

# Construing travelers' choice on peer-to-peer accommodation-sharing platform: an investigation into cultural identity and accommodation type

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research is motivated by the increasing need for international interactions during the gradual recovery of the tourism industry. By recognizing the paucity of research on cultural closeness and accommodation categories, this research aims to illuminate the influencing mechanisms of psychological closeness and travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property while booking an accommodation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors employ a mixed-methods approach, including an experiment and semistructured interviews.

**Findings** – Results show that hosts' higher cultural identity congruence leads to travelers' higher willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. Psychological closeness mediates the positive effect of cultural identity congruence on travelers' willingness to book. The authors further explore the moderating role of room types (entire room vs. private room) and find that the mediation effect is stronger for booking an entire room.

**Originality/value** – The current research underlines the importance of cultural identity congruence and accommodation type on travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property and psychological closeness.

**Keywords** Peer-to-peer, Accommodation sharing, Cultural identity congruence, Psychological closeness, Mixed-methods

**Paper type** Research paper



## 1. Introduction

As an essential branch of sharing economy, accommodation sharing has piqued mounting interest among scholars and practitioners (Belarmino & Koh, 2020; Dolnicar, 2019; Paulauskaite, Powell, Coca-Stefaniak, & Morrison, 2017). In the booming sharing economy, nonstandard accommodation represented by online accommodation-sharing platforms such as Airbnb has become a trend for global travelers. However, the traditional hospitality industry has been facing challenges since the peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation-sharing platforms have enabled the broad segments of the population to use the under-utilized rooms via monetary exchange sharing (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017). P2P accommodation is expected to grow by 31% by 2025 by involving a large population (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015). According to Allied Market Research (2022), the global online travel market's value was about \$354 billion in 2020 and is expected to exceed \$1835 billion in the next ten years.

P2P accommodation sharing has suffered from a massive shock due to the outbreak of COVID-19, especially for the transactions between cross-cultural counterparts. As the COVID-19 epidemic has entered the normalization period, it is no doubt that a noticeable cross-cultural trend will increasingly emerge in the background of irreversible globalization and during the recovery of accommodation sharing (Chu, Luo, & Chen, 2019; Gerwe, 2021). Given that P2P accommodation will recover in recent years, it is easy to see why attracting more overseas bookings and pushing the P2P accommodation data to more potential customers have become important topics in practice and research. Precision marketing has become an important practical issue for P2P accommodation sharing under overseas travel.

Potential customers rely on information related to shared accommodation hosts and rooms in their decision-making. Cultural identity congruence, the beliefs and behaviors that individual shares with members of one's community (Jensen, 2003), expresses the potential connections between hosts and travelers. Extensive research has shown that cultural identity congruence is important information for travelers (Hunter, 2011; Li & McKercher, 2016). Additionally, the cultural identity congruence of shared accommodation hosts has attracted more and more attention from international travelers (Wang, Wu, Xie, & Li, 2019). For example, when the cultural background of the destination country and the traveler's country of living is quite different, the traveler may be eager to experience the local culture in-depth (Guttentag, Smith, Potwarka, & Havitz, 2018). However, they cannot entirely disconnect from their own culture (Torelli *et al.*, 2017). Thus, delving into the impact of cultural identity congruence is beneficial for understanding consumer behaviors in accommodation sharing.

Accommodation type indicates the information about the shared accommodation rooms. The accommodation type should also be addressed while determining the influencing factors of accommodation sharing. Previous studies have attempted to explore the role of accommodation type in determining travelers' usage-related perceptions. For instance, Tussyadiah (2016) found that social benefits influence travelers' satisfaction for those staying in a private room that lives with hosts, but not for those staying in an entire apartment. Accommodation type indicates the accommodation-sharing property's sharing forms, including the entire room and private room. It is possible that the type of accommodation can affect a traveler's future intention to some extent because a private room signifies more interaction between hosts and travelers, while an entire room indicates an independent space.

The information about cultural identity congruence and accommodation type could affect the room choice. Previous studies have focused on consumer perceived benefits and risks (Lee, 2020), entrepreneurship (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; Kim, Tang, & Wang, 2020), booking and switching motivation (Chi, Wang, Luo, & Li, 2021), and trust (Park & Tussyadiah, 2020; Ye, Chen, & Paek, 2021) in accommodation sharing while paying less attention to cultural identity in host-traveler encounters (Cheng, 2016). Although Cheng and Zhang (2019) provide a theoretical framework for intercultural host-traveler relationships

and emphasize that cultural differences play an essential role in host-traveler encounters, very little is known about the effects of cultural identity and accommodation type on travelers' decisions, such as willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property.

Psychological closeness, the subjective perception of proximity between travelers and hosts in the travelers' psychological space (Wang *et al.*, 2019), could help explain the effects of cultural identity on travelers' decisions. Prior research reveals that in e-commerce platforms, relationships between consumers and retailers can be influenced by psychological distance (Cui *et al.*, 2020). Particularly in P2P accommodation-sharing services, it has been established that psychological closeness/distances are important in determining travelers' behavior (So, Xie, & Wu, 2019).

