2 years	Australia, 2 years	1	1
FF3	30	F	FR	4 years	Belgium, 1 year	<10	<10
FM5	29	M	FR	4 years		>20	>20
FF4	27	F	FR	3 years		>10	>10
FF5	28	F	FR	8 years		2	2
QF1	23	F	QC			1	0
QF2	35	F	QC		Ontario, 1.5 years; Mexico, 3.5 years	0	0
QF3	24	F	QC		Salvadoran parents, 2 first years in BC	0	0
QF4	21	F	QC			2	0
QF5	20	F	QC		Saskatchewan, 5 years	1	0
QM1	26	M	QC		Netherlands, 6 months	2	2
QF6	23	F	QC		Australia, 6 months	1	0
QF7	21	F	QC			1	0
QM2	26	M	QC		Ontario, 3 years; Denmark, 7 months	<10	<10
QM3	24	M	QC		Thailand 8 months; Uganda 1 year	<5	0
CF1	25	F	CA/ONT	2 years	Nova Scotia, 4 years	>10	>10
CF2	26	F	CA/ONT	2 years	One parent is from Quebec	<5	<5
CF3	23	F	CA/ONT	16 months	Boston, USA, 4 years	0	0
CM1	26	M	CA/ONT	8 months	Sweden 6 months Belgium 1 year	<10	<10
CF4	28	F	CA/ONT	2 years	Nova Scotia, 4 years, France, 1 year	>20	>10
CF5	24	F	CA/ONT	16 months	France, 4 months	0	0
CM2	29	M	CA/ALB	9 years	Dual citizenship, born in Seattle	<10	2
CM3	23	M	CA/BC	1 year	Sweden 6 months	<5	<5
CM4	27	M	CA/BC	2 years		>10	>10
CF6	28	F	CA/NB	9 years		>20	0

Notes:

CG: cultural group

QC: how long the respondent has lived in Quebec

Stayed: number of times the respondent has stayed in an Airbnb

Used: number of times the respondent has used the platform themselves to make a reservation

Ten respondents from each group were interviewed (See Table 1 for a detailed list of these respondents). Since perceived value is influenced by many factors other than national culture, I tried to minimize their impact as much as possible by selecting a relatively homogeneous group of respondents. All respondents were living in Montreal and were thus being exposed to the same institutional context when they were interviewed (see Appendix C for Airbnb's history in Quebec). Results could have been different if respondents were living in different Canadian cities at the moment of the interview. Moreover, all respondents were between 20 and 35 years old and were either students working part-time or full-time workers in low to medium-income jobs. Both female and male respondents were interviewed.

However, the group of respondents was heterogeneous when it came to their experience on the platform: both users and non-users of Airbnb were interviewed. This is because individuals who had never used Airbnb before could still shed light upon what can be perceived as valuable on the platform; their lack of experience on the platform could be due to personal circumstances but could also result from high perceived sacrifices - or low perceived benefits. However, because of the global popularity of the app, all the respondents in this study were familiar with Airbnb, even those who had never used it before.

4.5. Analytical Methods

The 30 recordings resulting from my interviews were transcribed verbatim by hand. This is partly because vocal notes were said out loud to describe the actions of the respondent in real time during the interview, and because the sound and the number of clicks was also taken into consideration to describe what was happening. Some examples of these oral notes were: "you are opening a second tab now", "you are looking at the pictures now" or "you are looking at the map now". This allowed for a faithful transcription of events in the scenario part of the interviews. In the final transcripts, these vocal notes were put in italic and the third person was used to make scenario transcripts easier to read (see Appendices F and G for some examples of transcripts).

Once all the interviews were transcribed, I read all of them a first time to familiarize

myself with the elements mentioned by the respondents. Then, using a coding software, I first categorized the data I collected according to the elements of my conceptual model, keeping in mind my unit of analysis. Elements were thus first divided between three broad categories: the benefits, the sacrifices and the risks perceived by the respondents when using the Airbnb platform instead of an alternative type of accommodation.

Then, during a second coding round, I used the same coding software to divide these elements into "nodes", sub-categories that would allow me to refine my analysis. Some of these nodes were directly drawn from my literature review (economic, social and environmental benefits), while some were predicted before the interviews by analyzing the marketing and the communication efforts made on the company's platform. In particular, some highly promoted ideas on the platform shed light upon the benefits users could expect from their use of Airbnb: they could be related to community ("Never a Stranger", "Belong Anywhere", "Stories from our Community"), variety ("Book unique homes and experiences"), and what the company calls the "local lens" - a way to experience a city in the way locals would (Airbnb, 2018). Moreover, even though comments and ratings are user-generated, they represent an important part of the value that can be perceived on the platform; indeed, trust is a necessary requirement for participating in the sharing economy (Frenken & Schor, 2017). As a result, a node named "trust-related aspects" was also created at the beginning of my second coding process.

During that second phase of coding, I took notes on a few elements that were not included in my initial list of nodes but were mentioned by a noticeable number of participants during their interviews – a third of the respondents or more. The nodes that emerged during that phase were then added to the theoretically driven nodes and used during a third and final phase of coding to refine my analysis. Contrary to the nodes I mentioned in the previous paragraph, I did not predict that these nodes would emerge prior to interviews. In total, I added three perceived benefits to the list of nodes: Autonomy, Comfort, and Kitchen. I also added a Personal Opinion node to the list to analyze and compare the respondents' point of view on Airbnb, which might be useful in explaining some variations in perceived value during my analysis. Finally, during the scenario, every respondent mentioned three criteria for

their choice of listing on the platform: price, location and pictures. While not intrinsically related to how they value the platform, I thought the way respondents ranked these three criteria could be of interest. Rankings was thus added to the list of nodes and will potentially be discussed during the analysis part of this study (see Table 2 for the list of nodes and their description).

Table 2: List of Nodes

Perceived Benefits	
- **Economic Benefits**	Benefits related to costs, particularly the diminishment of costs compared to other modes of accommodation
- **Social Benefits**	Benefits related to the Airbnb community and the interactions with users (including outside of the platform)
- **Environmental Benefits**	Benefits related to the environmental impact of using Airbnb
- **Ease of Use**	Benefits related to the usability and the features of the platform
- **Local Experience**	Benefits related to the fact that the user will "a local's place"
- **Variety**	Benefits related to the high number of listings and their uniqueness (as opposed as standardized hotels)
- **Trust-related aspects**	Benefits related to the existence of a reputational rating-system and how they foster trust
- **Comfort & Quality**	Benefits related to comfort and overall quality in Airbnbs
- **Autonomy**	Benefits related to autonomy and convenience
- **Kitchen**	Benefits related to the user's access to a private kitchen
Perceived Sacrifices	Time, money or efforts necessary to use Airbnb
Perceived Risks	Financial, performance, physical, psychological, social or time-related risks associated with Airbnb
Personal Opinions	Beliefs and opinions that could play a moderating role in the user's perception
Rankings	How each user ranked the following criteria when choosing a listing: price, location, pictures

.

Finally, I analyzed the content of each node to classify the respondents' answers and detect common ideas within nodes. For example, during the interviews, I asked every respondent if they believed in the existence of an Airbnb community for travelers. In this last stage of coding, I found three types of answers: some did not, some absolutely did, and some did but were not interested in being a part of it. By classifying respondents' answers within each node, I was able to detect trends and evaluate how each node was perceived by the respondents. These trends will be presented and analyzed in the next chapters.

4.6. Quality Criteria

In order to make my research study trustworthy, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability need to be established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To do so, post-positivist strategies were selected (Shenton, 2004). Although credibility could not be achieved through triangulation of data, since only one gathering method was used, I relied on iterative questioning by including some level on redundancy within each interview; specifically, I warned respondents that the direct questions might be redundant with some elements mentioned during the scenario part, in order to confirm their impressions and feelings towards the platform. Moreover, to ensure honesty during the interviews and avoid reflexivity (Yin, 1994), I insisted in each interview that any answer that would be given to me would be the best answer, as I was only interested in their personal opinions and feelings. Since the Airbnb platform is continuously upgraded and features are gradually added, the perceived value might change in time. In order to establish transferability, the features of Airbnb were thus extensively described in Appendix A. Appendix C also provides an analysis of how Airbnb was introduced in Quebec and how it managed to penetrate the market, in order to contextualize the situation in which the respondents were during interviews. For dependability, I provided a comprehensive description of my methodological protocol. Finally, to establish confirmability, I will expose in my conclusion how my initial beliefs were challenged by my data analysis, as well as the limitations of my research.

5. RESULTS

In this part, I will summarize the interviews using direct quotes and categorize the results according to the nodes presented in the previous chapter. For each node, I will include a table summarizing the main aspects raised by the respondents and the number of occurrences in each cultural group. At the end of this chapter, I also included a table containing a complete summary of the results presented in this chapter (see Table 16).

It should be noted that some aspects were considered as benefits by some individuals and sacrifices for others. For instance, for some individuals, the fact that Airbnbs are managed by a private individual is positive, because an individual might be more accommodating, especially when it comes to arrival times. On the other hand, some individuals perceived this aspect as a risk, because an individual might not possess the customer service and maintenance skills that a hotel staff does, leaving them more vulnerable if an issue occurs during their stay. In this case, this aspect was elaborated as a benefit (in the Autonomy node), as well as a perceived risk.

5.1. Perceived Benefits

Economic Benefits

Table 3: Perceived Economic Benefits

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Sees Airbnb as a cheaper alternative than hotels	10	9	9
- Sees Airbnb's prices as a main reason for its success	8	4	4
- Believes that for the same price, an Airbnb will provide them with "better value"	2	2	3
- Mentioned the benefits of Airbnb for hosts	6	-	7
- Still seeks hotel deals on the side	3	1	1
- Still turns to hostels	-	2	2

In my literature review, the first reason that could lead individuals to take part in the sharing economy was economic. In total, 28 respondents mentioned that they would pick an Airbnb instead of a hotel room because of lower prices. Moreover, at least two respondents from each group considered that with Airbnb, they could get "better value" for less money, because of the additional space and amenities offered in an Airbnb compared to a hotel room:

> "This is one of the only websites where I am aware that I'm saving money, but I'm still confident that my money and my person are safe despite lower prices."
> - FM1 (translated from French)

> "For my future vacations, I thought of using Airbnb, precisely because it's cheap." - QF2 (translated from French)

> "[Airbnb] is usually cheaper and you can get an entire home instead of just one room." - CF1

This difference in price compared to hotels was for all of the respondents an important reason to use Airbnb. Besides, when asked what could explain the success of Airbnb, 16 respondents cited the price of its listings as a main reason:

> "[Airbnb] is mostly a cheaper way to travel compared to hotels."
> - FM3 (translated from French)

> "It's rare to find a hotel room for less than 100 dollars a night, and at this price, the room will not necessarily be great ... On Airbnb, you can find cheaper options, and you can always choose a private room instead of a whole apartment, so you can always find prices that are really worth it." - FF4 (translated from French)

> "Of course, there is also a price aspect, which I think is highly related to the success of Airbnb and Uber." – QM1 (translated from French)

However, a few respondents admitted that they were still seeking out hotel deals when Airbnb prices were higher than they expected: CF4, QF3, FF1, FM5 and FM1 mentioned that they would concurrently search for hotel deals in most instances, "just in case".

> "I've heard that if you call a hotel instead of reserving online you can get better deals. So, if I was going to a place like New York or Chicago, I would probably try that."
> - CF4

> "Depending on the prices on Airbnb, I would also look at websites like booking.com to see the prices for hotel rooms. Sometimes you can have good surprises in terms of price and location." - FM5 (translated from French)

Besides, a few respondents – CF2, CF5, QF5 and QF6, who are all students working part time - still considered Airbnb as a little too expensive for their traveling budgets and usually turned to hostels instead:

> "At the moment, my travel budget is very limited, so I mostly look at hostels." - QF5 (translated from French)

> "I usually look at websites like hostelworld.com to find a hostel. I also do a lot of couchsurfing. It's mostly a question of budget to me." - QF6 (translated from French)

Renting their apartment on Airbnb represents an additional revenue for hosts, and this aspect is highly promoted by the platform.

Finally, while only two out of the 30 respondents were Airbnb hosts -FF2 and FF4- six French respondents and seven Canadian respondents mentioned the economic benefits that Airbnb brought to its hosts:

> "From a seller point of view, I guess it's a way to get some additional revenue when you're travelling." - CM3

> "Plus, it's good money to rent your place on Airbnb. I know so many people who have been able to pay a full rent because of it. It's a good incentive for renters." - CF4

Environmental Benefits

The potential environmental benefits of using Airbnb were not mentioned by any of the respondents, even though it is possible to find data about environmental impact of Airbnb on their blog. Specifically, an environmental evaluation made by the Cleantech Group has shown that using Airbnb instead of hotel rooms reduces greenhouse gas emissions, waste and consumes less energy and water (Airbnb, 2014). While some of the respondents might be aware of this aspect, none brought up the subject during interviews. This node as predicted before I started coding the data collected during the interviews but was thus not considered by respondents as a benefit of using Airbnb.

