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Airbnbs in the rural Midwest: Optimizing listing content for user's decision-making processes

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AIRBNBS IN THE RURAL MIDWEST: OPTIMIIZING LISTING CONTENT FOR

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the effectiveness of rural Airbnb listing content in influencing user decision-making. The peer-to-peer economy has been rapidly growing over the past decade, providing new opportunities for individuals to offer goods and services to other individuals through corporate platforms. Specifically, the Airbnb platform has rapidly grown, becoming the largest online platform for peer-to-peer property rentals, and one of the largest companies in the peer-to-peer sector of the economy. Previous research on the Airbnb platform has focused primarily on urban areas; however, Airbnbs have a proportionally large impact on local economies in rural areas.

Several methods were employed to evaluate the preferences and behavior of Airbnb users. First, an online survey was conducted to collect the self-reported priories of Airbnb users who are interested in, or have experience traveling to rural areas. Then, an eye-tracking and concurrent think-aloud study was conducted to investigate the behavior and motivations of users while interacting with, and ultimately choosing between 3 Airbnb listings. The results of the survey and the results of the eye-tracking and concurrent think-aloud study provide valuable insight into the decision-making processes of Airbnb users, and what content most appeals to them while choosing an Airbnb property to book. The findings of this research provide practical recommendations for rural Airbnb hosts. These recommendations are intended to improve the effectiveness of listing content in rural areas, providing hosts insights into the preferences, expectations, and behavior of Airbnb users who visit rural areas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the internet and the rapid rise of online transactions have paved the way for a new wave of individual-based economic activity that is facilitated by large online platforms. This new brand of consumption is referred to with a variety of terms including "collaborative consumption," "sharing economy," "gig economy," "peer-to-peer (P2P) economy," and "digital matching" (Penn & Wihbey, 2016). All of these terms refer to the general phenomenon of an individual providing services or goods directly to other individuals through an online platform that facilitates the exchange. For the purposes of this thesis, this newly developed way of conducting business will be referred to as the peer-to-peer economy.

The peer-to-peer economy has been growing steadily since the early 2000s (Fischer et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020). Early sites such as Craigslist and eBay provided platforms for individual-to-individual transaction (Ert et al., 2016), a new style of commerce that eventually led to the development of peer-to-peer commerce in the service industry. Ride-sharing apps, food delivery services, and accommodation sharing platforms have experienced rapid growth over the last decade and now represent a major segment of the service industry (Sarkar et al., 2017). The so-called peer-to-peer economy represents a wider restructuring of social spaces, business practices, and communication between individual and corporate actors (Frailburg, 2017; Zappen, 2005). This new structure is highly dependent on "electronic spaces" that allow people to "structure interactions and practices that differ from those occurring within traditional workplaces"

(Duin & Hansen, 1996, p. 6). The rapid development of peer-to-peer commerce online is especially prevalent in the hospitality industry, where individuals are utilizing online platforms to conduct business and communicate with other individuals, significantly expanding opportunities for direct peer-to-peer interactions and transactions.

1.1. AIRBNB AS A PEER-TO-PEER PLATFORM

The advent of peer-to-peer activity online has completely changed the hospitality industry. The growth of the peer-to-peer economy in hospitality is driven by economic and social considerations, as the desire for unique and local travel experiences grows along with the need for low-cost travel (Ert et al., 2016, Priporas et al, 2016). While a multitude of platforms exist to facilitate peer-to-peer housing and accommodation transactions, Airbnb has emerged as the largest and most frequently used platform with over 8 million home listings and 2 million nightly stays (Fischer et al., 2019). Founded in 2008, Airbnb has quickly grown into a massive network of accommodations with a market share that exceeds most major hotel brands (Priporas et al., 2016; Ert et al. 2016). Airbnb Inc. has recently become a publicly traded company and has already outpaced estimates for the expected value on the IPO market, while also expanding its market share in 2020, an impressive feat considering the significant harm caused by COVID-19 to the accommodation industry (Farrell, 2020).

Airbnb is rapidly reshaping the landscape of travel around the world, increasing the prevalence of "Airbnb entrepreneurs" who are utilizing the Airbnb website to grow their businesses and improve the travel experiences of Airbnb users (Chen et al., 2020 p. 121).

This change creates a complex economic and communicative relationship among buyers, sellers, and the communities in and through which they interact. Individuals and small companies benefit by having a large platform on which to offer their services, reducing overhead and expanding their reach as service providers. Customers, in turn, benefit from having a much more open marketplace and the ability to support small providers rather than large chain companies, like hotel brands. Airbnb makes profit by providing the online platform, customer support, and communication interface that facilitates the exchange of goods and services between individual service providers, called hosts, and customers, referred to as users.

1.2. AIRBNB AND RURAL TOURISM

Rural areas in the American Midwest have struggled in recent decades as birth rates have declined along with migration to urban areas. Despite accounting for 14% of the American population, rural areas have only had a 4% share in employment growth since 2013 (USDA, 2018). In 2016-2017, rural America increased in population after six consecutive years of population loss (USDA, 2018). This uptick in population could have a variety of factors, but the increased migration to rural areas has coincided with generally "declining rural unemployment, rising incomes, and declining poverty since 2013" (USDA, 2018).

The future outlook of rural economies is unclear. On the one hand, small towns have experienced large declines in self-employment and employment rates (Artz et al., 2020, pp. 702-3) but there has also been a growth of tourism in rural areas is serving as an instrument in the fight against rural poverty (Gascón, 2015, p. 499). Rural tourism

provides opportunities for new businesses that can provide "goods and services that may not be otherwise available" in rural areas (Artz et al., 2020, p. 705). Tourism in struggling communities can have a proportionally larger impact on the local economy, society, and ecosystem in comparison to urban areas (Chok et al., 2007). Tourism in rural areas can be an "efficient tool for the reduction of poverty" because it facilitates an "increase in income for some impoverished sector of the population" (Gascón 2015, p. 501)

Airbnb utilizes platform-mediated communication that has the potential to bolster tourism in rural areas and therefore local communities' economies. Community-based tourism (Đurkin & Perić, 2017; Ruiz-Ballesteros & Caceres-Feria, 2016; Vikneswaran & Amran, 2015) bolsters small local communities, many of which are struggling to survive. Research on the effectiveness of Airbnb content has the potential to boost revenue for Airbnbs in rural areas, providing much-needed support to the local economy. Understanding the decision-making mechanisms of Airbnb users is the first step to help rural Airbnb hosts support their local economy.

1.3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON AIRBNB IN RURAL AREAS

A concrete definition of rural within the Airbnb context 2due to the subjective impressions of users' understanding of rural areas combined with rural locations that are frequently visited by tourists. The USDA defines a rural area as a place consisting of "open countryside with population densities less than 500 people per square mile and places with fewer than 2500 people" (USDA, 2018). The U.S. Census Bureau distinguishes between urbanized areas, urban clusters, and rural areas. Urbanized areas contain at least 50,000 people, while urban clusters contain 2,500-50,00 people. Rural

areas, according to the Census Bureau, include "all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). According to this definition, vast swaths of the United States are considered rural areas. Figure 1.1 shows the map of urbanized areas and urban clusters as compared to rural areas. The overwhelming amount of rural areas in the U.S. makes it essential to consider the outlook of local rural economics, and seek innovative ways to support these small communities.
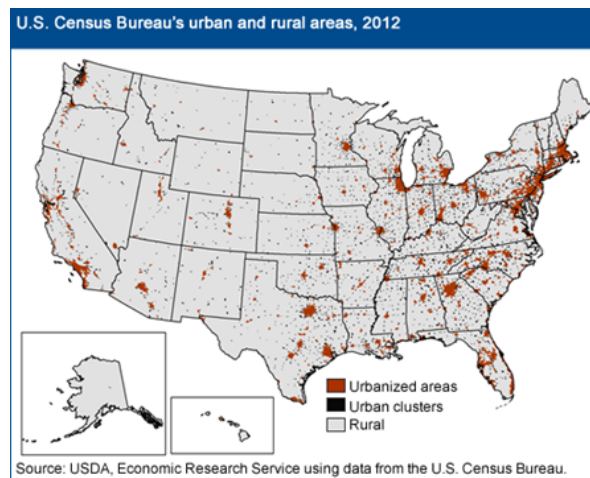
Figure 1.1 Map of urban and rural areas according to the USDA (2012) using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Some research has been done on the peer-to-peer economy in the accommodation sector, mostly directed towards the decision-making process of users and pricing determinants (Kiatkawsin et al., 2020, Chan & Xie, 2017); however, this research has largely neglected rural Airbnbs. Instead, most of this research on Airbnb has been focused on metropolitan areas and does not address differences in prices and attributes

between rural and urban listings (Falk et al., p. 134). With the exception of research on rural European resort areas (Oklevik et al., 2019; Domench, A. & Zogal, V., 2020; Cors-Iglesias et al., 2020), there have been very few studies of rural Airbnbs.

In urban areas, there are consistent results concerning the effectiveness of amenities and other listing attributes on a user's likelihood of booking a specific property; however, despite the prevalence of Airbnbs in rural areas of the United States, very little has been done to examine the determining factors for the booking likelihood for properties listed in these areas. While room and service quality are the main determinants to user selection in the traditional hotel model (Chu & Choi, 2000), Airbnb users seem to have more complex motivations and needs. Several studies have examined the effects of Airbnb listing amenities — number of beds, bathrooms, size, parking, geographic location, proximity to tourist attractions, etc.— on Airbnb pricing in urban areas (Viglia & Abrate, 2017; Benitez-Aurioles, 2018; Horn & Merante, 2017; Liang et al., 2017; Qiu et al., 2018). Chattopadhyay and Mitra (2019) conducted research using three different modeling techniques examining six variables and 137 different amenity options. Their study demonstrated that physical amenities, such as bathrooms, elevators, and beds, were mixed in importance with non-tangible listing attributes such as review scores and stays per month (Chattopadhyay & Mitra, 2019).

Falk et al.'s work (2019) is one of the few research projects that consider rural Airbnbs in the study sample, using comparative analysis to study metropolitan and rural Airbnbs. Their study demonstrated that both subjective and objective attributes in listing descriptions significantly relate to prices in both urban and rural locations; however, the key terms that impact pricing are different depending on location (Falk et al., 2019). In

rural areas, there are fewer hotel competitors, which allows for greater price flexibility, but also less access to tourist amenities and activities. Rural homes also attract a niche market of nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. Users who book these homes are more likely to stay longer and have preferences for practical features over luxury accommodations (Falk et al., 2019). Viglia and Abrate (2017) found that the main factor of success in the agritourism market, centered in rural vacation areas, is the "guests' desire for relaxation, freedom, peace, and a sense of authenticity" (p. 45). Agritourism, like Airbnb stays, is an alternative to the traditional accommodation industry, suggesting that the motivations of Agritourism guests might overlap with Airbnb users who choose to stay in rural locations. All this research suggests people have unique motivations and preferences when traveling to rural areas, so focusing research on rural Airbnbs will provide more specific and practically applicable results for these communities.

1.4. PEER-TO-PEER COMMUNICATION ON AIRBNB

Some studies have been done that examine the communication practices and relationships between hosts and users through the Airbnb platform. These studies suggest Airbnb users are looking for professional, engaged, and communicative hosts who manage aesthetic, affordable, and well-located properties (Chen & Xie, 2017; Gunter, 2018; Falk et al., 2019). Yao et al. (2019) describe an information asymmetry, an imbalance of knowledge between Airbnb users and Airbnb hosts that is significant when compared to the information asymmetry in a traditional hotel/hotel guest interaction. Without brand awareness, or professionally curated review sites, Airbnb users rely on the content presented on Airbnb listings to find information and predict the qualities of both

the host and the property. Airbnb users cannot rely on reviews on verified sites or other more traditional forms of quality analysis, but rather they go through a more complicated practice of recognizing signals of trustworthiness and quality through the content (Yao et al. 2019; McCool, 2019). While Airbnb guests can leave reviews on properties, the research is unclear on the effect of reviews on booking frequency and price (Yao et al., 2019).

Previous research has suggested that Airbnb users mitigate this information asymmetry by looking for listings that have access to tourist sites and information about how problems will be resolved during their stay (Priporas et al, 2016). Airbnb users also look for listings with hosts whom they find to be trustworthy and who are likely to address any problems they might encounter. Airbnb listings feature personal information about the seller which provides users a feeling of personal contact and increases trust prior to booking (Ert et al. 2016; Guttentag, 2015). Ert et al. (2016) found that hosts who are perceived to be "more trustworthy," based on their profile photo and other content, can charge higher prices. Trustworthiness can be measured in a variety of different ways, and very little research has been done on how users attempt to evaluate the trustworthiness of a host beyond their profile photo (Ert et al. 2016) and the information found in property reviews (Chen, Chen, & Liu 2020). While perceived trustworthiness does not in fact address the information asymmetry between users and hosts, hosts can use the listing content to increase a user's likelihood of evaluating the trustworthiness of a host, and as an extension, the trustworthiness of the property.