Given the importance of cultural factors and accommodation type in P2P accommodation sharing, we seek to answer the following research question: *We seek to answer the following research question: How does psychological closeness connect cultural identity and accommodation type with travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property?* The research findings will help expand our understanding of how accommodation sharing recovers from the hard hit of COVID-19.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Accommodation sharing

In recent years, sharing economy has received considerable attention (Acquier, Daudigeos, & Pinkse, 2017; Hou, Luo, Ke, & Cheng, 2022; Leung, Xue, & Wen, 2019). As an important economic activity, sharing economy usually refers to "the peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services" (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016, p. 2047). Sharing economy has expanded because of the explosive growth of information and communications technologies (ICTs) (Hamari *et al.*, 2016). Both the supply and demand sides benefit from sharing economy platform mediation, transfer of economic value, crowdsourced supply, the emphasis on temporary access rather than permanent ownership and expanded customer role (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2019). Sharing economy involves a wide variety of activities that provides convenience enabled by two-sided platforms such as ride-sharing platform, accommodation-sharing platform and space-sharing platform (Agatz, Erera, Savelsbergh, & Wang, 2012; Al-Abbasi, Ghosh, & Aggarwal, 2019; Belarmino & Koh, 2020; Dolnicar, 2019; Peng & Wang, 2021).

Sharing economy involves an economic system based on sharing underused assets or services, for free or for a fee, directly among individuals and is focused on access rather than possession (Hamari *et al.*, 2016; Schor, 2016; Cheng *et al.*, 2019). In recent years, the development of the sharing economy has been enabled and facilitated by the prosperous advancement of the internet and other supporting tools and features (Belk, 2014). Sharing economy brings economic and societal benefits, such as reducing drunk driving (Greenwood & Wattal, 2017) and increasing innovation and entrepreneurship in coworking spaces (Bouncken *et al.*, 2020). P2P accommodation sharing is a crucial business type in the sharing economy and focuses on improving housing resource utilization.

P2P accommodation-sharing platform refers to a "peer-to-peer marketplace for people to rent out residential accommodation (including their accommodations) on a short-term basis" (Martin, 2016, p. 152). As a newly emerging field, accommodation sharing has received significant attention. Accommodation sharing has been hit hard by the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 because of travel restrictions, flight cancellations, economic downturn and widespread lockdowns (Zhang, Geng, Huang, & Ren, 2021). Both individual and situational sides are important for travelers in determining P2P accommodation use (Jang & Kim, 2022). As the epidemic has entered a normalization period, existing research calls for exploring the recovery of accommodation sharing (Gerwe, 2021).

The extant research on accommodation sharing involves several essential topics. For example, some scholars have explored why consumers share accommodation instead of traditional hotels and its potential benefits and risks (Lee, 2020; Wang, Asaad, & Filieri, 2020; Fu *et al.*, 2021). In addition, perceived authenticity, electronic word-of-mouth and price sensitivity are important factors of perceived value and risk and further influence repurchase intention (Liang, Choi, & Joppe, 2018). Further, research has established that travelers' online reviews have become significant information sources affecting consumers' purchasing decisions (Ahani *et al.*, 2019; Padma & Ahn, 2020). Furthermore, several studies shed light on trust and perceived value (Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo, & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015) and host-traveler interaction (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018). In addition, several studies have attempted to address the cultural aspects of both accommodation-sharing providers and travelers (Lyu, Li, & Law, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2019). However, previous studies are limited to one type of culture, and little attention has been paid to cross-culture studies.

Accommodation type has been important in the existing literature (Bresciani *et al.*, 2021; Fadda & Sorensen, 2017). In the current investigation, we focus on the P2P accommodation-sharing platform, such as Airbnb, and two types of sharing properties and their effects on travelers' perceived experiences. Airbnb is a typical P2P accommodation-sharing platform that provides an online marketplace for rentals of idle housing resources. Specifically, the sharing property in P2P accommodation-sharing platform enabled services contains two types of sharing properties: an entire room and a private room. Private room indicates that travelers have to share common areas and facilities, such as toilets, kitchens and electrical equipment, with the host or other travelers during their stay, and they have private rooms for sleeping. On the other hand, an entire room means that travelers have a whole place where there is no need to share the joint space with others. Hence, under the background of the recovery of accommodation sharing, the present study aims to understand whether an accommodation-sharing provider's cultural background and accommodation type will influence travelers on an international trip.

## 2.2 Cultural identity

Cultural identity refers to "a broad range of beliefs and behaviors that one shares with members of one's community" (Jensen, 2003, p. 190). As a specific type of social identity, cultural identity formation involves taking on worldview beliefs and participating in behavioral activities that unite people in a community (Shweder *et al.*, 1998). Research on cultural identity has mainly focused on psychology and social psychology-related topics (Anders *et al.*, 2021; Mao & Shen, 2015). However, a growing body of literature recognizes the crucial role of cultural identity in determining individual consumer behaviors (Kipnis, Demangeot, Pullig, & Broderick, 2019; Strizhakova & Coulter, 2019). As business is on a trend of internationalization, international business contacts have become more frequent in recent years. It has been established that consumers suffering from cultural distinctiveness are more willing to favor and prefer brands relevant to a related cultural group (Torelli *et al.*, 2017).