Social Benefits

Table 4: Perceived Social Benefits

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
Community			
- Believes the community does not exist	6	7	7
- Believes the community exists	2	2	-
- Believes the community exists but they are not part of it	2	1	3
Presence of the host			
- Uncomfortable having the host close or in the apartment	3	3	-
- Open to book a private room in the host's apartment	4	1	-
Interactions with the host			
- Meeting the host is important to them	3	4	-
- Meeting the host is not necessary, but a bonus	5	4	7
- Would prefer to avoid any contact with the host	2	2	3
Others			
- Values a more human experience	10	5	5
- Welcomes recommendations from their host	7	3	3

Contrary to the concepts promoted on the platform and by the definitions of the sharing economy, two thirds of the respondents did not believe in the existence of an Airbnb community and viewed the platform only as an efficient tool to find affordable accommodation. Six French respondents, seven Canadians and seven Quebecers responded negatively or extremely negatively to the question "do you believe that Airbnb has created a community of travelers?". Half of these respondents added that in order to find themselves in a community of travelers, they would stay at a hostel or use an app like Couchsurfing, instead of being physically isolated from other travelers by staying in a private Airbnb. The other half thought that Airbnb promoting a coherent community was "a marketing tool" or "a gimmick":

"No, I completely disagree. I guess there is a social media aspect in the platform, but I don't know how many people are actually using this. I think it's a little impersonal, you could meet a lot of people along the way, but it has not been my experience with the website. A hostel would be a first choice if I was going to meet people." - CM3

"Wait, does that mean that people hang out or something? Am I in the community? I think that's bullshit. I mean I don't know, I guess maybe everybody wants to be a traveler and not a tourist. Maybe you feel more like a local, but it's probably just a gimmick." - CF4

"No, I don't think so. I don't even understand why Airbnb promotes this on their website. When I think about a traveling community, I think about hostels and couch surfing. Not Airbnb. It does not come to mind at all for me."
– FF1 (translated from French)

The other ten respondents were divided into two groups. Four people believed without a doubt that Airbnb was at the origin of a community; two of them, QF2 and QF3, had no experience with the platform, while FM2 and FM4 believed so because of repetitive positive past experiences with hosts:

"I think so. There are so many users who use Airbnb and then talk about it to other people. For example, if you liked an apartment, you will tell your friends about it, and they might end up booking it later. Users can recommend Airbnb and hosts in real life, I feel like it creates a community." - QF2 (translated from French)

"I think it's true. You can make new friends if you want, exchange numbers with your host and welcome them in your own apartment if they end up visiting your city, etc... I think it's very cool, since you're sleeping in someone's home, it makes everything more human." - FM4 (translated from French)

The last six respondents believed that Airbnb community might exist, but specified that they were not a member of that community or had no intention to be:

"I understand that they want to create this brand image for their company, but I don't want to connect with other users. But if you're a guy going to Australia for a few weeks and you want to meet people, you can use this community. I think Airbnb is one of the best ways to do that abroad. You have the possibility to do it, it's your choice."
– FF5 (translated from French)

"I think this community may exist, but it doesn't interest me at all. It's not something I want to be related to, I've never been interested in joining a community, virtual or not." - QM1 (translated from French)

In terms of what all the respondents expected from their host, their answers were similar in one aspect: they all wished for the host to be available and easily

reachable in case of emergencies but did not want the host to be present in the Airbnb during their stay:

> "I would like a minimal presence, but I would also like for them to always be available if you have a question. You should be able to reach them easily if there is a problem." - CF1

> "I like my privacy, so I wanted a place only occupied by myself. I don't want the host to be present during my trip but be available if anything goes wrong. So, if ever I have trouble entering the space or whatnot, I want them to be able to answer my calls and come as quickly as possible to solve the issue if needed." - QF3

Specifically, three French respondents and three Quebecers expressed that it would be awkward or uncomfortable for them if the host appeared during their stay or if he lived in an adjacent room or apartment:

> "I prefer whole apartments to private rooms, I find it difficult to meet strangers in a general way. It's the same thing with carpools: once I'm in the car I'm okay, but if I can avoid prolonged contact with strangers, I do it." - FM5 (translated from French)

> "I would prefer them not to be there at all. I do not mind meeting them, so they can introduce themselves and the apartment. But then I would prefer them to stay away for the rest of my stay. [Last time I used Airbnb,] it was just really awkward to be in a room in someone's apartment with them." - QF1

Moreover, only five respondents - four French and one Canadian, CF6 - were willing to consider the idea of renting a room in someone's apartment instead of choosing a full home, and only if they were traveling alone:

> "I also use filters to request a whole apartment or house. If I was traveling alone, I think I would be open to something else, but even with friends I think I would like to have the whole place to myself." - FF2 (translated from French)

> "I don't really care. Even in a private room, I will have some privacy. It's just for a week, I can go out, and the goal is not to stay locked up in an Airbnb for a whole week." - CF6 (translated from French)

Concerning the host's physical presence at their arrival, the respondents' preferences varied. A total of 16 respondents - five French, four Quebecers and seven Canadians – viewed the host's presence on their first day as a bonus but did not believe their presence necessary as long as they were able to communicate well with them:

"I wouldn't be mad [if I didn't get to meet my host]. It wouldn't ruin my week and I would not give them a bad review. I understand that you can't always be present when your guests arrive, we all have a life, they're probably very busy and it's complicated to manage everything perfectly. But if you are in a foreign country where you've never been before, it's cool to have a first contact with a local who can put you at ease and inform you on the places to go to or to avoid. If it's an Airbnb in Toronto, it really doesn't matter because I know the city already." – FM1 (translated from French)

"It doesn't matter to me. Although to be fair, I think there is more opportunity to have a better welcome if you're meeting the person. You can get personalized recommendations when you talk with somebody." - CM1

Seven respondents - three French men, as well as four respondents from Quebec - thought that meeting the host at least once at the beginning of their stay was important:

"It has happened to me several times, it didn't bother me too much, but I would have liked the host to be there to welcome me, that's for sure. You miss out on a more human relationship, and it makes the whole experience seems like it's all about extra money for them." – FM3 (translated from French)

"I would prefer to meet them in person. If someone leaves you a key in a box, you have to dig a little and since you are in someone's house, it's a little awkward. I think it's important to meet them, they can share some information with you directly."
– QF2 (translated from French)

Finally, the last seven respondents - two French women, two Quebecers and three Canadians - would prefer to avoid any physical contact with their host during their stay:

"I'm going to use the filters to request an entry without the presence of the host, I would rather avoid the small talk and that way I won't have to force myself to socialize."
- QF5 (translated from French)

"I don't need [the host] to be present when I arrive, I would be totally satisfied meeting someone else or using a lock with a code. I would even prefer the lock option: if I can have the least possible contact with the host, good! I'm not here to see his face or start a conversation." – QM1 (translated from French)

While personal opinions about the host's physical presence on the first day varied, all French respondents believed that dealing with an individual instead of a company was a valuable aspect of Airbnb; it allowed them to enjoy a more human and personalized traveling experience, and in some case, to potentially create a

connection. Half of the other two groups also mentioned the value of a personalized experience:

> "They give you personalized suggestions, even though you might not meet them in real life. That's the way I see it, and I think a lot of people might be inclined to ask for it. At the end of the day, I think it's something people crave: a more personalized experience. Even though we are in an era of technology, we look for these kinds of experiences and interactions." - QF3

> "I think maybe people enjoy the more personal contact with someone and being able to communicate with them exactly what they are expecting." - CM4

Moreover, seven French respondents said that the recommendations from their host were not necessary but might have a positive influence on their stay. Three Quebecers and three Canadians also welcomed recommendations:

> "It's nice to meet a host in person and to talk with them about the city and the activities around their apartment, it makes the experience more personalized. The recommendations of the hosts are always welcome and can make you want to return to their Airbnb." – FF2 (translated from French)

> "As I get older, I want more recommendations from people who live in the city I'm visiting. They know better than I do. Someone could come to Montreal and figure it out on their own using Yelp, but they might miss some things that some locals would have recommended." - QM2

Ease of Use

Table 5: Perceived Usability

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Values the usability of the platform	10	6	8
- Has difficulty using the platform	-	4	-

Out of the ten respondents from Quebec, eight of them had never made a reservation on the Airbnb platform, and two of them had never stayed in an Airbnb before. In the Canadian group, three respondents had no experience on the platform, while all French respondents had stayed and made a reservation with Airbnb at least once before. In total, 11 of the 30 respondents had never searched for a listing on Airbnb, which shed light on the usability of the platform. After navigating on the platform

for the first time, three Quebec respondents thought it was difficult to use the map and the search bar, and another respondent from Quebec with multiple experiences on the platform complained about the way reviews are organized on the platform:

"I'm just trying to see where Brooklyn is, but it's a little difficult" - QF1

"I'm having trouble with the map… and now it's frozen so it's a little annoying" - QF6 (translated from French)

"The map is not easy to use… When you want to zoom in to see a certain area, you end up at the other end of the city" - QM3 (translated from French)

"I would like to see the reviews ranked, that would be nice. Some apartment had 4 stars reviews, and I would have liked to find out why easily" - QM2

On the other hand, the other eight new users, as well as 16 other respondents who had some prior experience with the platform, believed the platform was very comprehensive, easy to navigate and user friendly:

"I think it was really easy, very user friendly" - CF3

"Airbnb is just easy to use and very interactive, especially if you're travelling with someone and you need to make a choice together." CF4

"I think that the website is very well done, it's easy to get in contact with hosts" - FM2 (translated from French)

Local Lens

Table 6: Perceived Benefits of a Local Lens

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Values the local lens and authenticity possible with Airbnb	7	8	7
- Aims to distance themselves from tourists and resorts	3	6	4

The "*local lens*" concept promoted by Airbnb was cited by 22 respondents as a valuable aspect of an Airbnb experience. These respondents believed that staying at an Airbnb would allow them to feel closer to locals and to have a more authentic experience in a foreign city, because they would take a local's place. Besides, most of them were specifically searching for Airbnbs that had a distinctive local look to

feel far from home and to make their stay more memorable:

> "The local aspect is also a big reason [to choose Airbnb] for me. It allows you to live in someone's house, it gives a more authentic feel to your trip. You feel less like a tourist, you can actually immerse yourself in the city and its culture."
> - QM3 (translated from French)

> "[Staying in an Airbnb] makes it easier to meet locals who will give you good addresses for your stay, but it also allows you to live right next to people who live there"
> – FF3 (translated from French)

Thirteen of them also compared the Airbnb experience to the one offered by hotels, stating that staying in an Airbnb would allow them to distance themselves from other tourists and avoid standardized resorts:

> "An Airbnb is definitely going to have its unique look and it's going to give me more of a local feel. Hotels are pretty standardized, so I don't think they would give me the same kind of local feeling that I would get from an Airbnb." - CM1

> "Also, when you stay at a resort, life is good, and everything is easily available, but you don't get to experience the local lifestyle. In an Airbnb, you can live like a local."
> - QF5 (translated from French)

> "I think Airbnb gives you an experience that more and more people want now: they want to see what life is really like in the city they are visiting, instead of being stuck in a resort and participating in planned activities. In a resort you have access to the beach, but it could be any beach in the world, and you would not know the difference."
> - QF2 (translated from French)

Only three French respondents, three Canadian respondents and two Quebec respondents did not mention the fact that an Airbnb would allow them to enjoy a more local lifestyle.

Variety

Table 7: Perceived Benefits of Variety

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Believes variety of offers (types, looks) is a benefit	9	7	5
- Believes variety in locations is a benefit	3	5	5
- Believes variety of price ranges is a benefit	2	2	1

For 21 respondents, the number and variety of offers on the Airbnb platform was valuable, especially when compared to other modes of accommodation. Variety was mentioned as a positive aspect of Airbnb by nine French respondents, seven Quebecers and five Canadians. The 21 respondents saw variety in the features and appearance of each Airbnb. Because of this, they said Airbnb offered them a high variety of listings in terms of looks and types, giving them more opportunities to find a listing that perfectly matches their personal preferences:

> "I feel like you're more in control in an Airbnb. It's totally up to me where I want to stay, what kind of trip I want to have. It's not like I'm booking a hotel, where everything is just so square and where all the rooms look the same. With Airbnb you can stay in the jungle or you can go to an apartment where all the walls are pink if that's what you want."
> – CF4

> "And finally, you can really choose the style of accommodation in which you want to stay. In a hotel, all rooms are pretty much the same. On Airbnb you can really see very different options and choose the one with the details that suit you the most."
> - QF5 (translated from French)

All French respondents in this group talked about looking for a "coup de cœur" on the platform; aware of the number of offers available to them, they wanted to find a place that would catch their eye and tended to choose listings based on their emotions. This "coup de cœur" aspect was also mentioned by CF4, QM2, QF1 and QF5:

> "I almost feel like I have too many options. I'm looking for a "coup de cœur" though."
> - CF4

> "For a trip like this, I usually focus on finding a "coup de cœur". I'm looking for pictures that make me say "wow" because there are so many different options anyway."
> - FM2 (translated from French)

Moreover, 13 respondents also talked about the fact that hotels are usually located in specific areas of the city, while Airbnbs are private apartments, and thus dispersed across town. As a result, three French respondents, five Quebecers and five Canadians perceived value in the fact they could find an Airbnb in many different locations:

"Another thing is that it's affordable, fun and closer to certain locations. There is not always hotels or hostels in the locations you're interested in, but there is always someone living there." - QF1

"Plus, an Airbnb is an apartment that is rented out. Unlike a hotel, which might not be well integrated in a certain part of a city, an apartment generally is." - CM1

Finally, five respondents – QF4, QM3, FM2, FF1 and CF6 - also mentioned the fact that a wide range of prices could be found on Airbnb listings, making Airbnb a platform where everyone could find something for their budget:

"On Airbnb, you can find so many different prices in one place. There's something for everyone, so I think that's why it's so successful." – FF1 (translated from French)

"There is something for everyone on the platform, from luxury apartments to cheaper apartments that are more accessible for travelers on a budget. You can find all sorts of price ranges." – QM3 (translated from French)

Trust-related Aspects and Social Reputation Systems

Table 8: Perceptions of Social Reputation Systems

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
Importance of reviews			
- Would book an Airbnb with no reviews	4	1	-
- Would book an Airbnb without reading reviews if the global star rating is high	-	-	3
- Needs a minimum number of comments to book an Airbnb	6	9	7
Subjectivity and types of reviews			
- Takes into consideration the subjectivity of reviews	3	5	2
- Is more interested in negative reviews than positive ones	1	2	3
Trust towards Airbnb			
- Is influenced by Airbnb's recommendations (ex: rare find)	6	-	-
- Doubts the sincerity behind Airbnb's recommendations	-	2	-
- Trusts Airbnb to help them if there's an issue with the host	5	1	2

In the literature review, it was suggested by authors that reviews were a crucial part of the value provided by the sharing economy platform, as they were the main tool used by these platforms to foster trust between users. Reviews and star-ratings are part of what Airbnb calls its "*collective content*" and is produced by travelers that have stayed in an apartment so that future travelers can based their decision on them (see Appendix A). During the interviews, only five respondents said they could book a listing with no reviews:

> "Comments are not that important, unless they are really negative. […] I don't think you're making a risky bet when you choose a listing with no comments, probably because I trust the Airbnb structure. I'm sure I'm not going to end up in something completely run down." – QM1 (translated from French)

> "If there are no comments on the listing, it won't stop me from booking it because it usually means that it's new on the website. I can take a risk and trust them. But it's true that seeing bad comments will really influence my decision."
> – FF2 (translated from French)

Besides, three Canadian respondents said they did not bother reading reviews as long as the global star rating was high:

> "[I don't look at comments], but I probably should. I look at the stars, and if it's good I just don't think about it. I think four stars is probably the cut-off. If it's less than four stars but I really liked the place, then I'd probably check the comments to see why it has bad ratings." – CM3

> "I don't need to read every single comment. But if a listing has a rating below 3 stars, I'm out of there." – CF4

However, the other 22 respondents needed a high amount of reviews to feel comfortable, and all of them said comments were important in their decision:

> "It makes me feel a little more comfortable, so I guess I would look for ads with a greater number of comments. […] I would spend a lot of time reading these reviews, and I would feel a lot more comfortable because they all mention the fact that the host is really nice."
> – CF3

> "I'm a review guy. There's only four for this one, I usually prefer to have around 20 reviews. Four could just be family and friends. Maybe I'm a little too cynical. I would still read it all, I want to see what people say." – CM2

Besides, half of the Quebec respondents, as well as three French and two Canadian respondents said they were taking reviews "with a grain of salt", considering the

reviews found on the website to often be subjective and not representative of what they could have written after the same stay:

"It's important for me when I'm searching, but I always take ratings with a grain of salt. I know ratings really depend on personal experience. Let's say I'm searching for a hotel instead. I've seen reviews, I've gone to the place, and based on my own experience I feel like those reviews don't really reflect on my own experience. Through time and travelling, I've noticed people have very different perspectives. The same trip could be 5 stars for one person and 3 for another one." - QF3