No technical communication scholarship has emerged that studies the communication taking place on the Airbnb platform. This thesis seeks to begin the

process of filling this gap by examining communication practices on the Airbnb platform, focusing especially on identifying content that most affects Airbnb users' decision-making processes. It is my hope that this research can produce practically useful conclusions that rural hosts can use to improve the effectiveness of their listings.

1.5. RURAL AIRBNB LISTING CONTENT AS TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Direct peer-to-peer technical communication is taking place in large quantities on the Airbnb platform, presenting a space for research on effective technical communication strategies for online, peer-to-peer platforms. Developments in internet technology have ushered in a decentralization of information, expertise, and commerce that was previously available only to large, established companies, because the internet opens a channel to resources that individuals can access, providing the infrastructure to make freelance labor affordable and efficient (Florzak, 2002; Hunt, 1996). Individual content-producers, like Airbnb hosts, now have an exponentially wider audience and can make their content available to Airbnb users around the world. This decentralization has led to the birth of a "quasi-professional" (Swarts, 2020, p. 437) space where writers, rarely trained technical communicators, communicate with each other using online platforms based on mutual needs and common purposes (Duin & Hansen, 1996; Kimball, 2016; Swarts, 2020).

Technical Communication, at its most basic level includes the "set of activities that people do to discover, shape, and transmit information" (Markel & Selber, 2021, p. 3). Specifically, technical communicators work to either provide information about a subject, or cause change by motivating their audience to take a particular action (Markel

& Selber, 2021, p. 3-4). Technical communication research pulls from "fields such as architecture, advertising, cognitive psychology, computer science, graphic design, mass communication, information science, and rhetoric" (Cooke, 2003, p. 155). An analysis (Rude, 2009) of research questions in the technical communication field yielded a general focus for technical communication research: "How do texts (print, digital, multimedia; visual, verbal) and related communication practices mediate knowledge, values, and action in a variety of social and professional contexts?" (p. 176). Within this understanding, the field of technical communication provides helpful analysis techniques to study what Airbnb listing content appeals to Airbnb users. Airbnb listings, or texts, are built with the express purpose of predicting the values of users and creating persuasive content that will lead those users to take the desired action and book a property.

There are three primary entities to consider when discussing the technical communication practices taking place on Airbnb: platform, host, and guest/user. The Airbnb platform serves as the interface for individual property listings. Properties listed on the Airbnb platform are presented in a standardized layout, meaning that hosts who list their property on the Airbnb platform have somewhat limited control over the presentation of the information about their property. The Airbnb platform sets boundaries for the design of the listings, and serves as an intermediary between hosts and users, collecting payment, providing customer support, and platform-hosted communication tools. The platform hosts interactions between the other two agents involved: potential guests, who have a specific set of needs and motivations, and hosts, who offer homes for visitors and provide income for themselves and their communities. Both hosts and potential guests could be considered users of the Airbnb platform. However, because this

research focuses on content presented to potential guests, for the purposes of this project I define *primary users* as people who are using the Airbnb platform to look at listings of properties to rent, ultimately seeking to choose a property and rent it on a short-term basis. Airbnb hosts function as technical communicators who attempt to use the content of their listings to persuade Airbnb users to choose their property listing.

Wall and Spinuzzi (2018) define content as "communicative text, images, video, audio, and other media" intended to persuasively communicate with the user (p. 139). On the Airbnb platform, text, images, and design elements make up the content of each property listing. While Airbnb hosts rarely have technical communication degrees, they work to create content with the ultimate goal of turning their audience, Airbnb users, into customers; they therefore act as technical communication practitioners. Simultaneously, the Airbnb company provides a website made up of thousands of identically designed listings with the similar purpose of appealing to users so they will ultimately make purchase decisions.

Other academic disciplines might approach the effectiveness of Airbnb listing content by using decision science or mathematical analysis to attempt to predict user's decision-making metrics (Rude, 2004, p. 83). These methods, however, would exclude the "social, value-based" aspects of individual choice (Rude, 2004, p. 83). Miller (1989) argues that rhetoric provides a more practical approach to understanding the process of decision-making, because it offers ways of defining problems, addressing values, and achieving agreement from one's audience (pp. 45-6). Therefore, examining the effectiveness of Airbnb listing content through the lens of technical communication, which recognizes the "mind, values, and emotion" (Rude, 2004, p. 84) of users, will

allow me to measure which content effectively influences user decision-making. Technical Communication research on LinkedIn profiles demonstrates that online content creators who use a storytelling style humanize the content and give "life into an otherwise dull set of particulars" (McCool, 2019, p. 232). This revitalization reflects a newly developed participatory marketplace where users can also become producers, consumers, and sharers of content. This new marketplace requires sensitivity and attention to effective use of rhetorical strategies used in content marketing, a method of "storytelling for sales" (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018). When users look at listings on the Airbnb platform, they are seeking information to aid them in determining which property will fulfill their needs and preferences for a particular trip, which is unique to each user and their purpose for travel.

Technical Communication scholars have been studying how traditional rhetorical strategies function in the digital age for some time, and are interested in how to re-configure rhetorical techniques to meet the new needs of communicators (Zappen, 2005; Reinsch & Turner, 2006; Davis, 2019). Swarts (2012) argues that technical communication is a "constructive work, aimed at producing concrete effects in the real world" (p. 12). In this way, technical communication connects people with sometimes differing needs and exigences (Swarts, 2012, pp. 12-13). Understanding technical communication through the interaction of agents also recognizes that technical communication "involves people, who cannot be totally predicted, quantified, containerized, or defined" (Dobrin, 2004, p. 118) As a result, technical communication must be rhetorical, and technical communication research must recognize the effect of rhetoric on the decision-making processes of online users. Airbnb hosts use rhetorical

techniques to actively create a "version of reality" (Rutter, 2004, p. 28) that represents

their property, actively selecting and organizing information to include on the listing,

hoping to persuade users to choose their property.

The content of an Airbnb listing is intended to optimize the experience of Airbnb

users as they click through the photos, read listing descriptions, and peruse reviews,

ultimately attempting to persuade them to choose the listing and book their stay. When a

user uses the Airbnb platform, they are presented with a consistent layout of content,

regardless of which property they might be interested in. This layout includes ten primary

sections:

1. Listing Title

2. Photo Grid

3. Property Information

4. Price Box

5. Property Features and Amenities

6. Calendar

7. Reviews

8. Location

9. Host Information

10. Other "Things to Know"

While the layout of Airbnb listings on the platform is consistent across the

platform, the effectiveness and persuasiveness of each listing in leading to user action are

dependent on both the appeal of the listing layout, controlled by the Airbnb platform, and

the appeal of the content presented within that layout, created by the host. Airbnb users

visit the Airbnb platform website with an established purpose in mind and a list of

priorities to consider when making choices about which property to book. To learn about

how users are affected by the content on Airbnb, both the platform-dictated elements and

the host-created content must be considered to gain a better understanding of users'

decision-making processes.

This thesis seeks to answer the following research question: "What Airbnb listing

features most affect an Airbnb user's decision-making processes while using the Airbnb

platform to book a short-term rental property?" This question focuses on the

effectiveness of listing content in accomplishing Airbnb hosts' and the Airbnb company's

desired result, namely the user purchase of a short-term stay in an Airbnb property. With

this focus in mind, the content created by Airbnb hosts cannot be separated from the

listing layout prescribed by the Airbnb platform for the purposes of analysis, because the

Airbnb user cannot distinguish between host-sourced content and Airbnb-sourced

content. Instead, this thesis seeks to understand which features of a listing appeal to users

and lead them to take action and book a property.

The hospitality industry has begun to do research on Airbnb, focusing on user

experience, behavior of customers, racial disparities, case studies, and a variety of

different focus areas (Fischer et al., 2019; Priporas et al., 2016; Falk et al., 2019;

Chattopadhyay & Mitra, 2019; Chen & Xie, 2017). This research provides a starting

point for analysis of the Airbnb platform, but focuses primarily on how the Airbnb

platform is situated within the larger hospitality industry. Approaching the Airbnb

phenomenon through the technical communication lens provides a way to examine the

content's effectiveness in influencing user decision-making. This study will examine the

effectiveness of content on the Airbnb platform to uncover a small piece of the "complexity, integration, interdependence, and technologization" of the current communication practices that have developed through the advent of peer-to-peer platforms (Ornatowski & Bekins, 2004). To answer what content most affects Airbnb users' decision-making, in the following sections I will discuss results obtained from both an online survey and an eye-tracking study, then analyze the results from both research methods to establish preliminary findings and recommendations for creating effective content on the Airbnb website.

2. SURVEY DEMONSTRATING AIRBNB USERS' PRIORITIES AND PREFERENCES

In the previous sections, I introduced the primary question for this thesis, and discussed previous research done on Rural Airbnbs and Airbnb content from a technical communication perspective. In this section, I will discuss the methods used to collect data through an online survey to better understand which content appeals to users on the Airbnb platform. The survey was designed to collect information about general preferences of Airbnb users and the content that affects users' decision-making processes when booking properties on the Airbnb website.

2.1. DESIGN

An online survey was an ideal instrument for this kind of data collection, in part because it is an efficient means for reaching a large sample size, which increases the dependability of the results (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, pp. 63, 95). Google Forms was selected as the platform of the survey because participants would not be required to create an account or provide personal information in order to fill out the survey. Excluding personal information was an important feature of the study to gain approval from Missouri S&T's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and gave participants the ability to provide answers anonymously.

The survey was split into three primary categories of questions: general questions, which focused on preferences for Airbnbs over hotels, purpose of travel and motivations for using the Airbnb platform; rural-Airbnb specific questions, which asked about previous experiences with rural Airbnbs, preferences, and priorities when booking; and

booking decisions questions, which focused on the rhetorical impact of different sections of Airbnb listings and how guests make decisions during the booking process. Across these three sections of the survey, 16 total questions[1] were asked, six of which were open-ended, and 10 of which were closed ended.

The 10 closed-ended questions were presented in several forms and were intended to provide context for the open-response questions and serve as the first piece of the data collection puzzle (Brumberger & Lauer, 2020, p. 313). These questions collected background information about participants' previous experiences with Airbnb, their preferences when comparing Airbnb stays to other lodging options, and their general behavior while examining Airbnb listings. Figure 2.1 illustrates the number of questions, question categorization, justification, and question text according to best practices for writing surveys, as described by Hughes & Hayhoe (2008, pp. 95-101).

The six open-ended questions allowed participants to write their answers, providing "rich insight into respondent attitudes" and a fuller picture of the motivations behind participants' preferences (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, p. 97). Understanding these preferences and recognizing their complexity better answers the question of what content appeals to Airbnb users and why that content is effective in persuading them to choose particular listings. The open-ended questions on the survey can be split into three primary focus areas, shown in Figure 2.2.

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[1] See Appendix A for the full survey

Question Type	Number of Questions	Question Text	Justification
Multiple Choice (multiple selections allowed)	2	• Why do you use Airbnb? • What travel purpose do you have for staying in an Airbnb?	Allowing participants to "check all {answers} that apply" provides a fuller picture of their priorities and accounts for multiple, simultaneous preferences that influence decision-making.
Likert scale	2	• If you have the choice, how likely are you to choose an Airbnb instead of a hotel? • How important are the following attributes while booking a rural Airbnb?	Likert scale questions which give participants a range of options to select measure the attitude toward a subject, and the intensity of that attitude.
Closed-ended multiple choice	6	• Have you ever stayed in the same Airbnb more than once? • Have you ever stayed in a rural Airbnb? (Rural is defined as a property at least 20 minutes away from a city or tourist attraction) • If you have not previously stayed in a rural Airbnb, would you like to visit one? • Given the choice, would you prefer to vacation in a rural area or an urban area? • Do you look at the host's profile before booking an Airbnb? • How many photos do you look at on an Airbnb listing?	Closed-ended multiple-choice questions require participants to provide a definitive answer and a firm choice, while yielding easily analyzable results.

Figure 2.1 Question type, number of questions, question text, and justification for questions for the online survey

Focus Area	Question Text
Preference for rural areas	• Why are you typically visiting rural areas? • When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located geographically?
Listing content	• What do you look at first on an Airbnb listing? • If you look at the host's profile before booking, what information are you looking for? • What information are you looking for in the photos included in Airbnb listings?
Decision-making process	• Ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?