According to Hogg and Terry (2000), people divide others into members of the same community and different communities. Members of the same community have similar backgrounds, while members of different communities are individuals in different social groups. The division of social groups is based on many elements, such as belief, attitude, cultural background and gender. Cultural identity congruence was used to depict congruence as members of the same community. The existing body of research on accommodation sharing suggests that the congruence of cultural identity should be addressed. For example, Strizhakova and Coulter (2019) offered a framework to understand the interplay between national and world-based identities and consumers' consumption practices. Wang *et al.* (2019) compared Chinese and American international travelers' accommodation-sharing preferences. The current investigation focuses on the effects of cultural identity and

### 3. Research model and hypothesis development

Building upon previous research and existing work, we develop a model to explain the effects of cultural identity and accommodation type on travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property mediated by psychological closeness. Figure 1 depicts our research model.

As discussed earlier, cultural identity congruence involves extensive beliefs and behaviors commonly shared in a community and indicate how people in an established culture recognize a cluster of focal factors that distinguish this culture from others (Clark, 1990; Jensen, 2003). The conceptualization of cultural identity congruence is rooted in the collective identity and self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social groups are formed based on various factors, such as beliefs, attitudes, cultural background and gender (Hogg & Terry, 2000). It has been established that consumers strongly desire to connect with their accommodation culture when surrounded by a different cultural environment (Torelli *et al.*, 2017). Tussyadiah and Pesonen (2016) found that a close interaction between hosts and travelers makes travelers stay longer. Previous research has shown the role of cultural identity congruence in host-traveler interaction. For example, Wang *et al.* (2019) examined international travelers' accommodation-sharing preferences. Their results suggested that Chinese consumers prefer accommodation-sharing properties associated with high congruence group hosts regardless of traveling alone or with a companion. Torelli *et al.* (2017) suggested that travelers may show a solid congruence group tendency in brand preferences and consumer choices under overseas travel. High congruence group host indicates the hosts who share the same cultural identity with travelers, and low congruence group vice versa. When the host rents his or her spare residence to the traveler for a short term, the host becomes a significant component of the traveler's travel experience (Chen & Tussyadiah, 2021). In the P2P accommodation-sharing context, we hypothesize that when travelers are on overseas travel, they may prefer a congruence group host and tend to be more willing to book an accommodation-sharing property offered by the hosts in the same cultural group. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H1. Under overseas travel, cultural identity congruence positively impacts travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property.

Psychological closeness is the extent of closeness that consumers perceive on a subjective psychological scale with the service provider (Kim, Zhang, & Li, 2008), which can be conceptualized as the intimacy between the traveler and the accommodation owner perceived by the travelers. Individuals' understanding of social phenomena is based on mental

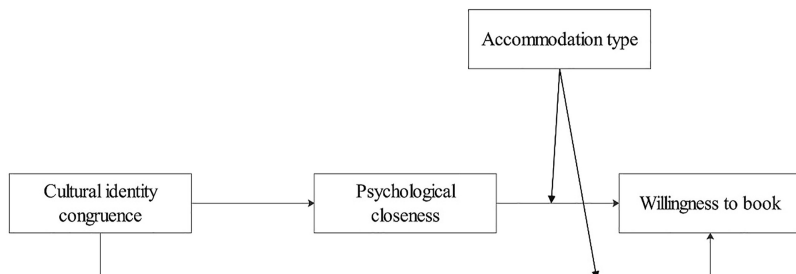


Figure 1.  
Research model

representations, and their perception of cognitive objects has varying degrees of abstraction (Resnick, 1991). Furthermore, people have different construal levels, which leads to different psychological distances of people's cognitive objects and the evaluations will change, based on psychological distance (Dhar & Kim, 2007; Sun, Keh, & Lee, 2019). Previous research has confirmed that psychological distance affects judgment (Fujita *et al.*, 2006; Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). Since there is unavoidable interaction between hosts and travelers, either online- or face-to-face, a low congruence group host holds a closer spatial and physical distance with overseas travelers than a low congruence group host. Therefore, we expect that in the P2P accommodation-sharing services, travelers will perceive a higher psychological closeness to the host in the same cultural community and vice versa.

The psychological closeness could be affected by many factors. Su and Mattila (2020) discovered that female consumers are more likely to book an Airbnb property hosted by a female (vs. a male). It is reasonably supposed that some travelers, such as women traveling alone, might have a high demand for privacy or security. Not only are the hosts unfamiliar, but the accommodation sharing provides relatively unfamiliar products and services (Lee, 2020). Previous research has discovered the bright side of psychological closeness. For example, Li and Chen (2019) proposed that a closer psychological distance contributes to more accessible organizational citizenship behavior and more substantial organizational commitment. Existing research focuses on the P2P accommodation-sharing context and recognizes the critical role of social distances in affecting travelers' loyalty (So *et al.*, 2019). The similarity between hosts and travelers will affect travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property (Ruan, 2020). When travelers share their salient cultural background with the hosts, they will feel high psychological closeness, further affecting their willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. It has also previously been observed that psychological closeness works as a mediator to connect cultural identity and travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property in P2P accommodation sharing (Wang *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

*H2.* Under overseas travel, psychological closeness mediates the impact of cultural identity congruence on willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property.