"Typically, you have to read them with a grain of salt I think, because they might complain about silly things like "it said it was close to the metro but the metro closes at 1". Well that's not really the host's problem, you can't give them a bad review for something out of their control." - CM2

Moreover, six respondents – FF2, QF2, QM2, CF1, CF4 and CM1 - stated that they were more interested in negative reviews than positive ones, because they allowed them to truly evaluate what could potentially bother them during their stay:

"Normally what I would do is look for the worst comments. I do that with anything, because the ones that are bad are often more genuine. I know companies that pay people to leave comments on their page, but nobody would pay someone to leave a bad comment. The bad ones I know for sure are real. The good ones I'm never sure about." - QM2

"I generally look at the most negative reviews and then what the response was, if there was a response. I want to see both sides of it: sometimes a review is not good, but the circumstances around it can explain why. If it's just a bad review with no response from the host, then I don't feel comfortable, because that means they are not talking about their own point of view." - CM1

While most respondents only mentioned the trust they put in the review system of the platform, six French respondents mentioned that seeing a listing with the highlight "rare find" or "super host" would impact their decision and described these highlights as tokens of quality. They thus trusted Airbnb to filter offers for them and direct their search towards certain listings:

"I really like it when it's a superhost, it's an insurance that the experience is going to be good. For example here, Airbnb recommends some verified villas that have a lot of reviews and super hosts, so of course I'm curious to see what they look like."
– FM2 (translated from French)

"I usually pay more attention to the listing with a "rare find" mention."
- FM5 (translated from French)

"The listings with a "rare find" mention always catch my eye, so I'm going to look at the pictures to check it out." - FF3 (translated from French)

Only two respondents outside of the French mentioned these highlights, but were skeptical about their meaning:

"They have an option here for 'super hosts', but if it is anything like couch surfing it might mean the host paid to get verified. Which does not really prove anything." - QM2

"I'm going to click on this because I want to see why it says "rare find". I wonder if it's Airbnb's decision or if it's because of the comments, so I don't know if I trust that."
- QF6 (translated from French)

Finally, French respondents also put more trust in the capabilities of Airbnb to help them or compensate them if something happened with their host; five of them explicitly said they had full confidence in the company's willingness to protect them and to solve their issues in a quick way. All these respondents had more than five experiences with Airbnb and had heard of issues that were solved quickly by Airbnb:

"All the problems related to Airbnb I've heard about have always been solved easily so I totally trust the website." - FM1 (translated from French)

"Customer service would also be a reason: it's really good on Airbnb. I've had problems on the platform, but the Airbnb team is really responsive and it's very reassuring. It's a real advantage." - FF1 (translated from French)

Two Canadian respondents also mentioned that they could count on Airbnb to help them contact their host or to compensate them, but were not sure the platform could be helpful in extreme situations:

"For example, if we could not get the Airbnb for whatever reason, and we were already in the city, what would we do? I don't think Airbnb would be able to book me a new place. They would refund you eventually, but you would be in trouble anyway." - CF1

"I've never had to contact Airbnb for an issue like this, but my friend I just told you about was reimbursed by Airbnb. So, I don't think you can rely on Airbnb to get a new place to stay if you end up in an extreme situation like his. However, for reimbursement or compensation later on I guess you can rely on them. But in that moment, you would have to rely on yourself to find a new place. It is not like a hotel that could offer you another room if they messed up." - CF2

Comfort and Quality

Table 9: Perceptions of Comfort and Quality

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Believes Airbnbs allow them to feel as comfortable as they would be at home	4	5	4
- Believes Airbnbs are more spacious and contain more amenities compared to a hotel room at the same price	3	3	3

During the interviews, 13 respondents mentioned comfort as a clear benefit from using Airbnb compared to hotel rooms and other modes of accommodation. Since the quality of a mode of accommodation could be assimilated to the comfort provided by it, I decided to fuse these two concepts. Other intangible aspects related to quality, such as responsiveness, reliability or staff interactions (Akbaba, 2006), are treated in other nodes such as Perceived Risk and Social Benefits.

Out of the 13 respondents who stated that comfort was an important reason to choose Airbnb over alternatives, five were from Quebec, four were Canadian and four were French. They all felt like an Airbnb would provide them with a comfort that they would normally find at home but not in hotels or hostels:

> "Airbnb are usually more comfortable, you can make dinner at home for example. You're visiting another city, but in the evening, you feel like you're home."
> - FF4 (translated from French)

> "I always look for an Airbnb first. It's always nicer to have your own place, you usually get a bigger place too, you can have people over, it makes your trip homier." - CM4

> "[In an Airbnb], you can also create a convivial atmosphere with the friends you're traveling with. You feel like you're at home or at a friend's, but delocalized. It's a more relaxed experience in general." – QM3 (translated from French)

Besides, three respondents from each group also mentioned that Airbnbs were usually more spacious than hotel rooms – and generally cheaper- and contained amenities not available otherwise:

> "All it takes is a better price with better amenities. You have a kitchen, everyone can have their own bedroom, it's a more comfortable stay." - CM2

"Of course, I appreciate the security of hotels, but since I'm someone who likes to be in spacious places, I would use Airbnb to find full houses or apartments instead of going to a small hotel room." – QF7 (translated from French)

Autonomy

Table 10: Perceived Benefits of Autonomy

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Believes Airbnb allows them to travel with more autonomy	3	3	3

When asked why they would use Airbnb instead of an alternative mode of accommodation, about a third of the respondents - three from each cultural group- mentioned the autonomy that resulted from using platform like Airbnb. Three of them, FF5, CF4 and QM1, appreciated the fact that everything they needed to make a reservation and plan their stay was accessible on their smartphone:

"[Airbnb] is modern, it's something that was missing. People were already subletting their apartments or their room, but now we have a way to do it on our phone super quickly." – FF5 (translated from French)

"I think people like to know that they have everything on their phone. It makes me feel more independent." – QM1 (translated from French)

Moreover, along with the seven other respondents, they expressed the idea that Airbnb allowed them to enjoy their stay with more independence than if they were staying in a hotel. In an Airbnb, the respondents have access to all the necessary amenities that would be charged in a hotel. They valued the fact that they are not restricted by hotel rules and can thus come and go as they please. Airbnb thus brings flexibility to its users during their stay:

"Airbnb would allow me to enjoy my trip more independently. You really live the experience in your own way." - QF5 (translated from French)

"[Staying at an Airbnb] is often more accommodating: you can arrive anytime if it has been negotiated with the host before, while sometimes hotels close at 10pm and you can not check in if you get there later." – FF1 (translated from French)

"I enter my own apartment with my own key, I unwind in my own way and use the facilities in my own way. That's what I want the Airbnb to be as well. The less

interference and the less friction there are to me feeling like I live there, the better."

- CM1

Kitchen

Table 11: Perceived Benefits of an Available Kitchen

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Sees access to a kitchen as a benefit	6	6	7
- Because it makes their trip cheaper	6	2	-
- Because it makes their trip more comfortable	-	4	7

Another benefit that emerged during the interviews was the access to a kitchen in most Airbnbs. In total, 19 respondents perceived value in their access to a kitchen during their trip, an access that is rarely given in alternative modes of accommodation. An available kitchen could be seen by the respondents as valuable for two types of reasons. On the one hand, being able to cook in an Airbnb instead of going to the restaurant was seen by the six French respondents as well as two Quebecers as a way to save money while traveling:

"I would choose an Airbnb also because you can have a kitchen. Often, it's too expensive for me to eat outside, so having a kitchen is essential." – QF6 (translated from French)

"My first reason [to choose an Airbnb over a hotel room] is the price. Not necessarily because a night in an Airbnb will be cheaper than a night in a hotel, but because it's cheaper to be in a place where I can cook." - FF3 (translated from French)

For the rest of the respondents - four Quebecers and seven Canadians - having a kitchen at their disposable was a way to make their stay easier and more comfortable:

"The only thing is that they only have a mini-fridge, which I might find annoying if I'm staying for a week. I might want to cook, or at least I want the option to do so. I probably won't because I'm going to be in Mexico where the food is great and cheap, but in some Airbnbs I've stayed at we had finger food stuff that we might want to save in an actual fridge." – CF4

"You have your own kitchen, your own fridge, it's not like in a hotel where you only have a choice between buying a sandwich or going to an actual restaurant. I find that Airbnbs offer a more "home-like" experience, which can be really enjoyable"

- QM1 (translated from French)

5.2. Perceived Sacrifices

Table 12: Perceived Sacrifices

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Needs to look for additional information outside of Airbnb	7	10	8
- Takes up to a few days to collect all the information needed and reach a decision	4	2	5
- Believes the platform would be improved if Airbnb provided more information on distances	1	4	3
- Does not need to look for additional information	3	-	2

During the interviews, the respondents did not have time to do some research about the city they chose for the scenario, leading 25 of them to mention that they would have done preliminary research outside of the platform before looking for an Airbnb, or that they needed to do some additional research once they were browsing the listings on the platform:

"I wish I could see the distances between the apartment and a bunch of important places for my trip. We can see where the apartment is but I would like to have a list with the distance from the airport, as well as the closest train stations and tourist attractions. It's a shame that I have to do a search on the side, the site could tell me that too, especially in a city I don't know at all." – CF1 (translated from French)

"Generally, I would have an idea of where the city center is or where the metro stations are and look for places accordingly. Normally I would have asked a friend who has been there first, so I could have an idea of where are good places to stay. For the sake of this, I will just use the map and guess where the city center is." – QM2

"I would do some research, because sometimes it can be a little difficult. We went to Russia with a friend and we were trying to figure out where to stay. We were looking up different areas and it can be tough to find something on Airbnb with no prior Google search." - CM2

Most of them use Google, touristic guides or sites such as Reddit or Pinterest to find information on the neighborhoods, the transit system and/or the main touristic activities in the city they wish to visit before looking for accommodation on Airbnb. QM2, QF5 and FF3 also mentioned that they would also ask friends who have been there before for advice, in addition to the information provided on the Internet. Additionally, 11 respondents said that they would spend a few days or at least a few hours browsing on the platform to make sure they chose the right Airbnb, sometimes going back and forth between Airbnb and other websites in order to make the most informed choice possible:

> "Sometimes I take a day or two to make my selection. I browse through the listings, I look at prices, keep the ones I like on the side and then come back 2 or 3 days later to book something". – FF5 (translated from French)

> "I wouldn't necessarily book an Airbnb right away, I would wait a bit, go back on Airbnb several times, do more research on the city and ask some people who have been to Jerusalem about what they know." – QF5 (translated from French)

> "I mean, I would probably save this one and then continue to look at other places, just to see what else is out there and confirm my choice." - CF2

Thus, the time and effort spent looking for additional information outside of the platform can be seen as the main sacrifice perceived by the respondents. On the other hand, hotels have fixed addresses, which makes it simpler to look for distances (Airbnb does not provide an exact address, but an area). When asked what kind of additional information they wished to see on the platform, eight respondents answered that they would like to read more facts about the city's neighborhoods and be able to see the distances between an Airbnb and the various points of interest around it:

> "I would like to see an address, or at least a zip code, so I could put it in Google Maps and figure out the exact routes from there to other places. I could also see if there's a restaurant nearby, that's one of the things that matter in my decision. Basically, I would like to have more detailed information about the neighborhood and the location of the Airbnb." - CF5 (translated from French)

> "[I would like to see] more information about the neighborhood. There could be a map provided by Airbnb about all the neighborhoods in the city, and you could choose which one fits your needs better." - CF1

> "In most listing, there's a map and the name of the neighborhood but they could add more information, and say why this location is popular for a certain type of stays. It would be nice to know what activities are close to an apartment. For example, when I went to

It should be noted that using the Airbnb platform is free of charge. The money spent to book an Airbnb, including the fees collected by Airbnb, could thus be seen in two ways: as a perceived sacrifice when compared to cheaper alternatives such as hostels or couchsurfing, or as relative savings compared to more expensive alternatives. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, 28 respondents mentioned price as a reason to choose Airbnb over hotels. Only four respondents - four students from Quebec and Canada - saw Airbnb prices as a sacrifice compared to hostels. The sacrifices perceived by respondents when using Airbnb are thus almost exclusively limited to the time and efforts needed to make an informed decision on the platform.

5.3. Perceived Risks

Table 13: Perceived Risks

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Perceives a risk for their own safety	1	6	8
- Because they are in contact with a stranger	1	1	5
- Because Airbnb lack the staff and procedures necessary to deal with safety issues	-	5	5
- Is afraid that reality will not meet their expectations	9	3	6
- But relies on comments to eliminate or lower that risk	5	3	-
- Believes that risk is part of the experience	4	-	4
- Is afraid that Airbnb's will offer poor customer service	2	-	5

Safety

Three types of perceived risks emerged during the interviews. The first type of risk, mentioned by fifteen respondents, was a safety risk. Because using Airbnb means staying in a stranger's home, it was seen by some respondents as potentially harmful

to their health. Depending on the respondents, this safety risk was either due to the fact that it is impossible to know a stranger's intentions, or to the fact that a private home usually does not have the staff and safety measures that could be found in hotels – or both. In total, six Quebecers and eight Canadians perceived safety risks when using Airbnb, while only one French respondent did. In total, seven respondents perceived safety risks as the result of dealing and staying with strangers:

> "When it comes to safety, well, you're staying with an individual, not a company. You don't know who you're dealing with, you don't know if you're going to be robbed or worse…" – CF6 (translated from French)

> "People can be sketchy or just never answer you. I think there is also a bigger risk when you decide to book an Airbnb from someone who looks a little sketchy and has very few reviews." – CF2

On the other hand, ten respondents saw these risks as related to the lack of staff and safety procedures that are usually offered in hotels:

> "Hotels are generally better set-up for emergencies, you have staff that are prepared to take action in certain situations like fires. It is actually very important if you go to a place where you don't know the language. To not have anyone there that speaks your language can be quite difficult especially if a dangerous situation rises. There is definitely risk with the fact that there is no staff in an Airbnb." – CM1

> In a hotel, you have your own key, you can lock your door, and usually the only people who can get in are employees. I think it's safer, if something happens, there is a system of support and punishment within the hotel. You will get better support."
> – CF6 (translated from French)

Three Quebecer respondents having two to none experience with the platform, also mentioned the fact that this risk was higher in foreign countries where they had no previous experience. For a first trip in a country perceived as culturally different, they would thus stay at a hotel to ensure their safety:

> "For example, if I was going to a country that I don't know and that is really foreign to me, I would feel a little safer in a hotel room, because I would be a little separated from the locals." – QF4 (translated from French)

> "[Being] in a city you don't know involves risks. In a hotel it's different, it's so big, it's more secure too. But it also depends on where you go: I feel that in some countries I would not choose Airbnb, but for others it would be my first choice." – QF2 (translated from French)

Only one respondent, QF1, thought Airbnb was safer than hotels, because it was more trackable - the same way Uber might be seen as more trackable and thus safer than taxis. However, three female respondents mentioned safety risks as a main reason for not using Airbnb, especially if there were alone:

> "I guess it is partially the reason why I am more inclined to using hotels instead of Airbnbs. Hotels are kind of a common area, a lot of people are staying there, it's not a specific and unique apartment. An Airbnb is a home, it's someone's apartment. There is less chance for people to know exactly where you are, so I guess there is less people to protect you, if you will. Especially if the host is not there. Actually, the host could be there and not have the best intentions. I feel safer at a hotel." – QF3

> "I don't know the rules of Airbnb in details, but I would not go to an Airbnb by myself. I think I would have a hard time feeling safe. I would feel more comfortable in a hotel. Being in someone else's house, alone, does not make me comfortable at all."
> - FF5 (translated from French)

Moreover, only three male respondents mentioned safety risks during their interview. QM1's comments on safety risks were very similar to the ones provided by female respondents, and he acknowledged the fact that these safety risks were higher for female travelers. But contrary to female respondents, who mostly believed that they could be in physical danger by staying in a stranger's home, the safety risk perceived by the two other male respondents -QM2 and CM2- was mostly due to potential theft:

> "You're staying at a stranger's house. It may be supervised by a platform that is based on mutual trust, the apartment can still belong to a bad person, and a host can still welcome bad people into their home. It's risky on both sides. This kind of mutual trust must be built and respected. Just like with everything else, it's important to be careful. If I were a single girl traveling, I think I would try to find female hosts on Airbnb, to avoid some discomfort or some misinterpretation of my intentions. It sounds stupid but it could spare you a lot of trouble." – QM1 (translated from French)

> "My biggest worry would be to book something in a not-so-ideal spot, probably because we've done that before and it was bad. I had a buddy who was staying at an Airbnb, and when he was gone, people came in and stole his passport and everything. Obviously, there is an elevated risk due to the fact that you don't know who has keys to where you're staying. The owner's brother could have fallen on bad times, there could be so many things happening. I always find a weird cubby and hide my things. In hotels and hostels, you have safes. But I don't really take that into account when I'm deciding where to book something." – CM2

"The unpleasant surprise"

A second type of risk was mentioned by every almost French respondent: for nine of them, the only risk associated with using Airbnb was to be faced with an "unpleasant surprise" once in the Airbnb, that is to say to be faced with an important difference between what was expected and what the Airbnb really was. This risk was also mentioned in the other cultural groups; six Canadians and three Quebecers mentioned the risk of being disappointed by the actual Airbnb, compared to the expectations they built up during their search on the platform. Many respondents from each group expressed this risk by comparing Airbnb to standardized hotels:

> "You never really know what you're going to get with Airbnb. […] I think that some of the hosts are not always clear on what they are giving you." - CM4

> "The only risk I see would be to book a place that does not look like the photos or does not live up to my expectations." - FF3 (translated from French)

Half of the French respondents and the three Quebecers who perceived this type of risk explicitly mentioned that reviews were a key component in their decision to stay at an Airbnb. According to them, reviews were an efficient way to eliminate or at least lower the risk of being disappointed when arriving at the Airbnb. The six Canadian respondents who perceived this type of risk did not all explicitly state that reviews were a way to eliminate risk. Four of them, as well as four French respondents, described this risk as accepted by them and part of the Airbnb experience.

> "When we use Airbnb, we know that we can have an unpleasant surprise. The approach is different. You're saving money. You can't have hotel standards when you don't pay the same price. It seems logical. You accept the risk because you're paying less."
> – FM3 (translated from French)

> "I like having the opportunity to look at everything in the house with the pictures. That way, when you arrive at the Airbnb, you won't have as many bad surprises. Since you're booking a place without being there, you can't guess how the place will actually look like, but a great number of pictures is reassuring." - QF7 (translated from French)

Lack of Customer Service

Another type of risk mentioned by some respondents was related to the performance of hosts in terms of customer service. Half of the Canadian respondents and two

French respondents mentioned that in case of emergencies or damage, Airbnb hosts would not always be able to help them immediately, and they might find themselves in an unsatisfactory situation. This aspect was not mentioned by any Quebecer. Canadian respondents were thus worried about maintenance and a lack of immediate solutions during their stay, because they perceived individuals as less reliable and less performant than hotels' maintenance staff.

> "In general, hotels are always clean, and if your room is dirty or your sheets are not washed, you can talk to someone and it will be fixed almost immediately. Sometimes on Airbnb you book something thinking "oh, this one is cheap and the pictures look cool", but when you arrive there you find yourself in a disgusting place. And then, there's not a lot of chances that your host will come clean the place up."
> - FF4 (translated from French)

> "I guess that because hotels are run by a company, while on Airbnb it's just one guy renting his apartment. He might be less experienced with customer service." – CM3

5.4. Additional results

Opinions on Airbnb

Table 14: Perception of Airbnb

Ideas and Opinions	Number of Respondents		
	FR	QC	CA
- Has a negative opinion of Airbnb	1	-	1
- Has a completely positive opinion of Airbnb	1	2	3
- Has a nuanced opinion of Airbnb	8	8	6
- Blames users for abuses related to Airbnb	5	4	6

The last question asked in every interview aimed to gauge the general opinion of respondents on Airbnb. When asked "what do you think about the debates surrounding the company in Quebec and in the rest of the world?", the respondents were encouraged to express their feelings about the company and were able to provide me with insight about how comfortable they were with a sharing economy model such as Airbnb. Only two female respondents, who also mentioned that they would never go to an Airbnb by themselves, had unequivocal negative feelings about Airbnb:

"The two experiences I had on Airbnb were not the best. I think that many people use it only to make money. I'm not really aware of the debates surrounding it, because Airbnb is not a subject of interest to me. I look at it when I need to find an apartment with my friends on vacation. If it's a trip with my family or if I'm alone, I'm never going to use Airbnb. Honestly, I don't care if they shut it down, I could do without it." - FF5

"Yeah, people hate Airbnb. I think it's very valid. It would be so annoying if the people above us bought the place and started renting it out on Airbnb. Imagine having different people having parties every weekend, or people visiting with the intent of going out and having fun, which is totally fair but so annoying for us. Having random people tromping at random hours… In the future, when I'll be looking to buy an apartment or a house, I will definitely be taking into consideration the presence of Airbnb around. That would turn me off." - CF3

The rest of the respondents had a positive opinion of the company. Specifically, six respondents expressed an unequivocally positive opinion about the company, combined with a cynical view about the debates surrounding it, stating that there was always going to be debates around a business model that disrupts industries, even if that model is beneficial for users:

"Honestly, I don't care at all. It's exactly like what happened with Uber. I think they noticed a flaw in the market, so they made something that works and that's it. The fact that hotels are complaining about it only shows that they are pissed off. As long as it's beneficial to me, I don't care about the rest." - FM4 (translated from French)

"It is kind of the same thing that happened with Uber. In my opinion, it is just business. It is just a shift of what has been normal for so long, so it makes people uncomfortable. I get that it is decreasing hotel business, but that's just how our world works. People will end up accepting the changes brought by Airbnb." – CF1

The other 22 respondents had nuanced opinions about the debates surrounding the company. While all of them clearly stated that they had a positive opinion of the company, they also insisted that its activities should be regulated:

"The government should be helpful and should want to create a better community and better infrastructures and try to attract more visitors. With Airbnb, you have so many cool alternatives to hotels. I'm fully supportive of it unless they're breaking a law, and if they do I believe the government should address it and think of long-term benefits." - QM2

"I mean, because it came in so quickly, laws still have to catch up with it. But I'm all for it to be controlled and taxed." - CF4

"My "punk" side tells me that I'm on Airbnb's side no matter what, but it's true that taxes are important to manage your city, your province and your country, so I'm contradicting myself. I just feel that something fun has been created and once again, they want to take it away from us. It can never be simple. It's a shame, governments should help these new

companies grow in a way that is beneficial to society in general. In Quebec I know that the collect taxes at the source, I think it's great." – FM1 (translated from French)

Most of the respondents recognized that negative externalities were emanating from Airbnb. However, fifteen of them explicitly blamed the users of Airbnb, and not the platform per se, for taking advantage of a sharing economy model that should be about sharing existing resources:

"I lived in Germany for a year, and Airbnb was totally banned there. I can understand that, people misuse the platform and that can be really annoying. My boyfriend and I rent our apartment on Airbnb because it allows us to go on weekend trips. I think that was the primary purpose of the app; I want to travel, my apartment is empty, why not rent it to travelers who need a place to stay. But I get the impression that many people are now using the platform to make a profit, which is a shame because it's moving away from the initial values of the app." - FF2 (translated from French)

"I would like to know if only a small group of users own most Airbnbs in their city. Then it's an issue because we are supposed to be in the circular economy, in a model built around people sharing resources. Instead, we find ourselves in a situation where a handful of people are capitalizing on a model that could benefit an entire city. We move away from the goal. We should find a way to fix limits, or to collect more taxes, so that their excessive profits could be better distributed." - QM3 (translated from French)

Rankings

Finally, based on the scenario part of the interviews and the respondents' direct answers, I was able to detect how each individual prioritized price, location and pictures when choosing a listing (see Table 4 for the rankings of each respondent).

Table 15: List of Respondents and how they ranked Price, Location and Pictures during their Airbnb search

Code	CG	Ranking
FM1	FR	Price. Location. Pictures.
FM2	FR	Price. Location. Pictures.
FF1	FR	Price. Location. Pictures.
FF2	FR	Location. Price. Pictures.
FM3	FR	Location. Price. Pictures.
FM4	FR	Location. Price. Pictures.
FF3	FR	Location. Price. Pictures.
FM5	FR	Location. Price. Pictures.
FF4	FR	Price. Pictures. Location.
FF5	FR	Location. Price. Pictures.

QF1	QC	Price. Pictures. Location.
QF2	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
QF3	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
QF4	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
QF5	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
QM1	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
QF6	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
QF7	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
QM2	QC	Price. Pictures. Location.
QM3	QC	Price. Location. Pictures.
CF1	CA/ONT	Price. Pictures. Location.
CF2	CA/ONT	Price. Pictures. Location.
CF3	CA/ONT	Location. Price. Pictures.
CM1	CA/ONT	Location. Pictures. Price.
CF4	CA/ONT	Location. Price. Pictures.
CF5	CA/ONT	Location. Price. Pictures.
CM2	CA/ALB	Location. Price. Pictures.
CM3	CA/BC	Price. Pictures. Location.
CM4	CA/BC	Price. Pictures. Location.
CF6	CA/NB	Location. Price. Pictures.

All respondents from Quebec mentioned price as the most important variable in deciding which Airbnb listing to choose. However, Canadian and French respondents were not as homogeneous in their answer. Six respondents from each group chose Location as the most important variable, often saying that they were willing to pay a higher price if it meant being better located and avoiding renting a car or spending too much time in public transportation. However, the other four Canadian respondents, as well as two respondents from Quebec and one from France, put Location as their last priority, stating they would not mind transit because it would allow them to discover the city in a local and different way:

> "If I'm visiting a city like Paris, which I have never visited, I'd rather have a really nice place within my budget than a perfectly located one, because I'm going to be walking around the city anyway." - CF1

> "Normally I would say 'Location', but in Japan I stayed in a couple of 3-star location places, and I did not mind spending 10 or 15 minutes more in public transportation or walking because at least I had a more local feel to my experience." - QM2

To conclude this chapter, I used the following table to presents a summary of the cultural trends developed in this section (see Table 16).

Table 16: Summary of the Results

Cultural Group	Discernible Trends
France	- French respondents were more likely to mention Airbnb prices as a reason for their success; however, they were also more likely to seek hotel deals during their accommodation search - Compared to other groups, French respondents were more likely to believe in the existence of an Airbnb community. - At the exception of one respondent from Quebec, French respondents were the only ones willing to choose a private room instead of a whole apartment - French respondents were twice as likely to value the human relationships created through the platform; they also welcomed recommendations from their host more than any other group - Compared to other groups, French respondents perceived more value in the large variety of offers on the platform in terms of looks. They were also more likely to look for a "coup de coeur" than other respondents - At the exception of one respondent from Quebec, French respondents were the only ones willing to book a listing with no review, and overall needed less reviews to feel comfortable - French respondents put more trust in Airbnb; they were the only one to trust the platform's recommendations and relied on Airbnb the most when faced with an issue - Believed more than any other group that having access to a kitchen was a way to save more money
	- French respondents were less likely to look for additional information outside the platform, and did not mention as much as other groups that the platform could be improved with additional information on distance - Compared to Quebecers, they spent more time going back to the platform before reaching a decision
	- Only one French respondent perceived safety risks when using Airbnb - Compared to other groups, French respondents are more likely to perceived risks related to their expectations and uncertainty - However, more than in any other group, French respondents believed that reviews were a way to eliminate or lower that risk sufficiently - They are more likely than Quebecers to mention lack of customer service experience
Quebec	- Quebecers were the only group who did not mention the economic benefits of Airbnb for hosts - Compared to other groups, Quebecers were more likely to consider a first physical meeting with their host as important - Only Quebec respondents mentioned some usability issues when they were using the platform

|		
	- Quebecers were more likely to mention that they would choose an Airbnb to specifically avoid other tourists and standardized resorts - Compared to other groups, Quebecers put more importance in reviews, but were also more likely to mention the subjectivity of these reviews - Quebecers, compared to French and Canadian respondents, were less likely to trust Airbnb to help them, and were less sensitive to the platform's recommendations - All Quebecers put price as their priority when choosing a listing	
	- All respondents expressed the need to look for additional information outside of the platform, and were more likely to believe that adding information about distances on Airbnb could improve their experience - However, Quebecers were more likely to confirm their decision right away once a booking was selected	
	- Compared to French respondents, Quebecers were more likely to perceive a safety risk, mostly due to the lack of structure and staff provided by a hotel in case of an emergency - Overall, they were less likely than any other group to perceive risks when using Airbnb, especially risks related to their expectations or customer service	
Canada	- While most of them considered that meeting the host would be a bonus, respondents from Canada were more likely to want to avoid any contact with them - Compared to other groups, Canadians were more likely to rely on star ratings and to seek negative reviews to evaluate a listing - Canadians were more likely than other respondents to value their access to a kitchen for comfort and convenience reasons	
	- Compared to French respondents, Canadians were more likely to look for additional information outside of the Airbnb platform, and usually spent more time on the platform to reach a decision than any other group	
	- Canadians perceived more safety risks associated with Airbnb than their counterparts; more than other groups, it was due to the fact they were dealing with a stranger, but they also feared the lack of structure and staff a hotel could provide in case of an emergency - Compared to Quebecers, Canadians were twice as more likely to mention the risk of finding an unpleasant surprise once in the Airbnb, but contrary to Quebecers, accepted that risk - Half of the Canadian respondents also feared that an individual would not be able to provide them with a good customer service, an aspect that was only mentioned by two French respondents	

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, I detailed the trends that I detected during my coding process. In the following chapter, I will analyze these results to answer my research question, and thus evaluate the influence of national cultures on the perceived value of Airbnb in the eyes of the respondents. To do so, I will first analyze the trends using Hofstede's model of national cultures, before discussing the potential influences of other factors on the perception of users.