Figure 2.2 Focus areas and corresponding question texts for the online survey

These three focus areas support the issues involved in the research questions for this project. First, giving participants an opportunity to openly write about their reasons for visiting rural areas lays a foundation for understanding what kinds of information they are looking for in rural Airbnbs. For example, if guests are traveling to rural areas for work, their priorities might be significantly different than the priorities of guests traveling to rural areas for an off-grid family getaway. As a result, analyzing the effectiveness of listing content depends on understanding the reason for travel, and the location of those travels.

The questions about Airbnb listing content are designed to learn about what guests look at on Airbnb listings, and what information they're looking for as they peruse

the different sections of a listing. Finally, survey participants were asked to explain their

decision-making process, and what ultimately "seals the deal" when they are looking for

an Airbnb to book. This question was placed at the end of the survey to encourage

participants to take their time answering, giving a final perspective on what listing

content spurs the desired action, namely paying to rent the property. The six open-ended

questions were designed to provide rich data within the context of the 10 closed-ended

questions, enhancing the credibility of the survey as a whole (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, p.

97).

2.2. SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

After receiving IRB approval,[2] the survey was distributed from March 2 to April

14, 2021, using social media posts on Facebook and Instagram, and emails on Technical

Communication listservs.[3] On Facebook, the survey was distributed through my personal

profile, then shared through three other individuals' accounts. It was also posted on the

Missouri S&T English & Technical Communication Facebook page, and two public

Airbnb community Facebook groups, including both the "Airbnb Host Community Vent,

Recommend, and Discuss" group, which has 53,000 members, mostly Airbnb hosts and

owners, and also the "AirBNB/VRBO/Homeaway/ShortTerm Rental Discussion" group

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[3] IRB Project #2050182 was categorized as an exempt study under "Category 2: Research Involving Surveys, Interviews, Public Observation" criteria (ii): "Minimal risk to subjects and identifiers may or may not be collected." This project was approved for exempt status because the survey did not require participants to provide any identifying information and there was very minimal risk associated with filling out the survey. IRB documents are included in Appendix B

which has 45,800 members primarily made up of Airbnb and other platform hosts. I chose these two groups because they are the largest groups for Airbnb-related communities on Facebook, and Airbnb hosts seem likely to also use the platform as guests, making them an appropriate sample population.

The survey was also distributed via an Instagram post on my personal profile, which was shared on temporary stories on several other personal profiles of friends. The Instagram post was shared as a permanent post on my profile, while also being posted three additional times throughout the testing period as a temporary story post that was visible to followers for 24 hours at a time.

In addition to social media distribution, the survey was distributed on two email list servs. The First listserv was for the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW). The ATTW is comprised of technical communication teachers and researchers who work in "technical communication, media, engineering, rhetoric, writing studies, and English, among other complementary research programs" (Association, n.d.). The survey was also distributed to the Council of Writing Program Administrators, an academic association of faculty who direct writing programs. These listservs included individuals who might not be active Airbnb users, or have limited experience with Airbnbs, widening the range of experience levels of participants and thereby diversifying the survey population.

The distribution of the survey finished April 14, 2021, with 104 total responses collected. This sample size was determined to be credible in comparison with other similar studies in the technical communication field (Brumberger & Lauer, 2020; Droz & Jacobs, 2019). Credibility is defined by Hayhoe and Brewer (2020) as a measure of

research robustness that is concerned with whether the participants represent the population or phenomenon of interest, and how typical their behavior and comments are (p. 96). The distribution channels utilized while recruiting survey participants supports the credibility of this survey by attempting to draw participants from a variety of experience levels so that the sample population would, to the extent possible in an anonymous survey, "represent the population of interest" (Hayhoe and Brewer, 2020, p. 96). Participants who were recruited from social media channels had a higher familiarity with Airbnb because the social media posts requested already active Airbnb users to participate in the survey. Conversely, participants who were recruited through the listservs likely had less familiarity with the platform because prior usage was not a requirement for participation.

The survey consent form also asked participants to self-identify as potential users of rural Airbnbs, whether highly or minimally experienced, further tailoring the survey sample to the population most relevant for this study. The survey was anonymous; however, participants had the option to provide their email address for follow-up research, which 45 participants did. The anonymity of the survey did not allow for controls or analysis relating the demographics of the survey population. As a result, the transferability of this research, usually demonstrated by proving the "context of the behavior beings studied is consistent with the context of the real-world situation in which the actual behavior would occur," was established by having transparent recruitment methods, and including open-ended questions that allowed participants to self-disclose richer details in their survey answers (Hayhoe & Brewer, 2020, p. 97).

2.3. SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data produced from the six open-ended survey questions proved to be valuable and gave extensive insight into Airbnb user preferences while users were viewing listings on the platform. I sorted and analyzed the open-ended question data by using inductive coding approaches as outlined by Charmaz (2006), Hughes and Hayhoe (2008), and Thomas (2006). The term "coding" refers to the process of "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2003 p. 43). These codes allow researchers to sort qualitative data and turn it into meaningful information, defining something and then grappling with what that something means (Charmaz, 2003 p. 46). Inductive coding, in which the researcher develops codes after closely studying the data, allows findings to emerge without the "preconceptions" and methodologies imposed by "deductive data analysis" typically used in experimental research (Thomas, 2006, p. 2). Inevitably, however, the findings of this study are at least somewhat "shaped by the assumptions and experiences" of me as the researcher as I sort the data and draw conclusions from it (Thomas, 2006 p. 4). My analysis is based both on my research objectives and multiple levels of inductive coding.

The first round of coding, referred to as *initial coding*, explores the data closely without applying preexisting categorizations or analysis (Charmaz p. 47). Careful initial coding is intended to make analysis both relevant, by providing an analytic framework that clarifies relationships and structures, and empirically sound (Charmaz p. 54). I engaged in "close reading" to familiarize myself with the content of these answers and recurring general themes (Thomas, 2006, p. 5) For each open-ended question, I read each

participant's answer carefully, taking notes of common themes that might serve as coding

categories. Then, I started over from the beginning of the survey answers and created a

list of initial codes in which data could be categorized.

Most codes reference explicit components of listings such as "number of

bedrooms" or "photos," but some codes capture combinations of multiple factors, such as

"location with secondary factor" or less concrete answers about feelings guests have

about rhetorical content on the listings, such as "style, uniqueness, vibe." Inductive

coding allows for answers to fulfill multiple codes simultaneously. In other words, one

response by one participant, such as "beds, outdoor pictures" might count in a photos

code as well as a number of bedrooms code. By allowing each response to be counted

toward all applicable codes, the complexity of user preferences and needs is recognized

and accounted for in the coding process.

After establishing the initial set of codes, I conducted "focused coding"

(Charmaz, 2006) by grouping codes together, making lists of four to eight summary

coding categories that represent the "key aspects of the themes in the raw data" (Thomas,

2006, p. 5). Each question yielded differing numbers of coding categories due to the

scope of differences among participants' answers. The number of coding categories

ranged primarily from six categories to eight categories, with one question only requiring

four categories[4].

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[4] Some survey questions, such as "When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they
located geographically?" yielded a small range of answers and therefore a small number
of focused codes. Other questions, such as "Ultimately, what determines your likelihood
of booking an Airbnb property?" yielded a wide variety of answers, resulting in a higher
number of focused codes.

After initial and focused coding, I developed summary coding categories for each of the six open-ended questions. The summary coding categories are shown in brief in Figure 2.3, followed by a detailed list of summary categories with definitions.

Question	Summary Coding Categories
When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located geographically?	Region, Escapism, Special Purpose, Various
Why are you typically visiting rural areas?	Price, Relationships, Escapism, Nature, Uniqueness, Passing Through, Multiple Non-hierarchical Reasons
What do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?	Location Relative to Needs, Ratings & Reviews, Price, Environment, Photos, House Features, Uniqueness
If you look at the host's profile before booking, what information are you looking for?	Personality, Hospitality, Communication, Experience, Property Information, Trustworthiness
What information are you looking for in the photos included in Airbnb listings?	Quality, Physical Spaces, Aesthetics Cleanliness, Personal Preferences, Environment
Ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?	Location Relative to Needs, Ratings & Reviews, Price, Environment, Photos, House Features, Uniqueness

Figure 2.3 List of survey questions with corresponding summary coding categories

2.3.1. Coding Definitions for the Question "When You Stay in Rural Airbnbs, Where are They Located Geographically?".

- *Region.* The region code includes any explicit mentions of U.S. states, countries, or other regions such as "Midwest." This code includes answers that only mention

a specific region, such as "Southern Missouri/Northern Arkansas," or several different regions or locations, such as "Arkansas, rural Australia."

- *Escapism*. This code focuses on a desire to escape as the reason for travel. Answers mention escaping from urban environments, looking for a quiet place to work away from distractions, privacy, peace, quiet, vacation, and relaxation. This code can also be connected to other geographic locations/motivations such as "Either near Mountains, water, or with no cell service."

- *Special Purpose*. This coding category includes answers that focus on the purpose of travel, rather than regional geography. Answers include national parks, or proximity to the purpose of travel. This can include general answers such as "wherever my business takes me or vacation" or specific geographic destinations such as "The Catskill Mountains."

- *Various*. This coding category includes answers that explicitly and exclusively say "various," or answers that give multiple geographic destinations and purposes such as "That really varies on where we are going and what we plan to do when there. But we prefer someplace not as busy, away from traffic etc."

2.3.2. Coding Definitions for the Question "Why are You Typically Visiting Rural Areas?"

- *Price*. This code includes mentions of price, cheapness, and fees. Examples include answers such as "cheaper" as well as price in conjunction with other factors, such as "rural areas are typically cheaper and usually provide more amenities than busy 5-star areas," and price in a hierarchical relationship with other factors, such as "price, then unique features/experiences." This code also

encompasses answers that mention incidental costs, cleaning fees, or other amounts that contribute to the total cost of the listing.

- *Relationships*. This code mentions reasons for travel that focus on relationships with other people such as family, friends, children, or romantic partners. The relationships code includes exclusive mentions of relationships, such as "visiting family," or relationships mentioned in conjunction with other considerations, such as "Travel to visit family, friends, or going to a vacation destination or business meeting."

- *Escapism*. This code focuses on a desire to escape as the reason for travel. Answers mention escaping from urban environments, looking for a quiet place to work away from distractions, privacy, peace, quiet, vacation, and relaxation. Examples include exclusive mentions such as "vacation" or mentions included in a list such as "peace, quiet, and privacy."

- *Nature*. The nature code includes mentions of the country, wildlife, outdoor activities, scenery, and natural elements such as lakes or beaches. Answers which only mention nature or natural activities, such as "To hike, see local wildlife, swim, be in a quiet location" fall into this code as well as nature in conjunction with other motivations, such as "To get out of my suburb and spend more time near national parks and in nature."

- *Uniqueness*. This code covers answers that reference style, vibe, or unique features without specifying each feature or what makes the listing unique. This category includes both exclusive mentions of uniqueness, or uniqueness included

in a list with other attributes. Examples include answers such as "price, unique features and experiences" or "vibe/condition of the space."

- *Passing Through*. This code refers to answers that reference Airbnbs as a stop on a larger trip, or on the way to a final destination (e.g., "Passing through on a larger vacation"). Answers might exclusively mention passing through, or in a longer list of reasons.

- *Multiple non-hierarchical reasons*. This code includes answers that mention multiple motivations for traveling to Airbnbs that fall into multiple other categories. Examples include answers such as "Peaceful retreat, unique types of accommodation and scenery" or "To get out of town and stay in a more unique environment."

- *Special Destinations*. This code includes answers that mention a particular place or purpose for traveling to a rural Airbnb. The code includes exclusive mentions of a special purpose, such as "sightseeing" or a special purpose, like a business meeting, mentioned along with other factors: "Travel to visit family, friends, or going to a vacation destination or business meeting."

2.3.3. Coding Definitions for the Question "What do You Look at First on an Airbnb Listing?".

- *Location relative to needs*. Location can be defined as the place guests are traveling to, or the proximity to the purpose of travel. This code includes answers that mention only location and no other factors, in addition to listing location in conjunction with other factors, such as "size and location" or "price, pictures, location, accessibility (how hard is it to get there)." So this code includes explicit

mentions of the word "location." as well as implicit mentions, such as "I usually aim to find something that is close to what I am engaging in." This code does not specify guests' motivations for choosing some locations over other locations, as this is outside the scope of rhetorical content that a host can control.

- *Ratings and Reviews*. Ratings and reviews can be defined as mentioning ratings, reviews, or both ratings and reviews. This code includes answers about both the content and also the quantity of ratings/reviews. Answers that exclusively mention ratings and/or reviews are included in this code, in addition to answers that mention ratings in conjunction with another factor, for example, "Ratings and price."