We distinguished two types of accommodation, i.e. an entire room and a private room. The travelers' choice of accommodation-sharing property type determines the extent of the interpersonal host-traveler interaction during the stay. Different accommodation types signify various interaction frequencies and modes (Pérez-Rodríguez & Hernández, 2022). When travelers choose an entire room, the face-to-face interaction between travelers and hosts will be less than in a private room. Individuals tend to be close to similar people and distant from those who are very different (Kets & Sandroni, 2021). During international travel, the congruency in cultural identity will affect the judgment of accommodation sharing.

The literature provides evidence that the influence of the host's cultural identity on consumer evaluation of accommodation-sharing property might be different if the chosen option is changed for the varying degree of host-traveler interactions (Wang *et al.*, 2019). It has been suggested that interpersonal interaction has significantly positive effects on traveler satisfaction (Huang & Crotts, 2019). Safety-related incidents in sharing economy tend to push travelers away from the idea of booking from strangers (Mody, Suess, & Lehto, 2017). In the P2P accommodation-sharing context, compared with the entire room, where the whole place can be used by them, travelers who book a private room are more likely to interact with hosts (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). When international travelers book an entire room, they can avoid potential physical harm and reduce the possibility of exposure to risks and uncertainties. On the other hand, travelers who prefer browsing entire rooms tend to reduce communications with the hosts (Tussyadiah, 2016). In this circumstance, travelers are more likely to perceive distance because of cultural identity and thus influence their willingness to book an

accommodation-sharing property. Furthermore, we expect that the traveler who chooses an entire room will benefit from protecting privacy and security and feel a closer psychological distance from the host and vice versa (Tussyadiah, 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize that travelers tend to be more willing to book an accommodation-sharing property when they choose the entire room and vice versa. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

- H3.* Accommodation type moderates the impact of cultural identity congruence on willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property, while psychological closeness serves as a mediator. Specifically, the effect of cultural identity congruence on willingness to book and psychological closeness will be stronger for an entire room.

#### 4. Research design

We follow a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research to provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). First, a quantitative study was conducted as a dominant study to test the research model. Then, a qualitative study was performed for a complete picture of the phenomenon of interest.

##### 4.1 Quantitative study

*4.1.1 Research design.* The study adopted a  $2 \times 2$  between-subject experiment where the manipulated factors are the host's cultural identity congruence (high congruence group vs. low congruence group) and accommodation types (entire room vs. private room). In addition, this study employed an experimental design in which each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four scenarios: high congruence group host with an entire room, low congruence group host with an entire room, high congruence group host with a private room and low congruence group host with a private room.

We randomly recruited the participants online and distributed our experiment link to the participants. The experiment was conducted on the WeChat platform. A total of 275 Chinese participants were recruited for the experiment. Table 1 describes the sample demographics. About 95.3% of the participants are the age of 18–25, the core consumers of accommodation-sharing platforms. Among the participants, 76% had traveled abroad and 58% had used P2P accommodation-sharing platforms to book accommodations in their international travel experiences.

*4.1.2 Hypothetical scenario.* The study stimuli reflected a hypothetical scenario of booking accommodation for an international trip. Wang *et al.* (2019) have recognized that Chinese consumers prefer accommodation sharing provided by high congruence group hosts in a culturally different destination, whether traveling alone or with a companion. We chose Japan

Variables	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	159	57.8%
	Female	116	42.2%
Age	≤25	262	95.3%
	26–35	9	3.3%
	>35	4	1.4%
Occupation	College student	207	75.3%
	Company employee	22	8.0%
	Teacher	2	0.7%
	Others	44	16.0%

**Table 1.**  
Sample  
demographics  
(*n* = 275)

as the destination country because Japan has a similar cultural background to China. According to the China Domestic Outbound Travel Report (2019), Japan is the prior choice for Chinese travelers to travel abroad. Meanwhile, most Chinese travelers can easily understand Japanese culture and customs because of their similar geographical location, culture and history. However, differences between these two countries are evident due to differences in policies and other factors. From a cultural perspective, Hofstede's cultural six-dimensional theory table data shows that Chinese and Japanese citizens have relatively similar long-term cultural orientations. However, the two countries are significantly different in power distance and avoidance of uncertainty dimensions. It shows that although the two countries have similarities, noticeable cultural differences cannot be comprehensively ignored. Therefore, this study assumes Japan is the destination country for Chinese travelers.

As presented in Appendix, scenarios were designed based on previous research (Wang et al., 2019). Participants were asked to imagine traveling abroad alone and finding a set of favorite houses on the online accommodation-sharing platform that meets their budget and location requirements. Language barriers with foreign hosts and cultural differences often make communication inconvenient for hosts and travelers. Therefore, in the context of the questionnaire, this article assumes that there is no language barrier between the traveler and the host; the Japanese host can speak fluent Chinese. At the same time, the actual Airbnb listing page is provided in the questionnaire as a reference. Perceivable information such as the house image, listing overview, price and the number of reviews received by the host is controlled to eliminate interference. Only the details of the host, such as profile picture, name and accommodation types, are differentiated between four scenarios.