6.1. The Influence of National Cultures

In this section, I will explore the trends that were detected within and between the groups and analyze them using Hofstede's cultural dimensions. To facilitate this analysis, I included the visual representation of the three cultures for the six dimensions of Hofstede's model (see Table 2, which was first presented in my Methodology chapter).

Figure 2: Hofstede's Country Comparison: France, Québec, and Canada
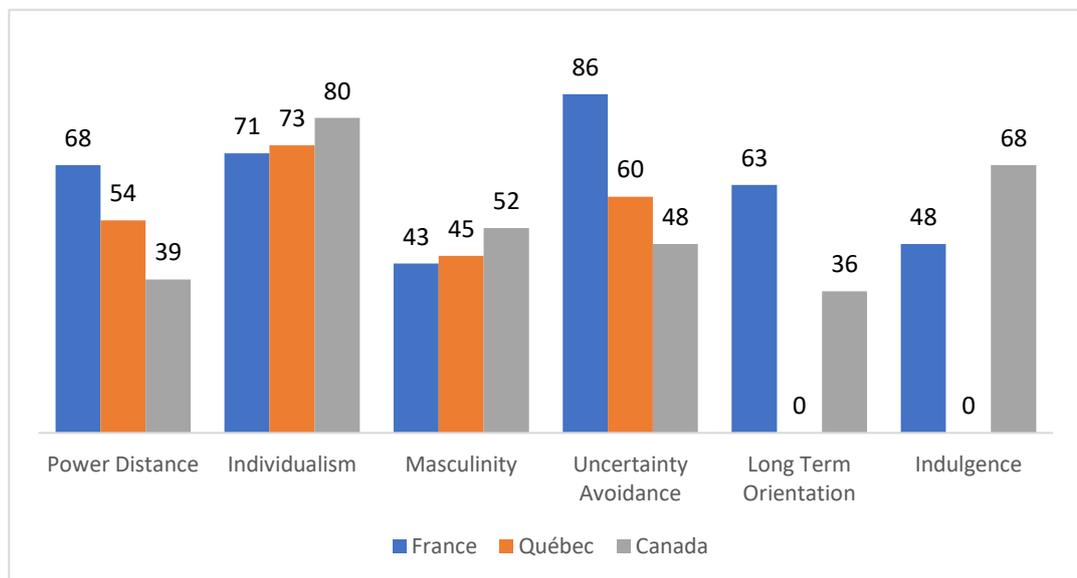
Adapted from https://www.hofstede-insights.com. Retrieved on November 12th, 2018
Long term Orientation and Indulgence data for Quebec are not available.

Perceived social benefits

Compared to Canada and Quebec, France scores lower on Hofstede's Individualism and Masculinity dimensions; its national culture is thus characterized by a higher

degree of cooperation between its members and is more relationship oriented (Hofstede Insights, 2018). Thus, as members of a more collectivist and feminine culture, French individuals tend to rely more on individuals outside of their family and friends for recommendations and help than their Canadian counterparts. These scores are consistent with the trends extracted from the interviews: French respondents were more likely to believe in the existence of an Airbnb community, perceived more value from the recommendations made by their hosts and their potential discussions with them, and were also more inclined than their counterparts to book a private room in someone's apartment instead of a full home. Overall, French respondents put more value in the human interactions stemming from their Airbnb experience.

On the other hand, Canada's culture is characterized by more self-reliance, less cooperation outside of families and groups of friends, and a bigger focus on achievement and assertiveness (Hofstede Insights, 2018). This is also consistent with the cultural trends detailed in the previous section; Canadian respondents were the least likely to consider that meeting their host was important, and the most likely to wish to avoid all contact with them. Along with Quebecers, they were also less likely to believe in the existence of the Airbnb community and to perceive high value from their host's recommendations. However, Quebec's culture is more relationship-focused and emotionally expressive than in the rest of Canada (Hofstede Insights, 2018), explaining why more Quebecers thought meeting their host was important.

Perceived risks

France's score on the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension is way higher than Quebec's and Canada's, suggesting that French respondents feel far less comfortable than their Canadian counterparts when faced with uncertainty; in other words, "the French don't like surprises" (Hofstede Insights, 2018, para. 16). This cultural aspect also corresponds with the risks perceived by the French respondents. At the exception of CF4, all of them perceived a risk related to the uncertainty resulting from picking accommodation without seeing it in real life first; they were afraid of the difference between their expectations after reading a listing and the

reality of the listing. This type of risk could be assimilated to a performance risk, defined as "the likelihood that there will be something wrong" with the listing they committed to (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972, p. 13).

On the other hand, Canada and Quebec, scoring lower on Uncertainty Avoidance, were less sensitive to this type of risk and more likely to accept the uncertainty emanating from Airbnb. Instead, most of them perceived a physical risk, i.e. a risk that their stay might be harmful to them (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). Only one French respondent – who coincidently has been living in Quebec for a longer time than all the others - was worried about physical risks. Once again, this is consistent with the scores of Canada and Quebec on the Individualism and Masculinity dimensions; as members of more masculine and individualistic cultures, Quebecers and Canadians might perceive individuals outside of their personal networks as less trustworthy because of a lack of focus on cooperation. Specifically, Quebecers, scoring lower than Canada for these dimensions, were less concerned about the danger a stranger could represent to them and more about counting of them to help them in case of an emergency.

Trust building processes

A large majority of respondents relied heavily on comments to mitigate the potential risks associated with Airbnb. However, half of the French respondents said they could book a listing with no prior ratings. This is interesting to consider, because it shows that French respondents are comfortable booking a listing on Airbnb, even though almost all of them perceived a performance risk due to the uncertainty surrounding a remote listing. This, combined with the fact that only French respondents put their total trust in Airbnb to help and compensate them if there was an issue with the host, shows that French individuals are more comfortable using the Airbnb platform than their counterparts, even though they are less comfortable with uncertainty. This could be explained by the way trust-building processes are impacted by national cultures (Doney et al., 1998). Individuals in collectivist and feminine cultures are more likely than individuals in individualistic and masculine cultures to build trust through transference processes; when faced with a potential untrustworthy individual, they will draw trust from individuals and institutions they

already trust (Doney et al., 1998). Moreover, French respondents are also more uncomfortable with uncertainty, which is, still according to these authors, another reason why they will rely on transference processes to build trust. In this case, French respondents indeed draw trust from both the Airbnb platform and its users. On the other hand, as members of more individualistic and masculine cultures, Canadians and Quebecers rely more on a calculative process, namely on their own calculations on the costs and rewards of using Airbnb (Doney et al., 1998). This is constituent with the results from the interviews; Canadians and Quebecers rely more on comments, which provide detailed information that could be used in their evaluation. Moreover, Canadians, more individualistic and masculine than the two other groups, are more likely to seek negative comments; these negative comments can provide them with crucial elements for their evaluation.

Hofstede's dimensions are consistent with the major trends found in the interviews, especially Individualism, Masculinity and Uncertainty Avoidance. These results concur with previous studies that have shown how dimensions such as Uncertainty Avoidance and Individualism influenced perceived value (Sabiote et al., 2012). However, a few discernible trends did not comply with Hofstede's model.

Limits of the Hofstede's model

First, while many respondents valued the variety of offers present on the platform, all of the French respondents, as well as four Canadians, mentioned the importance of finding a "coup de cœur" on the platform. Indulgence is defined as "the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses" (Hofstede Insights, 2018, para. 19). In theory, looking for a "coup de cœur" would be something an indulgent culture would do more than cultures with more restraint. However, France scores lower on this dimension than Canada (data for Quebec is not available).

Moreover, while no data is available for Quebec, the scores of France and Canada for the Long-Term Orientation dimension contradict some of the results. As members of a culture with a lower score on this dimension, French respondents are expected to "prefer to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion" (Hofstede Insights, 2018, para. 17). However,

French respondents had a very positive opinions of Airbnb and were more likely to be comfortable with the platform and the social interactions with other users.

These elements suggest that using Hofstede's dimensions to explain the variations between cultural groups can be insufficient. Moreover, Hofstede's model has been criticized for its over simplistic view on cultures; it assumes a high level of national uniformity and does not consider the influence of sub-cultures or other cultures on an individual (McSweeney, 2002). The trends detected in the interviews were rarely mentioned by the ten individuals of a group; French respondents all mentioned that they valued the usability of the app and the more human and personalized experience offered by Airbnb, and all the respondents from Quebec said that they needed more information from Airbnb. Other than for these three occurrences, no group agreed completely about the issues raised during the interviews.

Finally, the fact that Airbnb allows its users to enjoy a more local experience, but also provides them with more comfort and more autonomy was valued differently from one individual to the other, but not according to their cultural background. This suggests that each individual had different traveling habits and standards that did not stem from their cultural background. These observations confirm that relying exclusively on national cultures can be misguided. In the next section, I will thus discuss other elements that can influence the way individuals perceive their participation in the sharing economy.

6.2. Other Considerations

Economic and Demographic Elements

According to Airbnb, Paris is the number one market worldwide in terms of listings, and France is the second top destination for guests and the second source of guest after the U.S. (see Table A in Appendix B). A survey conducted in 2016 also showed that French individuals were the biggest users of sharing economy services in the European Union; furthermore, only 14% of the French respondents in this survey said they had never heard of the sharing economy before, making France the European country most aware of the sharing economy that year (Flash Barometer, 2016). Airbnb is thus far more popular in France than it is in Canada, which could be a major reason why perceptions vary between cultural groups.

A few non-cultural reasons could explain the popularity of Airbnb in France. First, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, France is the world's top tourism destination, with a total of 87 million international tourist arrivals in 2017 (UNWTO, 2018). This annual surge of tourists in the cities of France creates a significant demand for accommodation in various part of the countries. In 2017, there was 485 000 listings in France to answer that demand (Airbnb Citizen, 2018), which is more than four times higher than the number of listings in Canada (CBRE, 2017). The higher number of listings and users in France explains partly why they are more familiar and more comfortable with the platform and its uses than their Canadian counterparts.

Besides, the Canadian and the French economies experienced the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis differently. On the one hand, among G-7 countries, Canada was the only one to avoid a financial crisis and experienced a moderate recession compared to its counterparts (Haltom, 2013). On the other hand, France's growth has been highly impacted by the crisis. In the aftermath of the 2008 crash, France's economy was characterized as "beset by flatlining growth, ballooning debt and eye-watering unemployment" (Khan, 2014, para. 1). As explored in the literature review, the financial crisis of 2008 had a consequential impact on individuals' spending habits, leading them to rethink their ownership choices and to turn to access-based models (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). French individuals were more affected than Canadians by the financial crisis, which could have led them to seek cheap accommodation alternatives and additional revenues more than Canadians. This aspect could explain the wide adoption of the sharing economy in France. Moreover, the French government has created various accreditation and incubation programs such as French Tech, and the country has given birth to many successful collaborative platforms, including BlablaCar or la Ruche Qui Dit Oui.

However, it should be noted that national cultures and institutions interact and shape each other through various feedback effects (Alesina & Giuliano, 2015). It is thus difficult to evaluate precisely how much these contextual variables have influenced the adoption of the sharing economy platforms and value in France. French culture is more relationship oriented and more cooperative than Canadian culture, which corresponds to the values of collaboration promoted by the sharing economy. This cultural match could have influenced French citizens' choice to turn to the sharing

economy after the financial crisis.

Past experiences and Traveling Habits

In my literature review, it was suggested that perceived value could be influenced by the past experiences of a customer with a company (Cho & Bokyeong, 2016). This aspect was confirmed by some of the respondents' answers. Users with good social experiences on the platform were more likely to value prolonged contacts with their host and perceived a higher level of social benefits, and often mentioned that their good experiences with the platform led them to use it again for future travels. On the other hand, previous bad experiences influenced the way respondents perceived risks, but also how they perceived the company. For instance, FF5 was one of the two respondents who had a very negative opinion of Airbnb; this was due to her two past experiences on the platform, which were less than satisfactory. Moreover, CM2 perceived uncertainty risks because he once rented an apartment that turned out to be located in a dangerous neighborhood. However, the impact of a bad experience on the perceived value of Airbnb depended on how Airbnb helped or compensated the users. Some users mentioned bad experiences on the platform but had overall a very positive opinion of the platform because Airbnb provided them with quick and efficient customer service.

Finally, eight of the Quebec respondents had no experience on the platform. The group from Quebec was also the only homogenous group when ranking price, location and pictures during their search; all of them put price as their top criterium of choice, leading me to believe that their use of Airbnb is focused on finding a cheaper alternative than hotel or at least a well-located apartment, and giving less importance to the visual aspect of said-apartment or the potential social benefits of the sharing economy. Moreover, they were the group who put the less trust in Airbnb. This could indicate that some perceived benefits might arise for users after a few experiences with the platform: therefore, a group of Quebecers with more experience on the platform might have had a different behavior and combined price with visual and social aspects, just like the other groups did. Therefore, in addition to confirming that "higher levels of satisfaction lead to higher levels of loyalty in the field of sharing accommodation" (Cho & Bokyeong, 2016, p. 166), this study also suggest users with different levels of experience might perceive different benefits and risks from the same platform.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. Summary

The companies of the sharing economy vary widely from traditional companies on important aspects, especially on the role of their consumers or users in their business models. Still, they must compete against these traditional companies and might be seen as riskier by new users. There is thus a need to understand what kind of value the sharing economy provides to individuals and how to maximize it. However, the literature has not yet approached the sharing economy with a cultural lens and has yet to evaluate the impact of national cultures on the way users perceive the value of participating in the sharing economy.

From the 30 interviews conducted for this study, the main differences that arose between cultural groups pertained to how individuals perceived risk, how they built trust on the platform and what they expected in terms of social interactions. French respondents were highly sensitive to uncertainty but were also more likely to trust the platform and its users to reduce that uncertainty. Moreover, they were also expecting more benefits from their interaction with their Airbnb host than Canadians and Quebecers did. Using Hofstede's dimensions and a trust-building processes framework, I was able to explain these trends between the three cultural groups. However, Hofstede's model presented some contradictions for a few aspects of my analysis - such as the importance of finding a "*coup de cœur*" on the platform.

However, analyzing demographic and economic aspects, as well as the influence of past experience on the respondents, provided some explanations when Hofstede's model could not. This could confirm the recent criticisms of Hofstede's model and a sign that new cultural frameworks are needed to fully comprehend our increasingly complex cultures. Finally, it could signify the importance of demographic and economic factors in how individuals perceive the sharing economy and the value it provides them.

7.2. Implications

This exploratory study attempts to fill a gap in literature by introducing national cultures as a potential key determinant in the success of platforms affiliated with the sharing economy. It argues for the importance of cultural differences in the sharing economy, especially with regards to how users perceive risks and how they value the social interactions that are highly promoted by these platforms. My study is aligned with the criticisms of Hofstede's model, while proving that his framework can at some extent explain wide variations between cultural groups. It also applies a marketing concept, perceived value, to an international strategy issue.