- *Price*. This code includes mentions of price as the only factor considered, as well as price in conjunction with other factors, such as "price and pictures!" and price in a hierarchical relationship with other factors, such as "price, then unique features/experiences." This code also encompasses answers that mention incidental costs, cleaning fees, or other amounts that contribute to the total cost of the listing.

- *Environment*. The environment code relates to the attributes of the Airbnb location, outdoor space, privacy, and safety concerns. This coding category includes preferences for whole homes rather than shared spaces, privacy, and outdoor areas. It also includes answers that reference other codes, but with motivations within this category, such as "ratings to make sure it is safe." In this case, the answer mentions ratings, but the motivation of checking ratings is to evaluate the safety of the environment around the Airbnb. This category includes

exclusive mentions of environment-related answers, such as "If the space is exclusive to our family/not shared." or environment-related answers in conjunction with other factors, such as "The price and the level of privacy."

- *Photos*. The photos code includes mentions of photos, pictures, or listing attributes that could only be found in photos. For example, "Vibe/condition of the space" can only be evaluated by looking at the photos of the listing, since the host is unable to demonstrate an updated home without providing photos. This code includes exclusive mention of photos, as well as photos in conjunction with other attributes, either in a hierarchal or a non-hierarchical list.

- *House Features*. This code refers to physical attributes of the Airbnb and includes general answers such as "size" or "amenities" but also more specific answers such as "# of bedrooms and baths." This code includes exclusive house-feature answers, as well as answers that include house features in a hierarchical or non-hierarchical list.

- *Uniqueness*. This code covers answers that reference style, vibe, or unique features without specifying each feature or what makes the listing unique. This category includes both exclusive mentions of uniqueness, or uniqueness included in a list with other attributes. Examples include answers such as "price, unique features and experiences" or "vibe/condition of the space."

- *Multiple non-hierarchical reasons*. This code includes answers that mention multiple items that guests look at on the listing, without prioritizing. Examples include answers that mention two items, such as "size and location" or answers

that mention several items, such as "price, pictures, location, accessibility (how hard is it to get there)."

2.3.4. Coding Definitions for the Question "If You Look at the Host's Profile before Booking, What Information are You Looking For?".

- *Personality*. This code includes answers that talk about the personality of hosts, including their vibe, information from their biography, friendliness, and a desire for hosts who are individuals rather than corporations running Airbnbs. This code can include exclusive mentions of the host's personality, as well as mentions of their personality in addition to other features, such as reviews: "Do they seem cool? What have others said?"

- *Hospitality*. Hospitality answers focus on the availability, responsiveness, and accommodating approach of hosts. These answers can mention hospitality exclusively, or in combination with other features.

- *Communication*. This code focuses on the communication practices of the host as evidenced through the host profile. This includes answers that mention communication in conjunction with other information, such as "Reviews, sense of hospitality, high quality grammar."

- *Experience*. This coding category focuses on the experience of the host, including reviews, number of listings, and SuperHost status, which is conferred on hosts who get positive reviews each quarter. This category includes answers that mention experience exclusively as well as experience in conjunction with other considerations, such as "Other Airbnb's owned, their ratings, and their description of themselves."

- *Property Information*. This category refers to answers that mention using the host profile to find out more information about the Airbnb itself, including details such as policies, "notes about the property," or other pets on-site.

- *Trustworthiness*. Trustworthiness of hosts is described through answer that discuss safety, legitimacy, and reliability of the host. This includes exclusive answer only mentioning trustworthiness in addition to answers that mention trustworthiness in conjunction with other considerations, such as "it's to get a feel for the host and the relative reliability of the listing."

2.3.5. Coding Definitions for the Question "What Information Are You Looking for in the Photos Included in Airbnb Listings?".

- *Quality*. This code includes answers that focus on the maintenance, quality compared to price, comfort, updates, and accuracy of listings. Answers exclusively mention quality fall within this category, as well as answers that mention quality in conjunction with other considerations, such as "quality of the listing, cleanliness, space."

- *Physical Spaces*. This code focuses on the physical space within an Airbnb, such as rooms, amenities, layout, lighting, and appliances. Answers that mention physical space exclusively are included, such as "information on how the layout of the listing," in addition to answers that mention space in conjunction with other concerns, such as "size, amenities, cleanliness."

- *Aesthetics*. This code focuses on answers that mention aesthetics explicitly, as well as answers that mention similar terms, such as vibe, décor, "looks nice," etc. This code can function on its own or in conjunction with other considerations.

- *Cleanliness*. This code includes exclusive mentions of cleanliness, as well as mentions of cleanliness in conjunction with other attributes, such as "cleanliness, true to listing, amenities." This code does not include answers about updates or maintenance of the property, which fall into the quality code.

- *Personal Preferences*. The personal preferences code refers to answers that mention individual wants or needs, including the location of the Airbnb. This code includes both exclusive mentions of personal preferences, as well as preferences in conjunction with other factors.

- *Environment*. The environment code relates to the attributes of the Airbnb's outdoor areas, scenery, and nature. This category includes exclusive mentions of environment-related answers or environment-related answers in conjunction with other factors.

2.3.6. Coding Definitions for the Question "Ultimately, What Determines Your Likelihood of Booking an Airbnb Property?".

- *Location relative to needs*. Location can be defined as the place guests are traveling to, or the proximity to the purpose of travel. This code includes answers that mention only location and no other factors, in addition to listing location in conjunction with other factors, such as "size and location" or "Price, pictures, location, accessibility (how hard is it to get there." So, this code includes explicit mentions of the word "location," as well as implicit mentions, such as "I usually aim to find something that is close to what I am engaging in." This code does not specify guests' motivations for choosing some locations over other locations, as this is outside the scope of rhetorical content that a host can control.

- *Ratings and Reviews*. Ratings and Reviews can be defined as mentioning ratings, reviews, or both ratings and reviews. This code includes answers about both the content and also the quantity of ratings/reviews. Answers that exclusively mention ratings and/or reviews are included in this code, in addition to answers that mention ratings in conjunction with another factor, for example, "Ratings and price."

- *Price*. This code includes mentions of price as the only factor considered, as well as price in conjunction with other factors, such as "price and pictures!" and price in a hierarchical relationship with other factors, such as "price, then unique features/experiences." This code also encompasses answers that mention incidental costs, cleaning fees, or other amounts that contribute to the total cost of the listing.

- *Environment*. The environment code relates to the attributes of the Airbnb location, outdoor space, privacy, and safety concerns. This coding category includes preferences for whole homes rather than shared spaces, privacy, and outdoor areas. It also includes answers that reference other codes, but with motivations within this category, such as "ratings to make sure it is safe." In this case, the answer mentions ratings, but the motivation of checking ratings is to evaluate the safety of the environment around the Airbnb. This category includes exclusive mentions of environment-related answers, such as "if the space is exclusive to our family/not shared." or environment-related answers in conjunction with other factors, such as "the price and the level of privacy."

- *Photos*. The photos code includes mentions of photos, pictures, or listing attributes that could only be found in photos. For example, "vibe/condition of the space" can only be evaluated by looking at the photos of the listing, since the host is unable to demonstrate an updated home without providing photos. This code includes exclusive mention of photos, as well as photos in conjunction with other attributes, either in a hierarchy or a non-hierarchical list.

- *House Features*. This code refers to physical attributes of the Airbnb. House features includes general answers such as "size" or "amenities" but also more specific answers such as "# of bedrooms and baths." This code includes exclusive house features answers, as well as answers that include house features in a hierarchical or non-hierarchical list.

- *Uniqueness*. This code covers answers that reference style, vibe, or unique features without specifying each feature or what makes the listing unique. This category includes both exclusive mentions of uniqueness, or uniqueness included in a list with other attributes. Examples include answers such as "price, unique features and experiences" or "vibe/condition of the space."

2.4. CODING VALIDATION

To support the dependability of the inductive coding methods, two independent peer reviewers were given the research objectives, the list of summary coding categories with definitions and examples, and 10% of the data for each of the questions analyzed (Hughes & Brewer, 2020, p. 100; Thomas, 2006, p. 7). Both independent coders are M.S. graduates in Technical Communication from Missouri S&T who have previous research

experience using inductive coding to analyze qualitative data. A benchmark of 70%

agreement among coders was set to align with standards for this type of coding

(Neuendorf, 2003; Thayer et al. 2007); however, a higher rate of agreement was preferred

to validate the reliability of the summary coding categories developed throughout the

initial and focused coding process. Coder #1 agreed with my coding 89% across all data,

with an average agreement rate per question of 90.3%. Coder #2 agreed with my coding

79% across all data, with an average agreement rate per question of 79.8%. The slight

differences between the total agreement and average per question is due to the variations

in quantity of answers collected for each question being analyzed[5]. Thus, the total

agreement rate of 89% and 79% is most accurate representation of the agreement levels,

leading to a combined average rate of agreement of 84%.

2.5. SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the survey are best explained through the three focus areas

identified in the survey design section above: preference for rural areas, listing content,

and decision-making process. These focus areas directly correlate to the main issues

being investigated by my research question about what Airbnb listing content most

affects users' decision-making processes when using Airbnb as a tool to find short-term

stays in rural areas. The survey data reveal the unique motivations users have for using

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5 Some respondents left questions blank or answered "N/A," resulting in differences in
total response numbers for each question. See Appendix C for the total number of survey
responses per question.

Airbnb in rural areas, which then influence what information is compelling to users when they examine listing content, ultimately influencing booking decisions.

2.5.1. Preference for Rural Areas. Within the Preference for Rural Areas focus area, there were two questions measured:

Why are you typically visiting rural areas?

When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located geographically.

The following two sections detail the results of these two questions, examining survey respondents' emphasis on escapism as motivation for travel and how users evaluate the location of Airbnb listings.

2.5.1.1. Results for the question "Why are you typically visiting rural areas?". When asked why users use Airbnb to stay rurally, respondents overwhelmingly cited escapism, with 59 responses mentioning a desire to escape as the reason for travel. Participants stated they were looking for an alternative to busy, noisy, and crowded urban environments in favor of the privacy, peace, and quiet of rural areas. Twenty-seven respondents mentioned multiple reasons for visiting rural areas, suggesting frequent travel to rural areas for different purposes such as work, vacation, or traveling to visit friends. These results are demonstrated in Figure 2.4.
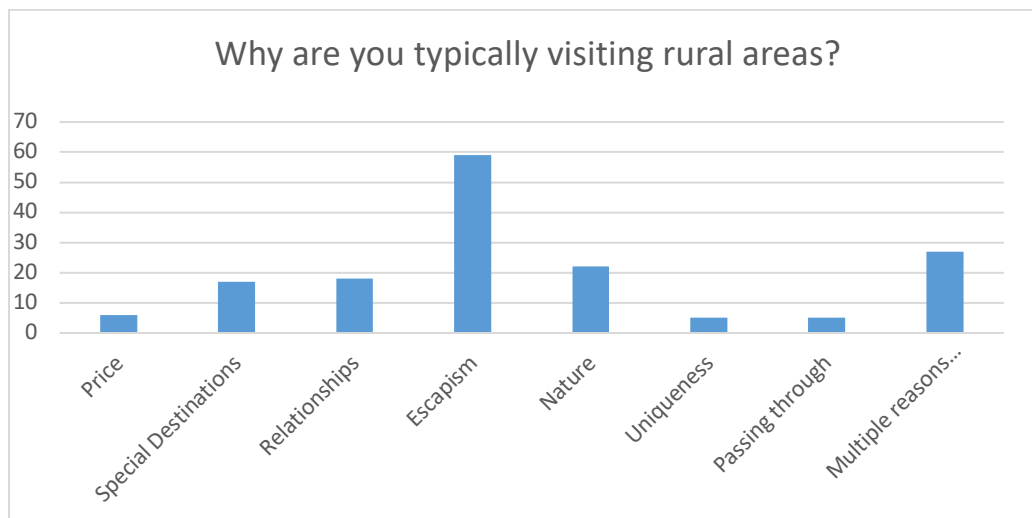
Figure 2.4 Responses to the question "Why are you typically visiting rural areas?"

2.5.1.2 Results for the question "When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located geographically?". The survey question about geographic location of the rural Airbnbs participants had previously stayed in was originally designed to collect basic information about regions of the United States; however, the survey responses provided a much more interesting insight into Airbnb users motivations.

While specific mentions of geographic regions or areas, such as "North Carolina" or "Midwest" were the most frequent response, a significant number of respondents answered multiple destinations, areas, or purposes for travel, and were thus coded into the various category. Answers such as "That really varies on where we are going and what we plan to do when there" or "Depends on where I'm traveling. I've stayed in AirBnB's in Upstate NY, NWCT, Utah, Washington State, Western Massachusetts, etc." suggest that Airbnb users who look at rural listings are likely to stay rurally more than once, perhaps even staying in rural Airbnbs routinely while traveling.