Based on the above conditions, the participants were told they had an entire or private room during the travel period. The hosts were a Chinese host (high congruence group member) or a Japanese host (low congruence group member) who could communicate fluently in Chinese.

*4.1.3 Measurement.* The existing measurement tool was adapted from prior research to ensure its reliability and validity. In this study, the existing scale was translated from English to Chinese, and some modifications and explanations were made according to the specific conditions in China, leaving the original intent unchanged. The survey begins with several brief issues related to their previous travel experiences. Next, willingness to book was assessed with three items taken from Wang et al. (2019), Liu and Mattila (2017) and Phillips, Asperin, and Wolfe (2013). "Staying at this accommodation-sharing rental for this trip would be an enjoyable experience.", "To what extent are you interested in staying at this home-sharing rental for this trip?", "How likely would you book this home-sharing rental for your trip". Finally, psychological closeness was measured with a key item adapted from Wang et al. (2019) and Kim et al. (2008). "The host of this rental seems to be similar to me." The questions were measured using a 5-point Likert scale based on 1 = strongly disagree to

Cultural identity congruence	Mean	Room type	
		Entire room Standard deviation	Private room Standard deviation
<i>Psychological closeness</i>			
High congruence group	4.17	0.80	3.85
Low congruence group	3.23	1.07	3.34
<i>Willingness to book</i>			
High congruence group	4.45	0.42	4.29
Low congruence group	3.95	0.54	3.35

**Table 2.**  
Descriptive statistics



5 = strongly agree. Moreover, Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property and psychological closeness for different groups in the experiment.

**4.1.4 Manipulation check.** A manipulation check question was used to ensure participants of each scenario could perceive different levels of the host's cultural identity. "The host of this rental seems to be a congruence group member to me." An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to check whether the respondent's cultural identity is mismatched with the host's cultural identity (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Upon reading the materials, participants under high congruence group scenarios indicated that the host is highly congruent with them ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), while low congruence group participants indicated a lower extent ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ,  $F = 26.430$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Our manipulation check results demonstrated that participants could eliminate the differences between high and low congruence group hosts. Thus, it appeared that the manipulation worked successfully.

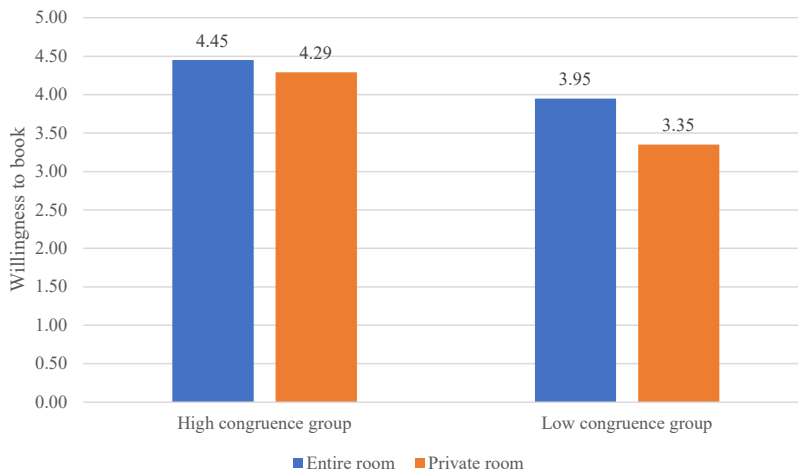
**4.1.5 Main effect result.** To test the hypothesized relationships, a 2(host's cultural identity congruence (high congruence group vs. low congruence group))  $\times$  2 (accommodation types (entire room vs. private room)) ANOVA test was conducted on travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property and psychological closeness. A two-way ANOVA demonstrated that the main effects of cultural identity congruence on psychological closeness ( $F(36.326) = 39.595$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and willingness to book ( $F(19.014) = 83.483$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were significant.

According to the results, the direct effect of cultural identity congruence on willingness to book is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.526$ ,  $t = 9.137$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Specifically, people under the high congruence group scenario have a higher willingness to book ( $M_{\text{highcon}} = 4.37$ ), and people under the low congruence group scenario have a lower willingness to book ( $M_{\text{lowcon}} = 3.85$ ). Thus, H1 was supported.

Moreover, to test H2 and H3, we adopted SPSS PROCESS 4.1 macro, which is appropriate for examining the mediating and moderating effects (Zheng *et al.*, 2021). PROCESS is a macro for SPSS that conducts observed-variable mediation, moderation and conditional process analysis (Hayes, 2022). When people are under the entire room scenario, the mediating effect of psychological closeness on willingness to book was significant [Lower Limit Confidence Interval (LLCI) = 0.1381, Upper Limit Confidence Interval (ULCI) = 0.3792, not including 0]. Furthermore, when people are in the private room scenario, the mediating effect of psychological closeness on willingness to book (LLCI = 0.0158, ULCI = 0.1479, not including 0) was also significant. Thus, psychological closeness played a partial mediation role in the context of the P2P accommodation-sharing services. Therefore, H2 is supported.