Moreover, my analysis show that most of the benefits of the sharing economy developed in the literature are indeed valuable by users. My findings also indicate that companies of the sharing economy, while widely different from traditional companies regarding the way they integrate users in their business models, might still face issues that the literature has explored at length for other types of consumption. Combined with institutional theories, cultural studies focused on the sharing economy might shed some light upon how cultures interact with each in our highly digitalized economy.

Moreover, understanding the role of cultures on perceived value in the sharing economy might provide internationalization guidelines for many digital companies involved in this type of consumption. My findings have already shown that users react differently to uncertainty and risks on these platforms. Since perceived risk has been shown to greatly influence overall value, companies of the sharing economy might discover that adapting their platforms and marketing campaigns to their different markets might increase the value perceived by their global users.

7.3. Limitations and Future Research

First, for confirmability reasons, it must be noted that some of my initial beliefs were challenged by my analysis. Before conducting my interviews, I expected perceived risk to be importantly moderated by the number of experiences of the respondents with the platform. Besides, as a French citizen who had been living in Canada for less than four years, I also expected Canadians and Quebecers to seek

social interactions more than their French counterparts. I was thus biased by old stereotypes.

This study's major limitations are related to the sample used for interviews. First, the participants were all aged between 20 and 35. Selecting respondents from only one age group allowed me to control for age variables, but also limited my results, because the sample was not representative of entire cultural groups. Including more than one age group in future studies would rectify this limitation and could not only shed more light on how cultural aspects influence perceived value but also on the influence of age on perceived value in the sharing economy. Moreover, only three cultural groups were compared, and these cultural groups had relatively close ratings for Hofstede's dimensions. This limitation is essentially due to the utilization of qualitative methods as well as the challenges often faced during a master's thesis. With limited funds and limited time, and because my methodology required face-to-face interactions, I limited my sample to individuals living in Montreal and to the cultural groups highly present in the city. A quantitative study conducted on a larger scale could allow for the comparison of more cultures, and particularly of cultures that are more significantly different. While focusing on residents of Quebec allowed me to control for contextual variables, it would also have been interesting to interview respondents from other cultural groups in their own cultural context. This could have been particularly compelling if interviews were combined with a study of potential economic and demographic influences.

An exploratory qualitative study was chosen for this subject in order to identify theoretical avenues that could in turn be tested with quantitative research. However, the choice of a qualitative method also generated some limitations that could be solved in the future by combining quantitative and qualitative data. Even though I tried to make the participants as comfortable as possible during interviews, it is possible that some information was withheld from me – because of personal preferences or oversights for instance –, which makes the data I collected imperfect. In addition to face-to-face interviews, future research could thus rely on surveys that participants could undertake by themselves and allowing them to subjectively ponder the benefits and sacrifices they perceive when participating in the sharing economy.

Overall, quantitative research conducted on a bigger scale could be undertaken to confirm the ideas discussed in my analysis. Moreover, while the popularity of Airbnb facilitated the interviews, studying another company could also produce different results: finding a company outside of the accommodation sector might change the main motivations of the respondents, and using a company with little popularity could also reveal more on the users' perception of the sharing economy – and not only their perception of Airbnb. Finally, using a dynamic model comprised of more levels of culture – like the one designed by Erez and Gati (2004) – could be adapted for this type of study, because it would comprehend individual complexities. Moreover, since institutions and cultures are highly correlated, a study combining the two would be complex but might yield compelling results.

8. APPENDICES

Appendices A, B and C are extracts from "Internationalization of the Sharing Economy: Airbnb and its experience in Quebec", a case study written by the author. Originally submitted on April 9th, 2018, within the framework of Entreprise Internationale, Cultures et Ressources Humaines, a MSc course taught by Ekaterina Turkina at HEC Montréal.

Appendix A: Presentation of Airbnb

Airbnb: the company

The idea for Airbnb was born in 2007, in the living room of Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky, two young alumni of the Rhode Island School of Design, who had recently moved to San Francisco, California. At the time, struggling to pay the rent of their apartment, the entrepreneurs had the idea of renting three airbeds and serving breakfast to guests in town for a major design conference. Excited by their first successful experience, the two entrepreneurs decided to pursue the idea and start a website that would offer relatively cheap accommodation to travelers visiting cities for conferences and festivals across America. In most cases, hotel rooms in cities hosting these kinds of events would be fully booked, creating an opportunity for alternative accommodation. To set up the website, Gebbia and Chesky enrolled Gebbia's former roommate, Nathan Blecharczyk, a computer science graduate from Harvard University. In August 2008, the three entrepreneurs launched airbedandbreakfast.com – renamed Airbnb in 2009 - just in time to take advantage of the arrival of Obama in Denver for the Democratic National Convention. Within a week, the website featured more than 800 room listings (Salter, 2012).

In total, and since its creation in 2008, Airbnb has raised more than $3 billion from venture capitalists, but has not gone public yet (Thomas, 2017). At the head of this digital empire, we can still find the three young entrepreneurs who started the company: Chesky as CEO and Head of Community, Gebbia as CPO, and Blecharczyk as CSO and Chairman of Airbnb China. The funds collected since 2008 have allowed the three co-founders to expand their presence dramatically. In 2017, Airbnb became the world's largest room service provider, with a number of room offerings superior to the ones of the 5 biggest hotel brands put together– namely Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, Intercontinental Hotel Group,

Wyndham Worldwide and Accor Hotel Group (Hartmans, 2017). In the past few years, Airbnb has also expanded the scope of its activities to become more than a home-rental platform. Airbnb now provides a comprehensive travelling experience, allowing its users to organize local activities through Experiences listings and to make restaurant reservations through Restaurants listings. However, Experiences and Restaurants listings are only available in a limited number of cities – such as New York, Paris or Toronto – and are not available in Quebec yet. Accordingly, I will only focus on the first and main offer of Airbnb in this study: its home-rental platform.

Platform and User experience

Airbnb's product is its digital platform, which is a two-sided marketplace; Airbnb needs to attract supply (hosts) and demand (guests) for the platform to work. Users looking to share accommodation through Airbnb can do so by visiting the platform and registering as a member.

For a potential guest, the platform provides centralized, organized, and comprehensive information. When accessing Airbnb, the guest is faced with a simple search bar which allows them to choose between Homes, Experiences and Restaurants. To look for a place to stay, the user must type a destination. Then, a page of listings appears, giving them the opportunity to use filters to refine their search: dates, number of guests, home type, price, amenities and facilities available, language and reputation of the host, and much more. The page of results also includes a side-map showing the listings resulting from the search and their price. By clicking on a listing, the user gains access to extensive information on the place they might be interested in. First, the listing contains photos, a detailed price of stay including all applicable fees, a calendar showing availability, a description written by the host, a list of amenities available to the guests, as well as a list of house rules and cancellation conditions. Also included in the listing are reviews of past guests and a description of the host. Thanks to the information provided on the platform, users can browse listings and make a decision based on content provided by the platform, by the host and by other members – put together, these three types of content constitute what the company calls "collective content".

On the other hand, potential hosts use Airbnb to list their available spaces. They are responsible for setting a price which cannot be changed once a guest has booked the listing. Hosts can choose between two options related to booking; they can either select the Instant Book feature – and thus accept any booking that is made by a guest – or choose to talk with the potential guest before accepting a booking. Once a booking has been approved by the host, they become legally bound to the guest by a contract that requires them to provide all the amenities and services listed on their listing. In return, the guest is legally bound to respect the rules made available in the listing, such as house rules and cancellation rules.

During the 14 days following checkout, the host and the guest can post a star rating and a public review of each other on the platform. The reviews are published and cannot be modified once they have both been completed. A member cannot delete a review that has been posted about them – unless it does not follow Airbnb's content rules – but can comment and answer them publicly. By clicking on a member's profile, it is possible to see every review that has been written about them. Comments and ratings are part of a reputation-based mechanism constructed by Airbnb; they allow the members to sanction or reward fellow members and thus monitor their behavior on and outside of the platform. However, Airbnb does not only offer tools; it has many active roles in the functioning of the platform.

Airbnb's role on its platform

In the Terms of Service available on the Airbnb Website, it is clearly stated that "*Airbnb does not own, create, sell, resell, provide, control, manage, offer, deliver, or supply*" any property listed on its website. Hosts are not considered employees or partners of the company, but "independent, third-party contractors" (Airbnb, 2018a). When a booking is made through the platform, the contract binds the host and the guest, leaving Airbnb out of the contractual relationship. However, as the provider of the digital platform on which individuals meet, Airbnb assumes crucial responsibilities: the company acts as a facilitator, a collector and a supervisor.

First, Airbnb facilitates listings on its platform by combining and classifying its own content and the content provided by its members. Each listing is presented in a standardized way and can be accessed using numerous filters. Airbnb also

translates some listings, using Google's translation services. The result of these features is a facilitated search process which allows users to make informed decisions. While the hosts ultimately choose how much to ask for a night on their property, Airbnb also offers a "Smart Pricing" feature, which suggests optimal prices for a listing. The feature relies on an algorithm created by Airbnb, which considers the property's type and size, its location, its reviews, the prices of similar listings, and other seasonal and external factors. The optimal prices vary according to the changes in demand for the listing, giving useful insights to the hosts. Moreover, the company has contracted with professional photographers who can visit homes and take realistic pictures of a listing. Hosts must pay for this service, but usually benefit from the impressions made by professional pictures on guests.

In addition to organizing content and facilitating listings, Airbnb also acts as a collector. The exchange of money between hosts and guests is exclusively handled by the platform, giving Airbnb an important middleman role. When guests book a listing, they are instantly charged for the entire amount of the stay. However, Airbnb does not transfer the payment to the hosts until 24 hours after check-in, giving the guests time to verify the property. The payments exchanged through the platform include the price of the rental, as well as cleaning fees, security deposits, local taxes, and the value-added tax (VAT) in countries or cities where the company is required to gather them. Moreover, in return for the services it provides on its platform, Airbnb charges service fees to its hosts and guests. A guest can see the amount of Guest Fees before making a reservation. These fees are usually below 20% of the booking subtotal but can be combined with VAT amounts when applicable. Hosts can see the amount of Host Fees - which is deducted from their global payout - before publishing their listing. Host fees are usually around 3% of the subtotal but can be higher in listings with extremely strict cancellation rules.

To supervise its members and establish trust, Airbnb does more than handling payments. Exchanging money and communicating on the platform grants protection to Airbnb users; they are protected by the many safeguards implemented by the company, which include its Payments Terms of Service, its Terms of Service, and cancellation and refund policies. Since May 2012, and after facing disgruntled hosts complaining about property damages, the company also offers a $1 million Host Guarantee to hosts in case of damages caused by guests. Other safety-related

roles are assumed by Airbnb; the company identifies members as "verified" by using social media and confirming their identity – sometimes by requiring guests to provide an official ID. Moreover, to prevent offensive and defamatory content, the comments posted on the platform are regulated by Airbnb through its Content and Extortion policies. Finally, Airbnb has a crucial role in the resolution of disputes between members – which often concern property damages. When a host claims a guest has damaged their property, they can ask the guest for financial compensation through the Resolution Centre. If no compromise is found between the two parties in the Resolution Centre, one of them can ask Airbnb to get involved. In this case, a team will analyze the situation and provide a final answer within 72 hours, collecting money from the security deposit or from the House Guarantee if needed.

Airbnb is thus an important actor in allowing guests and hosts to meet and establish short-term contracts in a safe and supervised way. Its roles are inherently rooted and limited to the scope of its digital platform.

Appendix B: Internationalization Strategy

[…] After a year of operations, Airbnb was considered a mature company in its local market but was still seen as a "*scrappy start-up*" in the eyes of users and regulators outside of the US (Rosenfelt, 2014). Airbnb thus had to adopt an active internationalization strategy to penetrate foreign markets. This strategy proved particularly successful in Europe where most of its more important markets are now located (see Table 1 for a ranking of Airbnb current top markets, destinations and sources of guests).

Table A: Airbnb's top markets, destinations and sources of guests

Top markets by active listings	Top destinations for Airbnb guests	Top sources of guests
1. Paris	1. United States	1. United States
2. London	2. France	2. France
3. New York City	3. Italy	3. United Kingdom
4. Rio de Janeiro	4. Spain	4. Germany
5. Los Angeles	5. United Kingdom	5. Australia
6. Barcelona	6. Japan	6. Canada
7. Rome	7. Canada	7. China
8. Copenhagen	8. Australia	8. Spain
9. Sydney	9. Germany	9. Italy
10. Amsterdam	10. Portugal	10. The Netherlands

Adapted from https://press.atairbnb.com/fast-facts/. Retrieved March 19th, 2018

Airbnb's international growth strategy differs from the ones implemented by more traditional companies. First, its product is a digital platform, which gives data a crucial role in designing and evaluating its strategy. Airbnb does not necessarily need to have a physical presence in a market to offer rooms in it. Moreover, it can use data to learn from every international experience; the company collects its own data, which is generated by its users on its platform, but also uses services such as

Google Analytics to identify demographic segments within their user pool by disclosing the devices and browsers used by their users. Moreover, as stated earlier, the platform is a two-sided marketplace. When entering a new market, the company needs to generate supply (hosts) and demand (guests). This can be difficult when individuals in a region have not heard of the platform or do not trust it; as a result, users are put at the center of Airbnb's growth strategy.

In a talk she gave in 2014, Rebecca Rosenfelt, Growth Product Manager of Airbnb, presented the main steps taken by the company to penetrate new regions. While paid acquisition – through Google and Facebook ads – is an important growth channel for the company, Rosenberg explains that it is not enough to create a substantial supply side. Indeed, it is more difficult to convince people to open their space to strangers than it is to convince guests to stay in local homes. As a result, Airbnb has adopted a people-focused strategy, which needs to be repeated and adapted for each new market. Teams are sent to markets of interest, where they organize parties and information events with early adopters of the platform. Being in contact with early adopters allows the company to understand the foreign market; local users provide the company with key knowledge on their city or country and what they want from the platform. These users can also invite friends and organize early events, and thus become key actors in supply acquisition efforts. In France, for instance, discussions with early adopters made Airbnb understand that domestic travels were highly important compared to international travels for French users. This pushed the company to first focus its efforts on local seasonal destinations to grow in France. During information sessions, the company also made sure to collect contact information to follow up with potential hosts. After having collected extensive information about locals, Airbnb often rely on low-cost guerrilla marketing campaigns to gain the press and the locals' attention - leaving covers on bike seats or installing air beds in malls (Rosenfelt, 2014). Moreover, Airbnb uses a referral system to expand its user pool in a new country; a user can get 25$ when inviting a friend, who will in turn get a 25$ discount when booking its first listing. Airbnb enjoys powerful network effects, which explains why converting users is a priority in its strategy.