It is worth noting the significant difference in the number of responses to this question that mention escapism when compared to the responses to the question above. This is likely due to the phrasing of the question. When respondents are asked *why* they visit rural areas, they are likely to cite their motivations for travel more specifically, in this case wanting to temporarily leave urban environments. When asked *where* they travel to, a few respondents mentioned escaping urban life, such as wanting no cell phone service, but the majority of respondents focused on more concrete location-related answers. These results are illustrated in Figure 2.5.

When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located?

Category	Value
Region	54
Escapism	13
Special Purpose	21
Various	30
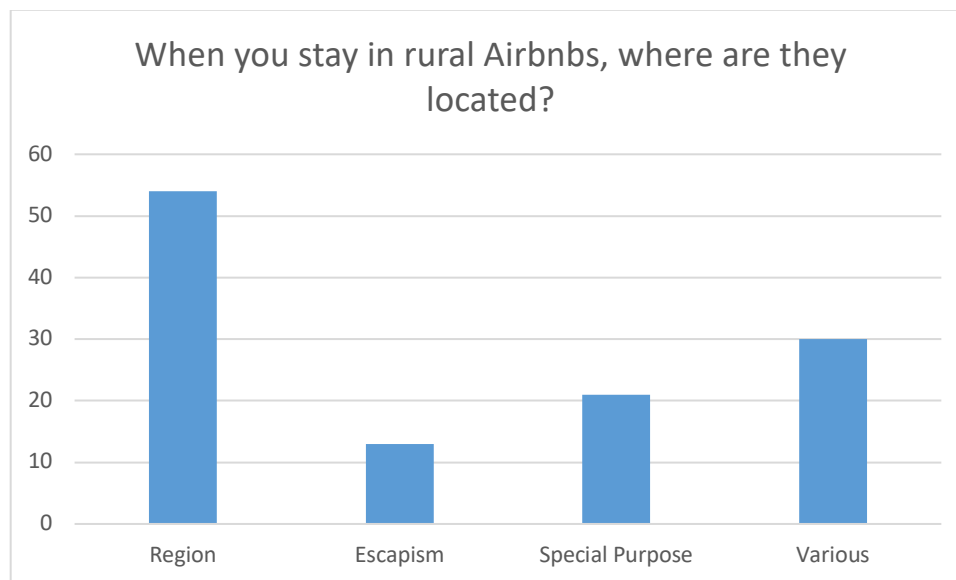
Figure 2.5 Results for the survey question "When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located?"

2.5.2. Listing Content. The next focus for this survey was the listing content and the response of Airbnb users to the rhetorical aspects to the Airbnb profile. This area includes three survey questions:

1. What do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?

2. If you look at the host's profile before booking, what information are you looking for?

3. What information are you looking for in the photos included in an Airbnb listing?

The following sections detail the results of these three questions, focusing primarily on survey respondent's self-reported behavior while looking at Airbnb listings, the importance of host information to Airbnb users, and whether photos have a significant impact on the effectiveness of Airbnb listings.

2.5.2.1. Results for the question "What do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?". The question "what do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?" was the first specific question asked about Airbnb listings, after participants completed the general questions about using the Airbnb platform and traveling to rural areas. The responses to this question were spread more evenly across the summary coding categories. Price was the most frequent responses, but it was closely followed by Photos. It is important to mention that the Price category includes exclusive mentions of price, as well as price joined with other factors such as "price, then unique features/experiences." Despite the question asking for a single item looked at first, a significant number of respondents gave multiple listing components without prioritizing one component over another, suggesting they might quickly examine multiple factors in the first few moments of viewing a listing. These results are demonstrated in Figure 2.6.
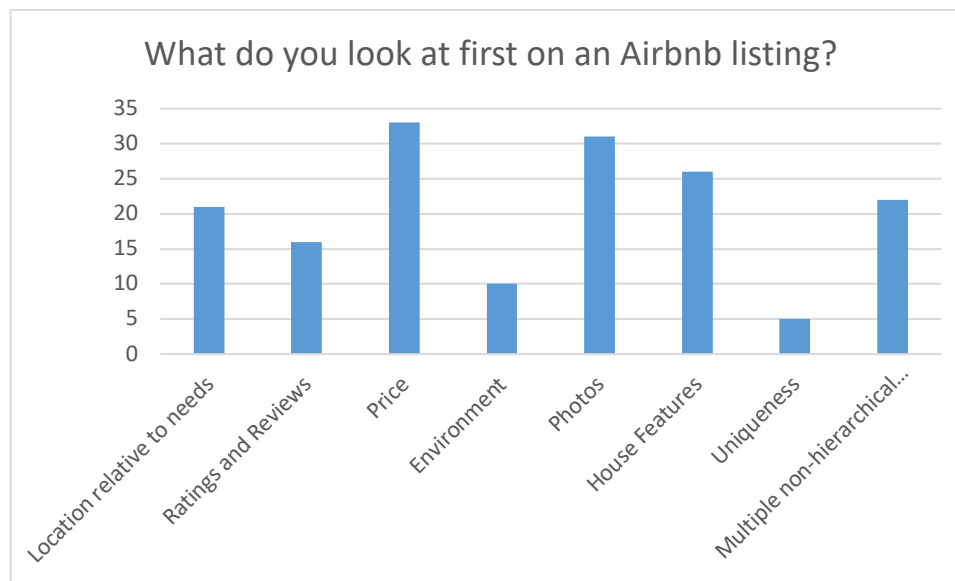
Figure 2.6 Results for the survey question "What do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?"

2.5.2.2. Results for the question "If you look at the host's profile before booking, what information are you looking for?". Next, respondents were asked about the information they seek on the host's profile. This question is predicated on an affirmative answer to the previous closed-ended question "Do you look at the host's profile before booking an Airbnb?" 73% of respondents answered in the affirmative. The participants who responded "yes" then answered the following open-ended question about what information they were seeking when looking at the host's biography. These results are illustrated in Figure 2.7.

DO YOU LOOK AT THE HOST'S PROFILE BEFORE BOOKING AN AIRBNB?

sometimes
6%

no
21%

yes
73%
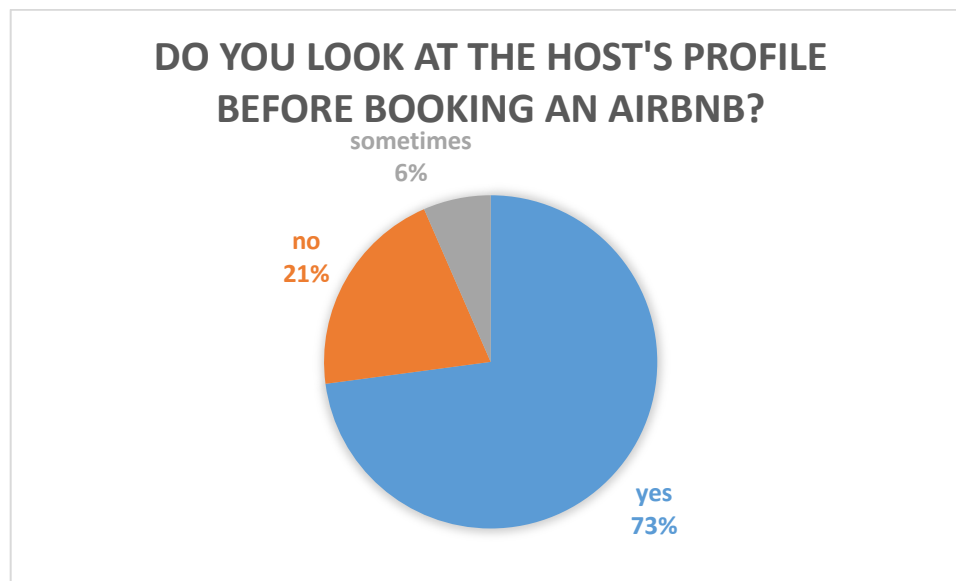
Figure 2.7 Results for the survey question "Do you look at the host's profile before booking an Airbnb?"

Airbnb hosts have almost complete control over the content that shows on their profile. Hosts choose their profile photo, and write a brief description about themselves. These two pieces of content are displayed on the Airbnb listing, along with the rating of the host by previous guests. While the rating is out of the host's control, the photo and biography information is a rhetorical construction of the host. Interestingly, the rhetorical choices of hosts were present in the answers within multiple summary coding categories. Respondents often explained their answers within the context of the written content provided by hosts:

"I am looking at their ratings and whether they communicate well."

"Usually whether I feel safe as a queer person based on how the host presents themselves."

"To get to know a bit about them and the property. I like to know the story."

"What they say about themselves"

"To get a sense of who they are"

"Other airbnb's owned, their ratings, and their description of themselves"

The Experience category focuses on the experience of the host, including reviews, the number of listings the host manages, SuperHost status,[6] and other markers of experience, such as the number of years hosting through Airbnb. Experience demonstrated through the host's written content is shown to be valued by Airbnb users when accompanied with positive reviews and a high rating. These results are illustrated in Figure 2.8.
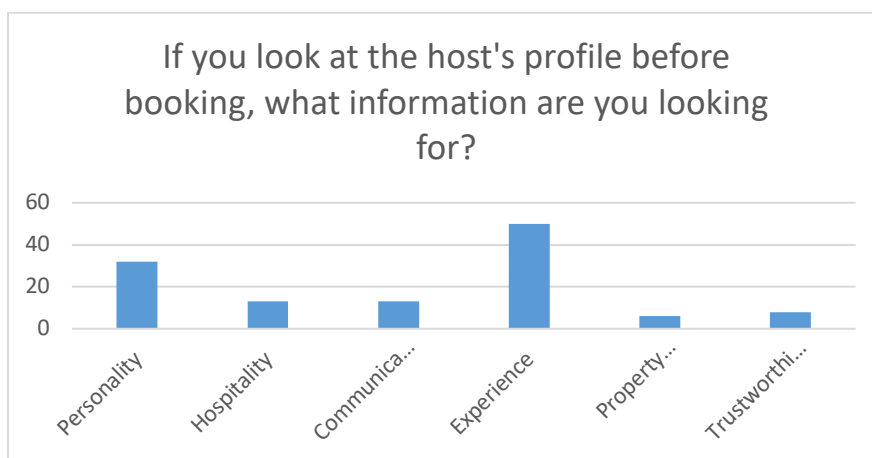
Figure 2.8 Results for the survey question "If you look at the host's profile before booking, what information are you looking for?"

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[6] SuperHost status is gained by having at least 100 nights per year booked; maintaining at least 90% response rate, maintaining a maximum of 1% cancellation rate; maintaining a 4.8 or higher average rating from guests (https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/829/how-do-i-become-a-superhost)

2.5.2.3. Results for the question "What information are you looking for in the photos included in an Airbnb listing?". Aside from the text on Airbnb listings, the main content of the listing is comprised of photos. Each listing page features 5 photos at the top of the page. A large main photo, with four smaller photos placed beside it, and a button giving users the ability to "show all photos," as seen in Figure 2.9.

Figure 2.9 Screenshot of a sample listing grid at the top of an Airbnb listing

This photo grid is placed at the top of the listing page, directly under the title and above the main price/availability box. Airbnb users can either scroll down past this grid to see the listing's textual elements, or they can see more photos on a different webpage that only contains photographs of the listing. When asked "how many photos do you look at on an Airbnb listing?" 97% of respondents answered "All," with the remaining 3% answering "some." No respondents indicated only looking at a few, one, or none of the photos on the listing. These results are illustrated in Figure 2.10.

HOW MANY PHOTOS DO YOU LOOK AT ON AN AIRBNB LISTING?

■All ■Some ■A few ■Only the Cover photo ■None

3%

97%
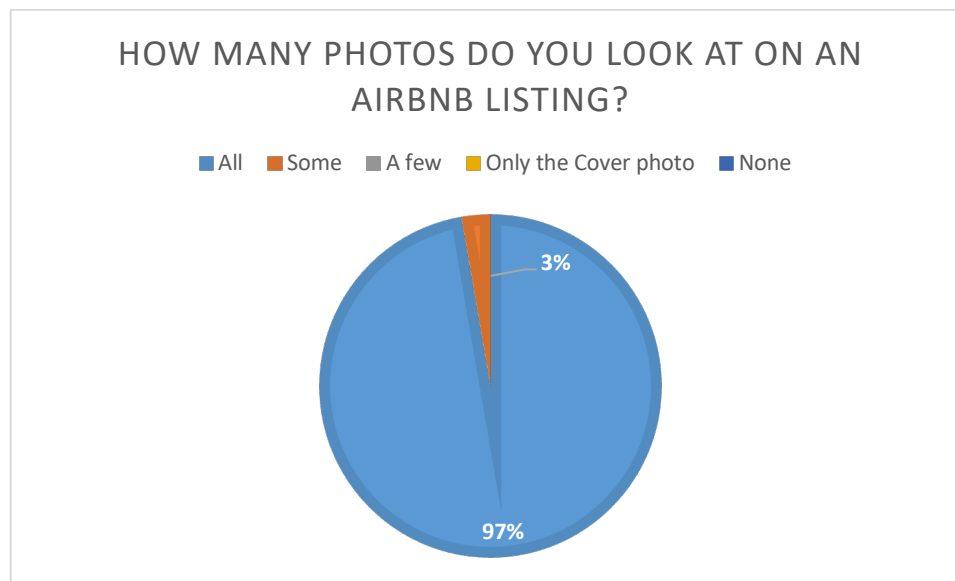
Figure 2.10 Results for the survey question "How many photos do you look at on an Airbnb listing?"