The effect of accommodation type on willingness to book ( $F = 7.986$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) was significant. Furthermore, results showed that people in the entire room scenario are more willing to book ( $M_{\text{entire}} = 4.20$ ), while people in the private room scenario are less willing to book ( $M_{\text{private}} = 4.02$ ). Figure 2 shows the mean value of willingness to book by four experiment groups.

Then, we analyzed the conditional indirect effect of cultural identity congruence on willingness to book contingent on room types. The results show that moderated mediation effect exists ( $\beta = -0.0883$ , LLCI =  $-0.1814$ , ULCI =  $-0.0090$ , not including 0). Specifically, Table 3 shows that the mediation effect of psychological closeness is significant for both the entire room and private room types. As Table 3 presented, with the moderating effect of the entire room type, the indirect effect of cultural identity congruence on willingness to book and psychological closeness ( $\beta = 0.1889$ , LLCI = 0.1101, ULCI = 0.2840, not including 0) is stronger than the indirect effect of the private room type ( $\beta = 0.1006$ , LLCI = 0.0395, ULCI = 0.1774, not including 0). Thus, H3 is also supported.



**Figure 2.**  
Results on willingness  
to book

Path	Room type	Indirect effect	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Zero included?
Cultural identity congruence → Psychological closeness → Willingness to book	Entire room	0.1889	0.0448	0.1101	0.2840	No
	Private room	0.1006	0.0355	0.0395	0.1774	No

**Note(s):** If the results of BootLLCI and Boot ULCI do not include zero, the mediation affects Exist

**Table 3.**  
Indirect effect by  
room type

## 4.2 Qualitative study

**4.2.1 Research design.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how cultural identity congruence and the types of accommodation sharing affect travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property and psychological closeness. To recruit prospective interviewees, we employed a purposive sampling approach. When traveling abroad, a qualified participant must have booked accommodation via accommodation-sharing platforms. Therefore, according to the frequency of using the accommodation-sharing platform and travel preferences, 10 Chinese interviewees aged 20–35 years old, from various backgrounds of gender and place of residence, were selected as the research sample.

In-depth interviews were conducted in March 2020. Interviews were carried out online, given the outbreak of COVID-19. According to the pre-prepared outline, the researcher contacted each interviewee via WeChat online voice call for the interview lasted 20–30 min. The interview started with a way of chatting, helping to create a relaxed atmosphere, as interviewees would be more likely to express their opinions. Before each interview, the researcher explained the research purpose and confirmed that all interviewees comprehended the background and basic framework of the following interview. Informants shared their experiences of accommodation sharing and expressed their views on the host's cultural identity and accommodation type.

**4.2.2 Result and discussions.** To analyze the qualitative data, we rigorously followed the thematic analysis approach (Berbekova, Uysal, & Assaf, 2021). Firstly, two coders noted initial ideas and extracted meaningful expressions from the raw materials. Secondly, all

meaningful expressions related to each potential theme were collected into potential themes. Finally, to maintain the reliability of qualitative findings, two coders participated in coding the raw data coding and rechecked coding results independently. After coding processes, two coders compared and adjusted results until no additional themes were identified from the data.

As discussed earlier, the quantitative study shows that distinct cultural preferences of hosts emerged in booking accommodation. Half of the interviewees showed tendency of high congruence group hosts during the interview, while others tended toward a low congruence. In the high congruence group, most of them mentioned that language is essential not only because of whether the host can speak the traveler's mother tongue fluently; but also because of how well the host and traveler can communicate. Sharing space can be challenging when both parties have distinctly different cultural backgrounds (Cheng & Zhang, 2019). Specifically, many interviewees mentioned the word "Laoxiang" in Chinese, a group of people from the same region, speaking the same language and having the same living habits. This group of people always behaves highly intimate, especially in an unfamiliar environment. An interviewee said, *"I prefer Chinese hosts because we can use WeChat for communication instead of a mailbox in Airbnb . . ."*. Another interviewee said, *" . . . I do not think Airbnb mailbox can offer me a feeling that I can receive a response in time."* In addition, some interviewees hold a view that although they do not have a definite preference for the host's cultural identity, they would possibly choose a high congruence group host when they plan to visit an utterly cultural-different destination. An interviewee explained that *"Chinese hosts can easily realize both Chinese people's demands and the reason why they propose it in a social and cultural view."* In other words, despite a low congruence group host can master the traveler's language, they may not relate to their culture and tradition which is an essential factor for Chinese travelers (Cheng & Zhang, 2019), in every intercultural encounter as well.

During communication with those with no specific preference of host, for instance, the desire to experience authenticity and localness was repeatedly mentioned as the reason to choose localhost. Willing to explore was indicated as a notable feature of Millennial users of online accommodation-sharing rentals. Seeking authentic experiences has thus become an important driving factor in using accommodation-sharing services (Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2018). While others expressed their feelings about building a host-traveler relationship and claimed that *"(host's cultural identity is) not important . . . we only contact hosts before check-in or for help . . . I do not like communicating with the host except for necessary demands."* Interestingly, the researcher found the former are more willing to share space with the host and other travelers while the latter, for the most part, would instead choose the entire room living alone or with a travel partner.