Appendix C: Airbnb in Quebec

In May 2014, Airbnb established its first physical presence in Canada by opening an office in Toronto. Since then, the company has also opened an office in Montreal, Quebec. According to Aaron Zifkin, Airbnb's country manager for Canada, a physical presence was needed because of the importance of the Canadian market in Airbnb's activities. In 2014, three Canadian cities were featured in the platform's top 20 destinations and almost 20 000 listings were offered on the site. Moreover, establishing a physical presence was a way of dealing more closely with the Canadian regulators (Serebrin, 2014). This proves that the platform can stumble upon resistance from the government in its foreign markets. The potentially arduous relationship between the company and the regulatory power is perfectly exemplified by its experience in Quebec.

Figure 1: Total Cumulative Active Rentals in Montreal from 2010 to 2017
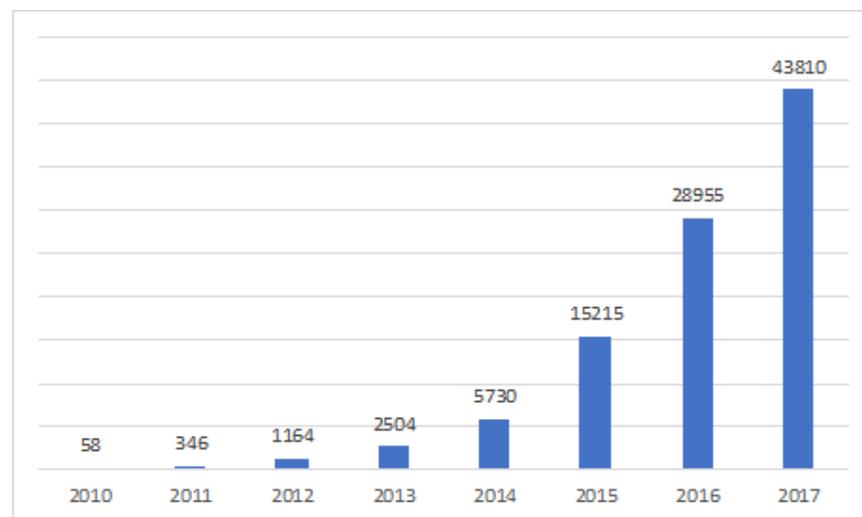
Adapted from https://www.airdna.co/market-data/app/ca/quebec/montreal/overview.
Retrieved April 6th, 2018

The Canadian site for Airbnb was launched in July 2009, and in 2010, only 58 active listings in Montreal were offered on the platform. The platform gained significant popularity in Montreal in the next years, reaching 5730 active listings in 2014 and nearly 44 000 in 2017 (see Figure 1).

While the platform started to exponentially gain in popularity among Montreal users, the local press started highlighting negative fallouts for locals, including

regulatory issues. Noise complaints against Airbnb guests and the realization from landlords that their tenants were renting their apartments without asking permission started abounding in the news. These strong critics were already emerging within the province as soon as 2014, when active listings were still counted in hundreds. Indeed, renting a space for touristic purposes without a permit was illegal in Quebec, which put Airbnb hosts at risk of having their lease cancelled. The hotel industry also emerged as an ardent critic of Airbnb, denouncing the fact that hosts were not bound by the regulations and taxes that hotels must pay to hosts travelers. The opposition from the hotel industry grew bigger as Airbnb started to offer more luxury listings with a value proposition similar to the rooms offered by high-end hotels catering to business travelers.

These past few years, some have also criticized the fact that not all hosts were renting their own spaces to make additional money on an individual scale. A recent report published by a research group at McGill university has shown the growing importance of triple thread listings, defined as «*short-term rental listings which are full-time, entire homes, and multi-listings*» (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Hosts participating in multi-listings manage multiple houses or rooms on Airbnb, which they use as a short-term way of generating profits, sometimes making it their main activity. This use of Airbnb does not correspond to the sharing economy model in which Airbnb was created, but a third of active listings in Canada are administered by multi-listings hosts and many hosts are not living in the space they are renting. In total, triple thread listings represent 8% of the total active listings in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, but generate 34% of total revenue (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). This derivative use of Airbnb and the fact that it takes out buildings and rooms from the local housing market has added fuel to the regulatory and critical fire that has been occurring since the beginning of Airbnb's popularity in Quebec, forcing regulators to intervene.

Adapting to regulatory pressures in Quebec

Criticisms of Airbnb emerge from the fact that when hosts started listing their space on the platform, short-term rentals were not regulated in Canadian provinces. Due to the short-term aspect of their activity, hosts were not obligated to follow touristic

accommodation laws and did not have to pay taxes. Hotel chains denouncing Airbnb as unfair competition have claimed that hosts did not operate on a level playing field. However, this changed when Quebec became the first province to legalize short-term rentals and create regulation adapted to the Airbnb business model.

The first regulatory effort made by Quebec occurred in 2015 and took effect on April 15th, 2016. After a debate of more than two years on how to regulate hosts' activities and collect tax revenue, Bill 67 was adopted on December 1, 2015. The Bill constrained regular users – a category that was not defined – to obtain a classification certificate from the Ministry of Tourism and to pay a 3.5% lodging tax to the institution. Sixteen inspectors were put in place to enforce the Bill. While the new legislation was well received by the tourism industry, the actual results of the Bill were not as expected after a year of being in effect. Tourism Quebec announced in 2017 that it only released 967 permits within a year, a low number compared to the number of existing hosts in Quebec (CBC, 2017). The low number of permits, generating poor revenues, combined with ongoing disturbance complaints and criticisms about the effects on Airbnb on the Quebec housing market, urged regulators to take an additional step in building legislation around short-term rentals.

The next step was taken in 2017, when the provincial government made a direct deal with Airbnb. Starting October 1st, 2017, Airbnb would be directly responsible for collecting the 3.5% tax from all transactions taking place in Quebec and transfer it on a quarterly basis to Revenu Quebec. By integrating all Airbnb transactions to its fiscal system and transferring enforcement power from its Ministry of Tourism to Revenu Quebec, the provincial government hoped to prevent users from lying on their revenue declaration and to collect as much as revenue as possible.

In 2018, hosts in Quebec must follow the rules stated in their lease, co-op rules, tenant organization rules, as well as city regulations such as zoning laws and rent control rules. They are still asked to obtain a classification certification certificate from Tourisme Quebec if they rent one or more spaces for less than 31 days, but the lodging tax is collected directly by Airbnb (Airbnb, 2018b).

Retrait d'une ou des pages pouvant contenir des renseignements personnels

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Background/demographic questions:
- Age, nationality, gender
- How long have you been living in Quebec? Have you lived in other provinces or countries? For how long?
- Have you stayed in an Airbnb before? Have you made a reservation on Airbnb before? How many times?

Scenario part:
- Imagine you have 1000 dollars at your disposal to book accommodation for a week, for you and a friend/significant other. You can go anywhere. Could you browse through Airbnb and choose a place to go while being very vocal about your thought process?

Possible additional questions during the scenario part:
- Why did you click on this listing/link/profile?
- Why is this important to you?
- Is that part of the listing helpful to you?
- You chose to not book this listing: why?
- ...

Opinion/value/feelings questions:
- When planning a vacation, how do you usually look for accommodation?
- If the respondent has never used Airbnb before:
    - Could you tell me why?
    - What did you think of this activity?
    - Did it make you want to use the platform for future travels?
    - Was the experience different from what you expected?
- Could you give me three reasons why you would use Airbnb instead of booking a hotel room?
- According to you, what should be the role of the host during your stay?
- Suppose the host could not meet you in person to give you the keys. How would you feel about that?
- As a traveler using Airbnb, which features attract you the most to a specific apartment/room?
- If you could have additional information on Airbnb, what would it be?
- What do you think of the rating system used by Airbnb?
- How would you describe a "perfect" Airbnb experience?
- What are for you the biggest risks associated with the use of Airbnb?
- In your opinion, what explains the success of Airbnb?
- Do you believe that Airbnb creates a community of travelers?
- What do you think of the debates surrounding the company in Quebec and the rest of the world?

Appendix F: Interview transcript: CM1

26 years old, Canadian, Male. Has lived in Quebec for 8 months. Lived in Ontario for 24 years, Sweden for 6 months, Belgium for one year. Has stayed in an Airbnb less than 10 times before and has made the reservations himself.

Scenario part:

M: Let's get started. Imagine you have 1000 dollars at your disposal to book accommodation for a week, for you and a friend or a significant other. You can go anywhere. Could you browse through Airbnb and make a choice while being very vocal about your thought process?

CM1: Okay then I will try to find a place in Lisbon, Portugal for two guests. _Launches the search_. I tend to use filtering for a few things. Obviously, it has to be the entire place, because I want my privacy. A private room is not private enough, and a shared room is not private at all. I don't really look at home types or anything like that, but I do want to look at more filters. It's going to depend on who I go with for the number of beds. Washroom I usually tend to ask for at least one of course, maybe two depending on where we're going. I also want these things generally covered: shampoo, of course kitchen, heating and air conditioning depending on where we're going, but either or is going to be very important. I don't care so much about the facilities, free parking especially I don't really care about. Property type I would basically go for anything expect for bed and breakfast, again due to the privacy. Basically, that's it. _Applies the filters_. Then I generally try to look at a few different things. First thing I would say is the pictures of course. It is actually the most important. When I look at the pictures, I want something that looks modern. I don't really want anything that looks older. Thankfully Airbnb is pretty good at that. Whenever I'm looking at places, at least the photos that are taken tend to look pretty modern. Beyond that, of course I look at the price. I try not to go too cheap, only because I'm never too sure about what it says. Maybe it's a matching price with quality type of thing. I don't feel comfortable choosing something that is too cheap compared with everything else. There must be a reason why it is cheap, so I tend to go more for prices in the middle. _Starts looking at the pictures of an apartment on the list_. The pictures that are shown have to be of the inside of course. This one would be a no-go for instance, because it mostly shows what it looks like on the outside. I don't really care, especially if all the places are close to the same area.

Goes to the next listing and opens it in a tab. This apartment here caught my eye because of the modern look and the patio of course. _Looks through the full-sized pictures_. I just like the colors to be honest, the all-white and the set-up. Now that I'm looking at it here, I guess I like it when there is a display of how the place can look. I'm not really that imaginative, so I like it when the pictures help me imagine myself there. For instance, if they show a breakfast table on the patio with plates

and everything, I like that. For the rest of the listing, of course Wi-fi is the number one thing. It says here there is a little place when you can work on your laptop, which is kind of important to me because sometimes I have to work even on vacation. And of course, I look at the size of the bed. This one has a double bed, so it's a problem. I want a queen, minimum. That's a big thing for me. Then I guess I usually look at reviews. Here all the reviews seem positive, but I generally look at the most negative reviews and then what the response was, if there was a response. I want to see both sides of it: sometimes a review is not good, but the circumstances around it can explain why. If it's just a bad review with no response from the host, then I don't feel comfortable, because that means they are not talking about their own point of view. That's generally my process there. I'm going to eliminate this apartment, because there is so many other choices and the bed situation is not perfect. _Goes back to the list_. In this case I think I'm kind of spoiled for choice, because there is a lot of apartments that match what I'm looking for in terms of aesthetics and location. On this listing for instance, you can tell immediately it's a big bed, and it's in the same area. _Opens a tab_. I can nitpick with that many choices. I don't have to settle down, because so many options could work. I have been to Lisbon before, so I'm familiar with the location, which makes things easier I guess.

M: What if you were going to a city you've never been before?

CM1: One thing I do is I rely a lot on the description of the area provided by the host. I did this when I went to New Orleans actually. I didn't really know the areas of the city. The area we ended up taking an Airbnb in was close to the trolley on Canal Street, which was taking us to the main part of New Orleans. That was pretty important to me. Actually, in general, being close to transit is really important to me. In Lisbon, I know where to go to be close to transit, but for other cities I would check the listing and some maps to make sure I'm close enough. Let's go back to the tab I just opened. It's a studio apartment, which kind of turns me off a little bit to be honest, but I'll go through it anyway. _Reads the description_. Whenever it says something like 'walking distance from restaurants and bars', it makes me happy. It also says that it is close to bus stops, metro stations, etc... which gives me a lot of options. It also comes with soap and shampoo. Once again it is a double bed, but in this case, there is a picture of the bed and it doesn't look so small anymore. For the reviews, I would actually take some time to go through them and find the negative ones. That's part of the process. _Looks quickly through a few comments_. It really depends on what the negative reviews are about as well. If there is ever a negative review that has to do with issues with the host or access to the Airbnb, that's going to weight more heavily than if the guest did not like a particular thing that everyone else thought was fine. It's less subjective. The other thing though, is that when I find something that I like, I'm not going to look around too much. I'm just going to go with it. I would go with this one. It's in a great area, the price is good, it has all the photos that I want to see. It would also come down to my partner of course. I just tend to focus on the first great thing that I see.

Opinion/value/feelings questions:

M: Perfect. Now if you don't mind, I'm going to start asking you questions directly. They might be a little redundant with some aspects you just mentioned. So first, when planning a vacation, how do you usually look for accommodation?

CM1: What I personally look for is something that is going to give me a social setting. If it's just me, and not with a partner, I want to be in a place where I can socialize. Generally, I look for areas in a social area, close to bars, restaurants and things like that. Usually I start looking at hostels for the same reason.

M: And if you had to choose between an Airbnb and a hotel room, can you give me three reasons why you would choose the Airbnb option?

CM1: For one, an Airbnb is definitely going to have its unique look and it's going to give me more of a local feel. Hotels are pretty standardized, so I don't think they would give me the same kind of local feeling that I would get for an Airbnb. Plus, an Airbnb is an apartment that is rented out. Unlike a hotel, which might not be well integrated in a certain part of a city, an apartment generally is. That would be number one. Number two, more privacy, in my eyes. You have privacy in your own hotel room, but outside of it everything is shared. In an Airbnb, you can have a whole apartment for yourself, then you have the outside. It feels more like you're living there, and not just visiting. Also, you have a kitchen, and it's always fun to be able to cook during your trip if you don't feel like going out. And third, I think it's the proximity to everything. I think it's easier to get closer to the local lifestyle than in a hotel.

M: What do you expect from your Airbnb host?

CM1: I want the host to give me access and get out of the way. I would like for them to be accessible for emergency purposes. Other than that, it's my trip.

M: Suppose the host could not meet you in person to give you the keys. How would you feel about that?

CM1: It doesn't matter to me. Although to be fair, I think there is more opportunity to have a better welcome if you're meeting the person. You can get personalized recommendations when you talk with somebody.

M: If you could have additional information on Airbnb, what would it be?

CM1: I took an Airbnb in Montreal last year actually, and I realized it could be interesting to have more information about the neighbors. The apartment I was in had neighbors who would smoke a lot outside, and it was messing with my sinuses

and my partner's. I guess it's hard to determine from a host perspective, but it would be nice to know a little more about the surroundings and the building itself. More disclosure about what's around. I think it's the role of the host to provide that kind of information.

M: How would you describe a perfect Airbnb experience?

CM1: I really think the perfect Airbnb experience is an experience where I can act almost as if I lived there for real. So, if I live in my own apartment, I don't really have to talk to my landlord at all, unless there is a specific reason for that. I enter my own apartment with my own key, I unwind in my own way and use the facilities in my own way. That's what I want the Airbnb to be as well. The less interference and the less friction there are to me feeling like I live there, the better.