The overwhelming majority of respondents claimed to look at all photos on an Airbnb listing, making it essential to understand what information users are looking for while perusing through the listing photos. The responses to the survey question "what information are you looking for in the photos included on Airbnb listings?" suggest guests are primarily interested in seeing the physical spaces of the property, including aspects like the number of rooms, what amenities are provided, the layout of the home, and whether essential basics like appliances are present. Users also use photos to evaluate the cleanliness of the Airbnb property. Answers that fell under the summary coding categories of Aesthetics, Comfort, and Quality had similar response numbers of 27, 29, and 30 respectively. The environment category, which focuses on the outdoor areas surrounding the Airbnb property was mentioned, often in combination with another

category. For example, the response "Room/bed sizes, bathroom amenities, kitchen areas, any type of outdoor seating or yard area" mentions physical spaces and comfort, with the addition of outdoor seating and a yard area. Figure 2.11 shows the survey responses to the question "What information are you looking for in the photos included in Airbnb listings?"
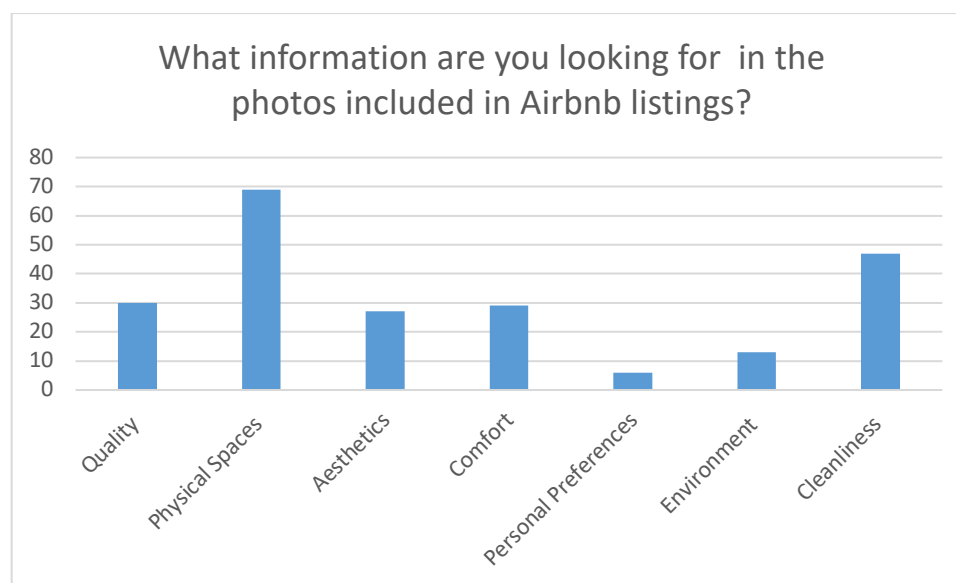
Figure 2.11 Results for the survey question "What information are you looking for in the photos included in Airbnb listings?"

This focus on indoor photos is somewhat unexpected when compared to the overwhelming majority of respondents who cited escapism as the reason for traveling to a

rural area, but demonstrates the importance of documenting the indoor areas of the listing thoroughly.

    2.5.3. Determining Factors in User Decision-Making Process. The final focus area for the study was the decision-making process of Airbnb users, and what prompts them to select a listing to book. In response to the question "ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?" price was, by far, the most frequently mentioned determiner in booking with 71 responses, followed by House Features and Location with 40 and 41 responses respectively. Figure 2.12 demonstrates the results for the survey question "Ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?":
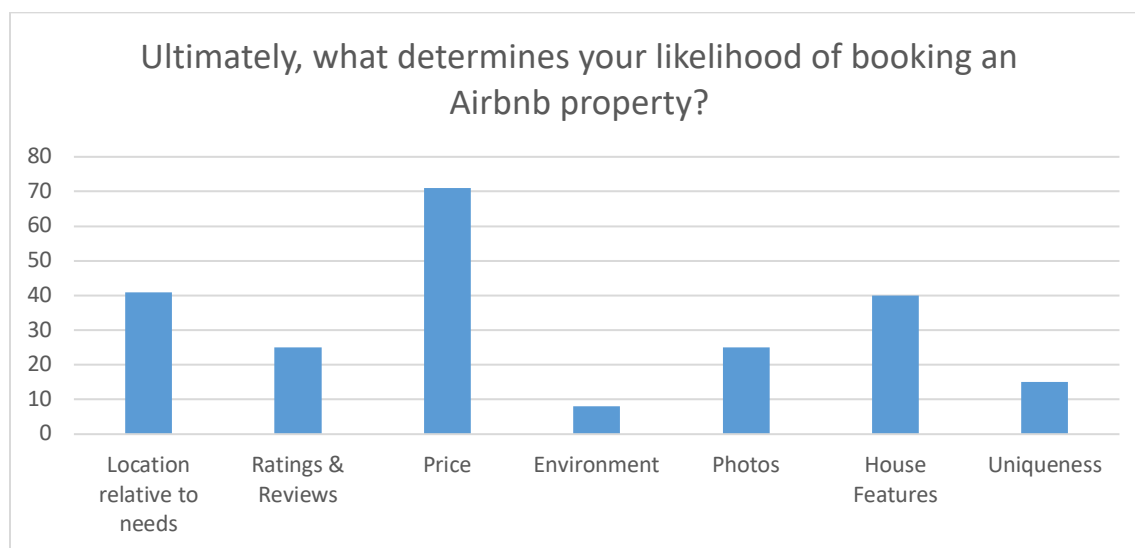
Figure 2.12 Results for the survey question "Ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?"

As shown in Figure 2.12 above, price is overwhelming the most mentioned booking

determinant, followed by location relative to needs, and house features. This data falls in

line with several other survey questions relating to price.

Figures 2.13 and 2.14 show responses to the questions "Why do you use Airbnb?"

and "If you have the choice, how likely are you to choose and Airbnb instead of a hotel?"
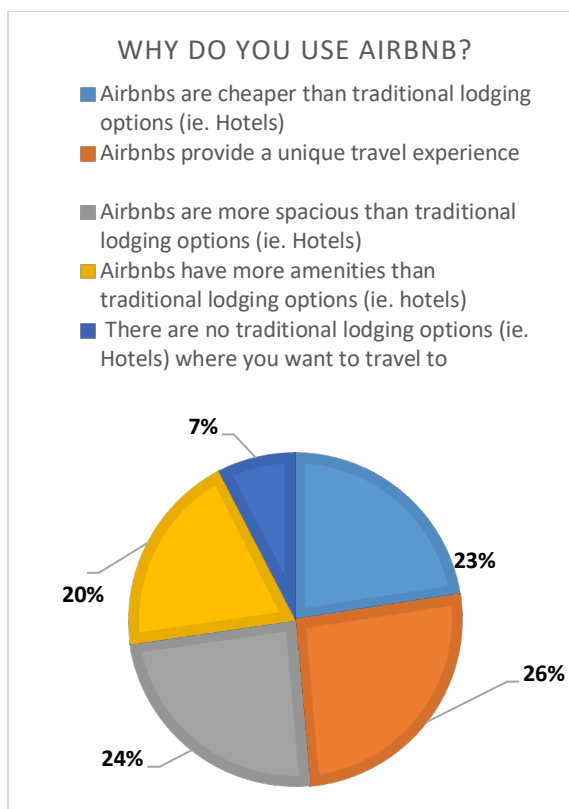
Figure 2.13 Results for the survey question "Why do you use Airbnb?"
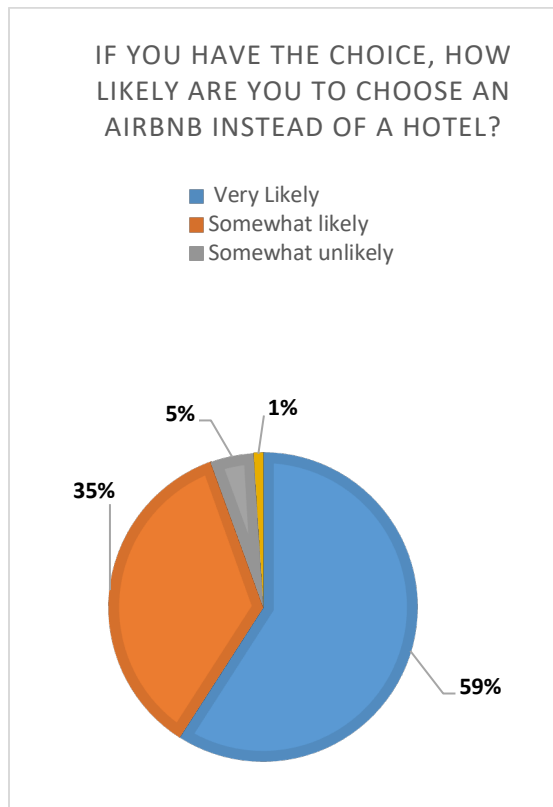
Figure 2.14 Results for the survey question "If you have the choice, how likely are you to choose an Airbnb instead of a hotel?"

When asked why survey participants user Airbnb, 23% of the total responses cited price as a reason to prefer Airbnb over other lodging options. The combination of price, space, and amenities provided by Airbnb make up 67% of the total responses, which closely reflects the 59% of respondents who said they were "very likely" to choose an Airbnb over a hotel.

2.6. CONCLUSION

This section described the methods I used for conducting the online survey and the data I gleaned from respondents' answers. The responses provided about these three focus areas, especially the decision-making process, directly correlate to the results of the eye-tracking study and concurrent think-aloud methods, discussed in the next section. In the next section, I will discuss the methods and results for the eye-tracking study. Then, in the following two section, I will analyze the results from all data collection methods, culminating with a recommendations section that discusses the practical implication of this work.

3. AIRBNB USER BEHAVIOR ON THE PLATFORM AS MEASURED BY EYE-TRACKING AND CONCURRENT THINK-ALOUD

The previous section discussed the methods for and results collected through an online survey that asked questions about user preferences and decision-making processes on the Airbnb platform. In this section, I will discuss a second segment of data collection that incorporated eye-tracking and concurrent think-aloud (CTA) methods. The eye-tracking and CTA study took place between August 12–19, 2021 on the Missouri S&T campus, after receiving IRB approval.[7]

These methods are designed to measure eye movements while also asking participants to describe their thoughts while evaluating three different Airbnb listings, pairing quantitative eye movement datapoints with qualitative descriptions of preferences from each participant. Dependable research should be replicable by other researchers, and relies on a minimization of the researcher's inherent preconceptions or biases (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, p. 80). In an attempt to paint a robust picture of Airbnb users' preferences and behavior, I used eye-tracking and CTA methods together because they demonstrate "observed behavior" of participants, rather than solely relying on the self-reported behavior of survey respondents (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, p. 79). The online survey's

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[7] IRB Project #2057582 was categorized as an exempt study under "Category 2: Research Involving Surveys, Interviews, Public Observation" criteria (ii): "Minimal risk to subjects and identifiers may or may not be collected." This project was approved for exempt status because participants were directly recruited and provided verbal consent before the study began. The eye-tracking equipment only collects footage of eyes, not any other identifying characteristics on participants' faces. Additionally, the questions posed to participants during the study did not require any disclosures of personal information or likelihood of discomfort or harm. The eye-tracking study was approved by the Missouri S&T Institutional Review Board on May 28, 2021.

dependability comes from a large sample size and the use of peer reviewers. The dependability of the eye-tracking and CTA results comes from triangulation of both methods. Hughes and Brewer (2020) define triangulation as a circumstance when "a finding from one method of data collection is verified by a similar finding from one or more other methods" (p. 134). In this context, the eye-tracking data triangulates with the CTA data to produce a more dependable set of results.