Some interviewees showed great endorsement when asked if a high congruence group host (vs. a low congruence group host) can bring them a psychologically closer feeling. However, several interviewees claimed that *"the behavior of traveling abroad is to feel and adapt to the life and culture of foreign countries," "I have a strong interest in other cultures,"* and *"I prefer accommodation owners with local cultural deposits because I like to know local characteristics and customs."*

Compared with commercial hotel products, the core aspects of the customer experience in terms of accommodation sharing emphasize the social and relational experience beyond routine customer-staff relations (Lyu *et al.*, 2019). In other words, consumers of accommodation sharing valued accommodation-sharing products from various factors in both rational and emotional mindsets. Nonetheless, booking an accommodation rental is a rational decision-making process mainly motivated by various factors.

## 5. Discussions and conclusions

With rising levels of globalization, many people are using online accommodation-sharing platforms to book accommodation properties when traveling abroad instead of traditional hotel providers (Cheng & Zhang, 2019). As a result, an increasingly wide range of cross-cultural communication scenarios will continue to emerge. In this study, we investigated the effect of psychological closeness in connecting cultural identity congruence and accommodation type on travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. The results indicate that cultural identity congruence positively affects willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. Furthermore, psychological closeness mediates cultural identity congruence and willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. Moreover, accommodation type significantly moderates the above relationships.

### 5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

This study has the following contributions. First, this study adds to the tourism literature by identifying the role of psychological closeness in connecting cultural identity and room choice. Several research studies have contributed to the accommodation-sharing field (Fu *et al.*, 2021; Hou *et al.*, 2022; Leung *et al.*, 2019). However, little attention has been paid to the cross-cultural aspect. Compared with previous research, which suggested that cultural identity congruence is a crucial factor in consumers' choices (Kipnis *et al.*, 2019; Torelli *et al.*, 2017), we explored the mediating role of psychological closeness in explaining the effect of cultural identity congruence on willing to book an accommodation-sharing property in the context of P2P accommodation sharing. By underscoring the mechanisms of the influence of cultural identity congruence on travelers' choices, the insights gained from this study may assist future research in identifying more mediators or mechanisms in understanding the significance of cultural background in tourism.

Second, by differentiating travelers based on their chosen types of accommodation, our research underlines the importance of accommodation type on travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property and psychological closeness. Previous studies have not thoroughly investigated the role of accommodation type (Lee, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2019). To date, fewer pieces of research have focused on issues arising from encounters between hosts and travelers from different cultural backgrounds. Accommodation type indicates the interaction frequencies and modes between hosts and travelers and thus will influence travelers' evaluation of an accommodation-sharing property. In the context of P2P accommodation sharing, our findings suggest that accommodation type moderates the impact of cultural identity congruence on willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property; at the same time, psychological closeness serves as a mediator. The current research extends the literature by addressing the effects of accommodation type in determining travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property and psychological closeness.

Third, our research adopted mixed-methods research to enrich our understanding of the effects of cultural identity congruence and accommodation type on travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property and psychological closeness. Previous studies have limited to single-study research in P2P accommodation sharing (Lyu *et al.*, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2019). By combining quantitative and qualitative research, the current investigation tested the hypothesized relationships and further explained quantitative research results through in-depth interviews. Furthermore, in-depth interviews verified that: some interviewees hold an apparent psychological closeness to their high congruence group host compared with low congruence group hosts. In contrast, a part of the interviewees expressed their local cultural preferences.

The current work offers critical practical implications. Based on our findings, P2P accommodation-sharing platform managers can better calibrate their marketing tactics by building psychological closeness between international travelers and travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. Our findings suggest that a high congruence group host leads to a higher willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. Therefore, the practice that recommends sharing rooms owned by people of similar cultural backgrounds or cultural identity congruence to travelers is suggested. Moreover, it would be interesting to promote cultural integration and exchanges as cultural identification contributes to psychological closeness. The results show that the accommodation type of the entire room leads to a better willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property. It suggests that P2P accommodation-sharing platforms should pay attention to the interface design of room classification and give more circumspection in selecting the housing.

The study also has implications for the hosts on the P2P accommodation-sharing platform. Compared with traditional accommodation provided by hotels, P2P accommodation sharing is more likely to be questioned about its reliability. The initiative and frequent kindness may not bring the expected positive outcome since the study shows that travelers are likely more willing to book an accommodation-sharing property and feel psychologically close to the hosts who provide the entire room. Privacy and security are crucial factors in an international trip when Chinese travelers book rooms on P2P accommodation-sharing platforms.