M: In your opinion, is there any risk associated with staying in an Airbnb?

CM1: Hotels are generally better set-up for emergencies, you have staff that are prepared to take action in certain situations like fires. It is actually very important if you go to a place where you don't know the language. To not have anyone there that speaks your language can be quite difficult especially if a dangerous situation rises. There is definitely risk with the fact that there is no staff in an Airbnb. That's the kind of risk I see there: even if it's your fault, if you started a fire for instance, it's a lot more difficult to figure out what to do in an Airbnb versus a hotel, where you can just call someone.

M: In your opinion, what explains the success of Airbnb?

CM1: I think people want to feel like they are living in the place they are visiting. They want as much local experiences as they can get. You get that removed when you're in a hotel, and partially in hostels. Hostels are a little closer to that, but you have the disadvantage of sharing rooms and things like that. I really thing Airbnb is the only option that lets you have an authentic living experience within the place you are visiting. A hotel can't do that for you, a hostel can't really do that for you.

M: What do you think about the Airbnb community?

CM1: I think they could do better. I don't think it's necessarily creating a community of travelers. I think that what they have been working on recently has been helpful, like the Experiences and things like that. But you have a platform where you know the locations of all these different Airbnb, and it is still hard to connect with other travelers. It should be more community events for people who use Airbnb. You should be able to connect with other Airbnb users in your area when you're travelling. I haven't experimenting with Experiences yet, but from what I know it is not really what's happening right now.

M: And finally, what do you think of the debates surrounding the company in Quebec and the rest of the world?

CM1: It can really go both ways. I feel like on one side, if you own your own property, you should be able to rent it out the way you want to, whatever the prices. If you want to Airbnb it, it should be your decision to make. If you own the property at least. Other side of this is, from what I know, that it has affected rental prices. It's tough because on Airbnb it is so much easier as an owner to make money, because you can make a month's rent in a week pretty easily. There is a profit incentive, but it takes away the ability of the citizens of this city to actually live there. It also takes away the local aspect of it. It takes away from the whole Airbnb experience. It's mixed feelings because of the consequences.

M: Anything else to add before I finish the interview?

CM1: I think I told you everything!

Appendix G: Interview transcript: QM2

26 years old, Canadian, Male. Has lived in Quebec his whole life, expect for 3 years in Ottawa, Ontario, and 7 months in Denmark. Has used Airbnb and stayed at Airbnbs more than 10 times before.

Scenario part:

M: Let's get started with the first part of the interview. Imagine you have 1000 dollars at your disposal to book accommodation for a week, for you and a friend/significant other. You can go anywhere. Could you browse through Airbnb and make a choice while talking me through your thought process?

QM2: First, let's choose Oakland, New Zealand. I'm going to choose dates in approximately 3 months, because normally I would look up places a few months in advance. It has been a little while since I've used Airbnb, but I'm assuming that all the prices stacked on top of each other on the map are in the city center. I'm using the map first. Generally, I would have an idea of where the city center is or where the metro stations are and look for places accordingly. Normally I would have asked a friend who has been there first, so I could have an idea of where are good places to stay. For the sake of this, I will just use the map and guess where the city center is. *Zooms in on the map*. I see a lot of different things here, with a lot of different prices, and I wonder if there's a way to sort this. Okay so on the top I can see they have some filters. I'm going to start with the price. I have a thousand dollars for a week, so it's like 150 dollars a night I'm guessing? I'm also going to bring up the nightly minimum, because if I'm going with a significant other, I don't want a cheap find. Alright, I have adjusted the filter, from 93 to 154 dollars, and there is a bunch of option in this area. I guess I'm looking for a place that has had a lot of hosts. Generally, if a lot of people have stayed in a place before and the rating is good, it means I'm going to have a good experience. Let's see what the other filters are first. For the property type I'm kind of indifferent I guess. They have an option here for 'super hosts', but if it is anything like couchsurfing it might mean the host paid to get verified. Which does not really prove anything. I want to see ratings, and I would like to list the apartments according to them. Anyways, all the listings here have over 4 stars and between 20 and 1000 reviews. I guess I will start going through the listings.

I always start by making sure the reviews are good by looking at the star ratings on the right. Then I look at the price, to make sure it is within my range, and finally at the pictures on the list before opening a listing. The first one is within my price range, it has a 4.5 star rating and more than 200 reviews, so I am going to look at the pictures. It's an entire condo, which is important for me if I am with a significant other, I don't want just a private room. I'm assuming it's in the middle of the city, based on what the other listings are telling me. All the ones in the city center are close to 100 dollars, this one is a little under, which makes sense because it is not

as central. I'm going to open this one in a new tap and browse through the other ones. I like to do that. *Opens a first tab*. The next one is over 4 stars, costs 78 dollars a night, but I think it is a private room in a loft. It looks very cool though. You know what, I am going to fix the filters now, to make sure I only see entire places. *Applies filter*. It's going to make hunting a little easier. This one only has 15 reviews. I'm going to look quickly through the pictures. It looks cool but small. The thing is, when you're going to visit a city with a significant other, you're not really in the apartment too much. For example, when I went to Vancouver with a girlfriend, we got the top floor of a three-story house, and it was tiny. But we spent almost no time there, because we were visiting a city that I did not really know. So, I'll give this one a chance. But I'll check the reviews before I commit to giving it a tab. *Opens the listing, goes to the comments*. Yeah so everyone says it is good actually.

M: What kind of comments are you looking for when you're checking the reviews?

QM2: This one only has 15 reviews, so I can go through all of them. Normally what I would do is look for the worst comments. I do that with anything, because the ones that are bad are often more genuine. I know companies that pay people to leave comments on their page, but nobody would pay someone to leave a bad comment. The bad ones I know for sure are real. The good ones I'm never sure about. Airbnb is a bit different because everybody is talking about a specific place or host, and they all have their own profile with pictures and everything. I also think you have to stay somewhere to leave a comment there. I guess they could make a second account, book it for themselves and leave comments that way. Take all I've just said with a grain of salt. For this listing, I can't find any bad comment actually. Is there a way to search and arrange reviews? I don't think so. Anyways, I can read through all of those so it's okay. I'm going to read about the host. I'm going to check out his profile, see who he is and if he is a normal-looking person, not that it should be judged or whatever. He has a job, he's married, he seems to have positive reviews. Okay so even though this one only has 15 reviews, it might be worth giving it a chance. I'm going to go back to the main page and leave this tab open. *Goes back to the list*. I usually do this until I have 6 to 10 options. There's one listing here that is a 'rare find'. We chose a 'rare find' for Vancouver and it was really good, but honestly, based on the few pictures I can see, this one looks boring, lacking character. I want my apartment to be memorable, not just like any hotel. This one has no decoration, it's all white, it's industrial looking almost. So, I'm going to pass. Okay so I'm pretty far down the page, I'm going to adjust my filters again. All the ones I've been finding are under 100 dollars a night, so let's put a maximum at 105. *Applies the filter*. The first one that appears on the list is an entire guest house, it's 98 a night, it has 25 reviews. It has a Murphy bed that comes out of the wall, cool! It's a studio, and it looks pretty cool and central. I'm going to add this one as well, since the pictures look mice. *Opens a new tab*. Let's move on. This one only has 10 reviews and looks like a dorm room, so no. A lot of these apartments look like apartments that you could find in Toronto, and that is not really what I

would want. I picture New Zealand as a very rural country, with earthy-kind people, so I don't want to stay at a big modern place. I want a cultural feel to my apartment a little bit, even if it's just because of some decoration. Let's move on. This one is also a 'rare find' but it is a little further than the other. It does have a great view of the skyline. It's a weird looking apartment though. I'm going to skip over it, nothing really stuck out about it, even though it was a 'rare find'. A lot of apartments are that way, just white big square without anything special. I also feel like if you stay in those modern apartments, you might be in the middle of downtown, but in a bad way. You would be in the middle of the corporate lifestyle, and I'd rather be a little bit outside of town and have a more local experience. I like discovering the little neighborhoods that are a little out of the way. This next one is 103 a night, has 50 reviews and is also really central, but it looks a little more interesting. It looks a little bit like my aunt's cottage. Let's open a tab for later. *Opens a tab*. I have 4 tabs now. I'm going to scroll through the next page very quickly and give some of these a chance by looking at the first picture just in case, but other than that I think I can work with the 4 I already have. *Scrolls through a page of listings*. The ones on the second page do not have that many reviews, and none caught my eye. Let's just compare the 4 tabs I already have opened. They are in no particular order.

Opens the first tab. This one is a villa suite. I'm going to click on the host's profile, I want to know who she is and if she is going to be available if I have questions. She works in the film industry, she's been on the site since 2013, which is nice to know. She's a super host, which is whatever since I don't know how you become one. Comments say that she goes over and beyond for every guest, she's highly rated, with a score of 4.8. She looks like she is a good host. She has two listings, she's not new to this. *Goes back to the listing*. I'm going to read some reviews on the apartment, since it has all the amenities that I want. She has 5 stars on every criterion.

M: Imagine one of the criteria had 3 stars instead of 5. Which one would be the more devastating for your decision?

QM2: Normally I would say 'Location', but in Japan I stayed in a couple of 3-star location places, and I did not mind spending 10 or 15 minutes more in public transportation or walking because at least I had a more local feel to my experience. Now, I would probably say 'Value' and 'Cleanliness'. If the place is not clean for their guests, how can I trust the hosts for the rest of my stay? That's priority number one, since you're almost paying for hotel quality. *Reads a few comments out loud*. Anyways, this apartment is currently number one. Out of one.

Let's see the next one. *Opens a second tab and goes directly for the host's profile*. I guess who they are does not matter that much, it is just me being curious. Normally I would go straight to the reviews, which are the most important part for me, but right now I'm just following their layout and I already know that these places are

good, since I prejudged them. The only thing that could make me change my mind on the host's page would be if they had a really busy job that would stop them from being available for me if I had a problem. For instance, a paramedic or a nurse with long shifts might not be able to help me, but that's very specific. I know it's not couch surfing, but I generally like to hang out a little bit with my host, go for beer as a thank you for instance, or simply get some advice on the city. If it's someone who just moved in the city, it might also not be possible. Okay so this host seems great. Let's go back to the main page. The comments are all positive, it has 5 stars everywhere. The other looked homier, so it is still my number one. Honestly, I would do the exact same thing for the two other tabs, so I'm not sure you need me to finish the comparison. I really liked the first tab, let's just say I'm choosing this one. I've seen the pictures, the reviews and the host's profile. I would probably ask if there is a lock-box or a safe if it is not mentioned in the amenities. Oh, it says here it has a lock-box. It's in my budget, so I would request a book.

Opinion/value/feelings questions:
M: Perfect, let's move on to direct questions then. When planning a vacation, how do you usually look for accommodation?

QM2: It depends on who I'm going with. When I'm going on vacation, I usually have the choice between a hotel and an Airbnb. Unless I'm travelling for a business trip, these options are pretty interchangeable for me. There are actually two tiers: there are hotels and Airbnb for a fancier type of accommodation, but there is also the hostel world, crashing with friends and couch surfing. Personally, I prefer Airbnbs to hotels, they are a little more personal, and I know that less people have slept in the bed I'm sleeping in. Assuming I'm going with my tier 1, I would always choose Airbnb. I've used it before, I know it's good. It's usually cheaper too! If it's cheaper and better, there is no reason to choose otherwise.

M: According to you, what should be the role of the host during your stay?

QM2: Not present but available if there is a problem. It does not even have to be them, it could be their friend or significant other, but I need someone who's going to be able to help me out if something happens. Especially if it's in a place where I don't speak the language. For instance, in hostels, I make sure that some staff speak English, that way they can help you and give you tips on where to go during your stay. Airbnb, that might not always be the case. As I get older, I want more recommendations from people who live in the city I'm visiting. They know better than I do. Someone could come to Montreal and figure it out on their own using Yelp, but they might miss some things that some locals would have recommended.

M: Suppose the host could not meet you in person to give you the keys. How would you feel about that?

QM2: That's fine. In Vancouver they had a little key thing where you type a code and then it opens, and the keys are in the inside. That's fine honestly, I'm okay with that. The host doesn't have to be present, they could always send recommendations via email.

M: If you could have additional information on Airbnb, what would it be?

QM2: I would like to see the reviews ranked, that would be nice. Some apartment had 4 stars reviews, and I would have liked to find out why easily. It would also be nice if they had stats like some hostels do, to let you know how far the apartment is from main attractions.

M: According to you, what are the biggest risks associated with the use of Airbnb?

QM2: Assuming that they have reviews, I don't see any. I have never had any bad experience in a well-rated Airbnb. If I was going to a place with not too many reviews because it was in an obscure location for example, the risks would be higher. Especially since I travel with my camera gear, I would be less likely to flaunt it around. But generally, when I travel, I have my important stuff on me, like my passport. I still don't want anyone to go through my stuff, but I usually trust other people's opinions.

M: In your opinion, what explains the success of Airbnb?

QM2: It's the first of its kind! It has a first mover advantage kind of. It was a cool idea, it's like paid couchsurfing. I know I keep bringing couchsurfing up, but it has been around since 2000. A guy was visiting Iceland and had nowhere to stay, so he emailed everyone in a dorm of the University of Reykjavik. Then he started a website. Airbnb was kind of the first website to make a paid official version of the concept. Airbnb is more popular than couch surfing now. With Airbnb, you get your own private place, while with couch surfing your in someone's place with them. It's cheaper than hotels, it's as clean as hotels, the location is convenient enough, it has tons of hosts on it, so it offers so many choices. Couch surfing is great, but I would not stay there with a significant other. I don't think I would even find a host accepting couples.

M: Do you believe that Airbnb creates a community?

QM2: I never saw it like that. Again, I think I'm biased because of couch surfing, which actually has a community. They have a reddit community where people share tips and stories. Booking an Airbnb does not really mean you will hang out with your host. It's a little faceless. Hosts on Airbnb are doing their own thing, living their life, but hosts on couchsurfing will show you around and spend time with you. That makes a community. Also, on couchsurfing, there is a sense of payback

because as a traveler there is a big chance you will then host people in your own city through couchsurfing. Just because I stay in an Airbnb does not mean I will start renting my place on the website. Couch surfing is more of a tit for tat kind of thing.

M: Okay, final question. What do you think of the debates surrounding the company in Quebec and the rest of the world?

QM2: That's just how business works. It is the same thing with taxis and Uber. It is the exact same thing. You can be as mad as you want, but if a better, cheaper idea comes out, then why should people pay more for something that is honestly worse. It's one thing if they are doing something illegal, and I guess that it is a little bit the case with Airbnb and subletting. The government should be helpful and should want to create a better community and better infrastructures and try to attract more visitors. With Airbnb, you have so many cool alternatives to hotels. I'm fully supportive of it unless they're breaking a law, and if they do, I believe the government should address it and think of long-term benefits.

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