Both eye-tracking and CTA have been used by technical communication researchers to evaluate the usability of websites and applications. Eye-tracking studies use software that measures where participants fix their eyes on a computer screen, which is thought to be associated with the focus of attention (Punde, Jadhav, & Manza, 2017, p. 86). The use of eye-tracking as a method to measure attention is based on Just & Carpenter's (1976) "eye-mind" hypothesis, which posits that a person's gaze directly corresponds with the most immediate thought in their mind (Cooke, 2005 p. 458). According to Cooke (2005), eye-tracking makes "connections between people's eye movements and their verbalizations, actions, or preferences" (p. 461-2). Technical Communication scholars have used eye-tracking technology to obtain quantifiable data about usability and rhetoric online because it is a useful, and potentially more accurate, source of information than solely relying on qualitative studies based in participant verbalization (Cooke, 2005 p. 456). In other words, the self-reporting behavior of users when they evaluate online content is often not the same as their actual physical behavior as they navigate websites and make decisions based on the content they see. Eye-tracking allows researchers to collect information about these behaviors in practice.

CTA asks participants to verbalize their thoughts while working with a website, and it is often helpful to researchers when evaluating usability in online contexts (Van den Haak et al., 2007, pp. 58-59). Tracking gaze movement on the screen can show where users look on the listing page but cannot provide any data about why they look in particular places for varying amounts of time. CTA, however, encourages participants to share their thoughts with the researcher. Thus, eye-tracking and CTA complement each other as appropriate methods to get information about how participants use a website and the reasoning behind their navigational choices. Answering the question of what Airbnb listing features most affects user's decision-making processes requires insight into both the internal thought processes of participants and the physical interactions users have with listing content. As a result, the two data collections methods discussed in this section work together to investigate the effect of Airbnb listing content on user decision-making.

3.1. AIRBNB LISTING SELECTION

Three listings were selected for this study, following similar methods to those used in a study by Ert et al. (2016) which investigated pricing determinants for both rural and urban Airbnbs in Switzerland. In that study, participants were shown a screen split into quarters; three quadrants contained three different Airbnb listings with the remaining quadrant featuring a hotel listing, provided to participants as an "opt out" (Ert et al., 2016, p. 67). Comparisons between Airbnb and hotels are outside the scope of this study, however Ert et al.'s (2016) study provided the basis for my own selection of three listings. The three specific listings used in the current study were chosen to reduce external factors that might influence user choice, such as price, distance to metropolitan

areas, capacity, and overall rating. This study seeks to examine the content of the listing, rather than the properties themselves, so three similar properties were chosen to reduce focus on aspects of user preferences that are unrelated to the listing content. Despite some minor and unavoidable differences in attributes, these properties were determined to be similar enough to provide comparable results with which to analyze the effectiveness of listing content. Figure 3.1 identifies each listing with its location, price, capacity, rating, and rating.

Listing	Location	Price/night	Guests	Rating
"FOSSIL BLUFF-unplug, relax, connect with nature"	Oldfield, MO 40 minutes from Springfield, MO	$110	4	4.96/5
"Small private country home with lake, spa, firepit"	Montgomery City, MO 40 minutes from Wentzville, MO (St. Louis metropolitan area)	$132	4	4.97/5
"Midwestern Charm Kansas City Area"	Odessa, MO 40 minutes from Kansas City	$95	3	4.97/5

Figure 3.1 Name, location, price, guest capacity, and rating of the three listings shown to eye-tracking participants

3.2. EYE-TRACKING EQUIPMENT

There are two types of eye-tracking systems: head-mounted and remote. Head-mounted systems have the tracker attached to the participant's head, allowing both eye movement and head movements to be measured. Remote systems, used in this study, are placed in front of the participants and measure the orientation of the eye in relation to the computer monitor. Remote systems are more widely used than head-mounted systems, especially in human-computer interaction research, due to their comparatively low cost and high durability (Cooke, 2005, p. 456).

Figure 3.2 GazePointGP3 HD 150 Hz Eye Tracker

This eye-tracking study utilized a remote GazePointGP3 HD 150 Hz Eye Tracker with accompanying iMotions software. The GazepointGP3 eye tracker system is a research-grade eye tracker that uses a 60Hz machine-vision camera to measure eye movement. iMotions software tracks participants' eye movements as they navigate through the various pages. The software synchronizes with the GazePointGP3 tracker and

provides data in real time while also recording information that can be viewed in several different formats once participation has been completed.

3.3. PARTICIPANTS

Participants for the eye-tracking study were recruited from the pool of survey participants who voluntarily provided their email addresses for follow-up studies on this subject. A total of 64 survey participants were contacted in this way. Eight people responded to the recruitment email, but only four people were able to participate because the study required participants to travel to Rolla, Missouri. The four participants range in age from 25-62 years old. One participant is a current technical communication M.S. student, one participant is a recent graduate of the Missouri S&T technical communication M.S. program, one participant works in finance, and one participant is a veterinarian. The variety of these participants' experiences and backgrounds provides a "richer perspective" of how Airbnb users interact with listings (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, p. 82). Airbnb users are diverse and have a wide range of motivations and expectations from the platform, so the dependability of this study is supported by recruiting a diverse pool of eye-tracking participants (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, p. 82). Three participants self-identify as women and one participant self-identifies as a man. This sample size of four participants is within comparable range with similar eye-tracking and usability studies, such as Cooke (2008), Tofteland-Trampe (2017), Wall and Spinuzzi (2018), and Chen et al. (2020).

The results of the eye-tracking study, verbal feedback from participants, and the results of the survey are complementary, supporting the validity of the results of this research project as a whole.

3.4. EYE-TRACKING STUDY PROTOCOL

Participants completed this study one-at-a-time in a classroom on the Missouri S&T Campus between August 12 and 19, 2021. Each participant sat down in front of a desktop computer with a GazepointGP3 eye tracker placed in front of the monitor[8]. Participants were informed about the goals of this research, the tasks they would be asked to perform, and the functionality of the eye-tracking camera. After giving verbal consent to continue, participants began the study.[9]

First, each participant followed small dots on the computer screen to calibrate the camera. Then participants were shown the three Airbnb listings. The listings were presented one-at-a-time in automatically assigned random order, and participants could click on any portion of the webpage, opening other pages or dialogue boxes. Presenting the Airbnb listings to participants as live and dynamic webpages replicated the experience of the actual booking process for Airbnb users, allowing participants to freely navigate the listing as they would in a real-world booking scenario. The order of presentation was randomized to attempt to reduce the influence of the listing order on which listing was chosen and what listing features were evaluated. For example, one of

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[8] Due to COVID-19 restrictions, participants were asked to wear a mask during the testing period. This did not inhibit the functionality of the GazepointGP3 eye tracker.
[9] The interview script for the eye-tracking study can be found in Appendix D

the three listings states that the property does not have WIFI or cell service. The

participants who saw this listing first tended to look for WIFI information first in

subsequent listings, but participants who saw other listings first that did not explicitly

discuss WIFI and cell service did not prioritize looking for that information when

perusing the following listings. Randomizing the presentation order of the three listings

reduced the impact of these individual factors in measuring the effectiveness of the listing

content.

      CTA methods were used so participants would describe their thoughts and

reasoning for navigating around the Airbnb listing and what they were looking for as they

perused the information. When a participant opened each listing, I asked them "what

stands out to you about this listing?" then asked them to "describe what you see –what do

you like, not like, or find interesting?" After looking at the first listing, the first

participant asked for clarification of how to open the next listing. This was the only time

during the study when I gave direct instructions to participants about where to click –

namely the red exit button on the top right corner of the screen. To maintain consistency,

I gave the same instruction to the following three participants at the same point in the

study.

3.5. EYE-TRACKING DATA ANALYSIS

      To begin analysis of the eye-tracking data, I defined Areas of Interest (AOIs) on

the listing page within the iMotions software. An AOI is a "subregion of a stimulus

object," in this case an Airbnb listing, defined by the researcher to segment data into

measurable pieces (Punde, Jadhav & Manza, 2017). In iMotions, AOIs can be drawn onto

the video directly and moved lower or higher to respond to participant scrolling. After

reviewing the footage from each participant, I defined eight AOIs on the Airbnb

listings,[10] which were consistently present across all participants.

1. Photos (Photo Grid and Photo Page)

2. Price Box

3. Beds

4. Amenities

5. Property Information

6. Host Information

7. Reviews

8. Map

Segmenting the Airbnb listing into these eight areas allowed me to measure how long

each participant focused their attention on each section of the listing.

I then counted the number of times a participant's gaze moved into each AOI and

manually collected time stamps for each, starting and pausing the video when a

participant moved from one AOI to another. Timestamps were measured in seconds and

recorded to two decimal points. As a result, information about the total time spent

looking in each AOI was measured to the hundredth of a second, allowing precise

comparative analysis among listings and among participants. This study seeks to

understand which listing content is most effective in leading Airbnb users to choose one

listing over another. Understanding where guests look, how long they look there, and

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[10] A sample listing with AOI markers is included in Appendix F

what information they are looking for, can give insight into which content segments on Airbnb listings persuades potential guests to book the property.

3.6. EYE-TRACKING AND CTA DATA CODING

The results of the eye-tracking and CTA study were analyzed using deductive data analysis methods. Because the eye-tracking study was completed after the survey, the eye-tracking data was analyzed deductively based on codes established during the analysis of survey data, allowing the previously established themes to lead the direction of the data collection and analysis for this portion of the study (Yin, 2016, p. 100). Using the survey as a basis for deductive coding served as a triangulation technique to support the dependability of the CTA study by using the same codes for both the CTA data and the survey, examining stated Airbnb user preferences with two different data collection methods. Deductive coding based on previously established summary codes served as a "transitional process" (Saldana, 2009, p. 4), allowing analysis of the CTA data to further explore what content appeals most to Airbnb users.

CTA data were primarily focused on reasons for choosing one listing over another, so coding categories were based on the summary categories identified for the survey question "Ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?":

1. Location relative to needs

2. Ratings and Reviews

3. Price

4. Environment

5. Photos

6. House Features

7. Uniqueness

These categories provide the basis for analysis; however, the nature of the eye-tracking and CTA data led to the blending of some categories together. While survey respondents were asked questions about what kinds of information they look for while using the Airbnb platform, eye-tracking participants demonstrated in real time which listing content section they used to look for information. The survey demonstrated what information users seek on listing, but the eye-tracking study goes one step further by revealing where users go to find information that is relevant to their decision-making process. The eye-tracking data combined with the verbal CTA feedback uncovers a new layer of information about Airbnb user behavior while examining listings.

The most notable instance of the additional layer of information collected through eye-tracking and CTA is the understanding that most of the information gleaned by Airbnb users is being found through photos. While the survey suggested users think of photos as discrete elements of the listing, much like amenities lists and the number of beds included on the property, eye-tracking and CTA data demonstrated that Airbnb users actually find these other kinds of information primarily through photo content. In other words, when Airbnb users look at listings in real time, they use photo content to find information about other listing content. So, while photos were considered a separate category of content on the survey, eye-tracing and CTA data require photographic content to be considered in conjunction with all content discussing the physical attributes of an Airbnb property. As a result, while the seven summary coding categories served as

a deductive foundation for analysis, the combined results of the eye-tracking and CTA data required that photos could not be discussed separately from other listing content because most of the important information referenced by survey respondents was found on the photos by eye-tracking participants. Discussing photos as vessels for other content in the eye-tracking and CTA results provides an accurate and realistic perspective on what content is effective at influencing user decision-making.

3.7. EYE-TRACKING RESULTS

The results for the eye-tracking study will be presented in three parts: First, the listing selections of each participant will be stated, accompanied by the participants' rationales for their choices. Then, the results from both eye-tracking and CTA will be presented and analyzed for each participant individually. Finally, results across all four participants will be discussed to compare the effectiveness of the listing content areas in the entire sample population.

3.7.1. Participant Listing Selections. To contextualize the results from both the eye-tracking and CTA data, the ultimate booking decisions of each participant should be taken into consideration. After each participant finished evaluating all three Airbnb listings, they made the following selections:

- Participant 1 chose the "Midwestern Charm Kansas City Area" listing, citing its "feeling of seclusion yet safety," cleanliness, modern style, amenities, price, and outdoor environment.

- Participant 2 chose "Small Country Home" listing, primarily citing an appreciation for the outdoor setting, positive reviews of the host, and the "very

nice feel to it," even though they also noted that "the price is a bit on the high side."

- Participant 3 initially chose the "Small Country Home" listing, but immediately changed their mind and selected the "Fossil Bluff" listing. When asked why, they stated "you get the most value for your money, lots of room, really wonderful outdoors, you have the creek. I didn't like the décor, but it looked comfortable inside, and I've never stayed in the house with a moose, so that seems fun. It looks like the most fun."