### 5.2 Limitations and future work

Although this study provides insights into the Airbnb host's cultural identity congruence and psychological closeness from the traveler's perspective, the study has several limitations. First, this study has verified that the impact of cultural identity congruence on travelers' willingness to book an accommodation-sharing property of booking, and the moderated role of room types. However, the dependent variables are not merely influenced by the above factors. Future research should consider to what extent other variables might influence the result. Second, the age of the participants is around 18–25. Future studies can be extended to a broader range of participants. Third, we distinguish the high congruence group and low congruence group from the perspective of nationality. Future studies could consider cultural identity in more diverse dimensions. Furthermore, since travelers have more opportunities to interact with the host when they choose a private room instead of an entire room, consumers may perceive a closer relationship with the host due to such increased interaction. Finally, the effect of accommodation type on perceived psychological closeness also deserves further exploration.

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## Appendix

### Hypothetical scenario

Please imagine that you are going to enjoy a 4-day trip to Osaka, Japan without companion. To find a set of favorite places to stay, you decide to book accommodation-sharing rental from Airbnb. Through your searching, you noticed an entire room hosted by Mio, a Chinese host living in Japan (Scenario 1).

Construing  
travelers' choice

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大阪·整套公寓

★心斋桥3Mins直达 / 全新黑胶主题公寓 / 免费行李寄存 / 卫浴分离 / 日本桥道顿堀难波梅田直达

4.9分 · 228条评论 超赞房东 中文房东 华人精选

可以做饭 有洗衣机

### 房源概览

2位房客 1间卧室 1张床 1.5个卫生间

♥我的公寓位于大阪中心，是一个闹中取静的人气住宅区。出门30秒即可到达关西的高级超市，周边还有非常地道的日本美食，想吃夜宵也没有问题哟~(´▽`)~

♥如果您是家庭出行或多人出行，公寓内也有其他房型供您选择，欢迎咨询~



Mio

超赞房东 · 已验证 · 326条评价

¥ 293 / 晚  
★★★★★ 228

查看可订状态

Scenario 1.  
High congruence group  
host × entire room

JEBDE  
1,1/2

Please imagine that you are going to enjoy a 4-day trip to Osaka, Japan without companion. To find a set of favorite places to stay, you decide to book accommodation-sharing rental from Airbnb. Through your searching, you noticed an entire room hosted by a local host named Takahiro. The Japanese host can speak fluent Chinese. No language barrier is shown between you and host (Scenario 2).

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4.9分 · 228条评论 超赞房东 中文房东 华人精选

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### 房源概览

2位房客 1间卧室 1张床 1.5个卫生间

♥我的公寓位于大阪中心，是一个闹中取静的人气住宅区。出门30秒即可到达关西的高级超市，周边还有非常地道的日本美食，想吃夜宵也没有问题哟~(´▽`)~

♥如果您是家庭出行或多人出行，公寓内也有其他房型供您选择，欢迎咨询~



Takahiro

超赞房东 · 已验证 · 326条评价

¥ 293 / 晚

★★★★★ 228

查看可订状态

Scenario 2.  
Low congruence group  
host × entire room

Please imagine that you are going to enjoy a 4-day trip to Osaka, Japan without companion. To find a set of favorite places to stay, you decide to book accommodation-sharing rental from Airbnb. Through your searching, you noticed a private room hosted by Mio, a Chinese host living in Japan (Scenario 3).

Construing  
travelers' choice

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大阪·公寓型住宅里的独立房间

★心斋桥3Mins直达 / 全新黑胶主题公寓 / 免费行李寄存 / 卫浴分离 / 日本桥道顿堀难波梅田直达

4.9分 · 228条评论 超赞房东 中文房东 华人精选

可以做饭 有洗衣机

### 房源概览

2位房客 1间卧室 1张床 1.5个卫生间

❤我的公寓位于大阪中心，是一个闹中取静的人气住宅区。出门30秒即可到达关西的高级超市，周边还有非常地道的日本美食，想吃夜宵也没有问题哟～(´▽`)～

❤如果您是家庭出行或多人出行，公寓内也有其他房型供您选择，欢迎咨询～

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超赞房东 · 已验证 · 326条评价

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★★★★★ 228

查看可订状态

Scenario 3.  
High congruence group  
host × private room

JEBDE  
1,1/2

Please imagine that you are going to enjoy a 4-day trip to Osaka, Japan without companion. To find a set of favorite places to stay, you decide to book accommodation-sharing rental from Airbnb. Through your searching, you noticed a private room hosted by a local host named Takahiro. The Japanese host can speak fluent Chinese. No language barrier is shown between you and host (Scenario 4).

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大阪·公寓型住宅里的独立房间

★心斋桥3Mins直达 / 全新黑胶主题公寓 / 免费行李寄存 / 卫浴分离 / 日本桥道顿堀难波梅田直达

4.9分 · 228条评论

超赞房东

中文房东

华人精选

可以做饭

有洗衣机

### 房源概览



2位房客



1间卧室



1张床



1.5个卫生间

♥我的公寓位于大阪中心，是一个闹中取静的人气住宅区。出门30秒即可到达关西的高级超市，周边还有非常地道的日本美食，想吃夜宵也没有问题哟~(´▽`)~

♥如果您是家庭出行或多人出行，公寓内也有其他房型供您选择，欢迎咨询~



Takahiro

超赞房东 · 已验证 · 326条评价

¥ 293 / 晚

★★★★★ 228

查看可订状态

Scenario 4.  
Low congruence group  
host × private room

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**About the authors**

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