- Participant 4 also chose the "Midwestern Charm Kansas City Area" listing. Their rationale for choosing this listing focused on the physical attributes of the property, such as comfortable beds, a coffee bar, a parking space, and outdoor areas, concluding simply by stating both the indoor and outdoor space was "nice."

3.7.2. Individual Participant Results. To evaluate the effect of the listing content on the booking decision of each participant, both the eye-tracking data measuring attention and the CTA data recording the rationale of participants were considered.[11] Each participant is considered individually, since their preferences and priorities were personal and subjective, making it impossible to analyze their responses to listing content homogenously.

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[11] Two technical issues occurred, one for Participant 1 and one for Participant 2, that required the exclusion of some listing data to maintain the accuracy in the reporting of results. These exclusions are described in footnotes for each participant.

Originally, photos were categorized as a discrete AOI, but in tracking them using the same methods as the other AOIs, I determined photos required special analysis. While other AOIs have pre-determined sets of content, such as a pre-set list of which amenities are included or a map with a location marker on it, the information shown through photographic content is diverse, and often similar to other content in other AOIs. Rather than serving as separate content that conveys different information about the property, photos are used by Airbnb users as tools to find information about a property without reading the text-based content on other sections of each Airbnb listing. As a result, photographic content is discussed in the individual participant eye-tracking and CTA results in conjunction with other AOIs on the listing.

3.7.2.1. Participant 1. Participant 1 was most interested in content about the physical attributes of the property, reflected in attention to property information, beds, and amenities. Results of the eye-tracking data for Participant 1,[12] as shown in Figure 3.3 align with CTA data (see Figure 3.4) which suggest interest in house features and the surrounding environment. These focus areas suggest that Participant 1 was most affected by content that described or showed the physical spaces of the property.

Participant 1 consistently placed a significant emphasis on safety and looked for cues to evaluate the safety and physical attributes of each property through the photos and text descriptions present. Conversely, they paid no attention to the previous guests'

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[12] A technical glitch caused a loss of data for the first 2 minutes of Participant 1's data. This loss of data happened when Participant 1 was viewing the "Small private country home with lake, spa, firepit" listing. It was determined that the eye-tracking data from this listing should be removed from analysis entirely because total percentage of attention would be represented inaccurately. CTA data from this listing is included because it stands independently from the eye-tracking data.

reviews or the host information in both the eye-tracking and CTA feedback. Similarly, no

eye-tracking attention showed interest in the map locations of the listings. Some verbal

feedback referenced the location of listings, but only in reference to the purpose for

travel, and the ruralness of the property, rather than the geographical location shown

through the map.

Figure 3.3 Percentages of time Participant 1 spent on each listing AOI.
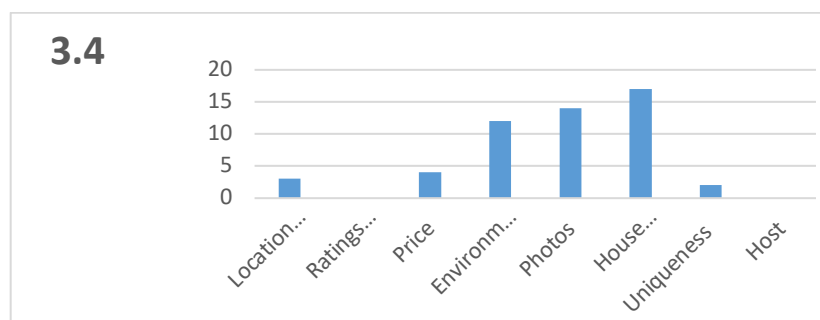
Figure 3.4 CTA data for Participant 1, with a Y-axis showing number of comments fitting
into each coding category, shown on the X-axis.

Ultimately, Participant 1 selected the "Midwestern Charm Kansas City Area"
listing. When asked for a rationale, they made two statements:

"First, I think it's a modern house, um, first gives me feeling of seclusion yet
safety. Clean, modern, has all the amenities I want, and I'm content around
people, and at a moderate price."

"The environment. Clean, arranged, beautiful outside and inside, everything."

In contrast, when asked why the other two listings were not selected, Participant 1
stated the following:

"The first one ({Fossil Bluff}), it's just too secluded I wouldn't feel safe. It's so
rough, there's no road. Lots of trees, it's old. I don't think that would be a good
spot for a family vacation.

"The second, ({Small Country House}) I think it's a bit pricey. Just one bedroom,
even though it says four people, how can four people stay in one bedroom? It's
pricey. For the number of people you can take, however it's clean and a little
modern, has all the amenities I want. I would only take that choice if I didn't have
another option."

Finally, when asked what the deciding factor was in choosing among the three
listings, Participant 1 stated that "pictures of the surrounding" was a deciding factor
because they needed to know where groceries could be found, and whether the
neighborhood was safe and pleasant. Specifically, Participant 1 stated "Including pics of
the neighborhood I think was nice, could push someone to book that place."

3.7.2.2. Participant 2. Participant 2 spent the most time focusing on physical attributes of the property reflected through the Amenities section, photo grid, and property information13. This is also reflected in this participant's verbal focus on the environment and house features. Interestingly, while Participant 2 only spent 5% of the time looking at each listing's price box, it was discussed frequently throughout the interview. Most verbal references to price were brief, and accompanied with longer statements about the physical attributes of the property, such as the following comment:

"Ok, this looks like my taste. $135, um, I like the view, the whole lake. It's worth

the money $135, it is. Even though it's one bed, one bath, I like the whole… It's

beautiful, I like the view."

While this comment does mention price, it is briefly recognized within a larger comment about the surrounding environment and the size of the home. This comment also includes a brief reference to the property having "one bed," which suggests recognition of the number of beds in the property, despite spending no visual attention on the area of the listing devoted to describing the number and size of beds onsite. Therefore, it is likely this information about the size of the listing was found in the photo content of the listing, not the textual content.

Participant 2 paid a moderate amount of visual attention to the reviews and host information; however, both of these content areas received significant attention when they explained their rationale for choosing the "Small Country Home" listing. So,

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[13] A technical glitch caused a loss of data part of Participant 1's data on the "Midwestern Charm Kansas City Area" listing. It was determined that the eye-tracking data from this listing should be removed from analysis entirely because total percentage of attention would be represented inaccurately. CTA data from this listing is included because it stands independently from the eye-tracking data.

although the reviews received a limited amount of visual attention and hardly any verbal

feedback during the interview, they were featured as a decision-making metric along with

the environment surrounding the property. Eye-tracking and CTA results are shown in
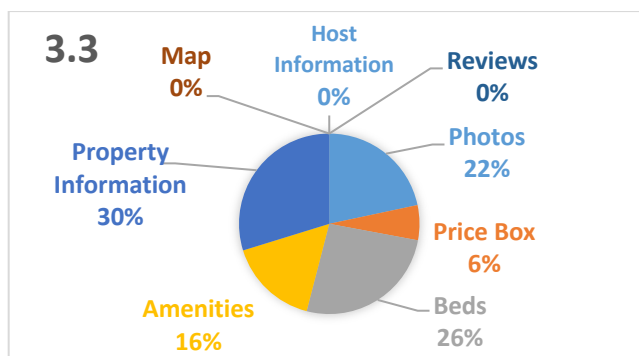
Figures 3.5 and 3.6.

Figure 3.5 Percentages of time Participant 2 spent on each listing AOI.

Figure 3.6 CTA data for Participant 2, with a Y-axis showing number of comments fitting
into each coding category, shown on the X-axis.

After reviewing all three listings, Participant 2 selected the "Small Country Home" listing. When asked why they chose this listing over the other two, two primary reasons were provided:

"She has very good ratings as well."

"I like the whole setting, the outdoor setting and all of that."

After providing these two reasons, Participant 2 added a small caveat to their choice:

"The price is a bit on the high side, but if the price would come down a lot more people would go there to be honest. It has a very nice feel to it."

While the price is not high enough to deter Participant 2 from selecting this property, it is a memorable piece of content that perhaps counted against the property when this participant was weighing their options and making their ultimate booking decision.

3.7.2.3. Participant 3. Participant 3 primarily focused on photos and property information content on all listings. This is especially demonstrated through the significant emphasis on house features in the CTA data for Participant 3, who especially expressed a preference for indoor photos rather than outdoor photos: "I'm looking for inside pictures. It takes me awhile to get to the inside. The outside is nice but the inside is kind of dated. . . . I wish they had more indoor pictures, emphasis on the outdoor pictures, I guess cause they're marketing that way"

This suggests that Participant 3 is looking for a particular type of content in the photos included on the listing, and a clear preference for photos that feature the indoor spaces of the property rather than the surrounding areas, reflected in the relatively low emphasis on the environment in CTA responses.

Of all the participants, Participant 3 was the most interested in price, both in visual attention and verbal feedback. On all three listings, Participant 3 spent time putting in travel dates and changing the number of guests to see if the price would change, while also looking at additional cleaning and service fees to "see if they're gigging me." No other participants took these additional steps to verify the total cost of a trip, despite price being looked at and discussed in each interview. These results are illustrated in Figures 3.7 and 3.8.
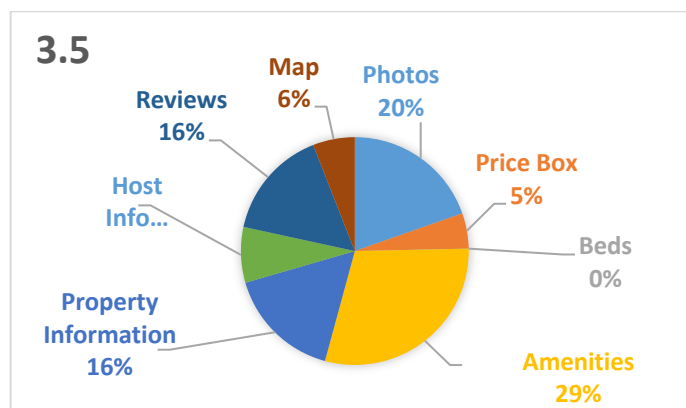

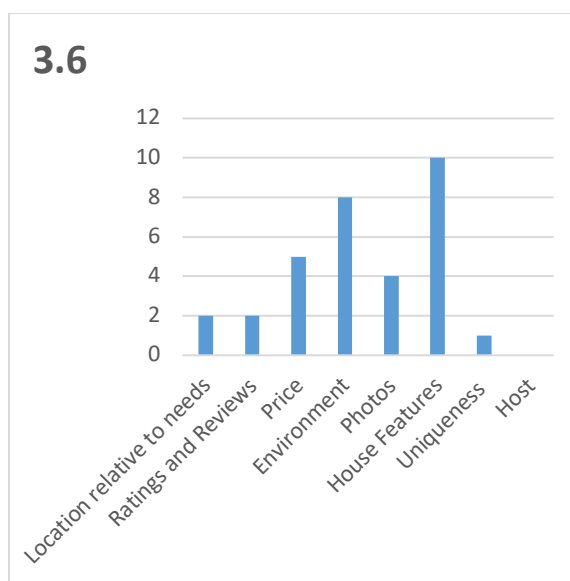Figure 3.7. Percentages of time Participant 3 spent on each listing AOI.

3.8

Figure 3.8 CTA data for Participant 3, with a Y-axis showing number of comments fitting into each coding category, shown on the X-axis.

Participant 3 initially selected the "Small Country House" listing, but when asked for a rationale, immediately changed their selection to the "Fossil Bluff" listing. Despite stating they "don't particularly like that style" they cited several reasons for choosing the property:

"I think it's, you get the most value for your money."

"Lots of room."

"Really wonderful outdoors, you have the creek."

"It looked comfortable inside, and I've never stayed in {a} house with a moose, so that seems fun."

"It looks like the most fun."

These reasons appear to be based on the content found throughout the listing, especially the photos, considering that the creek, outdoor areas, and the moose are only shown on

the photo page of the listing. Although host information, reviews, and the location received attention and feedback during the interview, none of these features were discussed as reasons to choose or not choose a listing to book.

3.7.2.4. Participant 4. Participant 4 focused their attention property information found through the listing photos with secondary interests in host information, and location. Participant 4 was the only participant to spend time looking at the map on the listing and discuss both the geographical location of the property and how the location might influence their decision-making: "Then I'd zoom out and see where it was in relationship to where I was. How long it would take to get there."

"Location, not near anything. Montgomery City."
The geographical location is being referenced in both of these examples, but the reason for travel and the ease of access is also mentioned.

Additionally, Participant 4 commented that the price of the "Small Country Home" listing was high, considering "it's way over what you could stay at a local hotel, which would have better amenities and cell service." For this participant, the price is discussed in comparison to other hotels, but also in conjunction to the amenities offered by the listing. These results are illustrated in Figures 3.9 and 3.10

At the conclusion of the interview, Participant 4 chose "Midwestern Charm Kansas City Area." When asked for the reasoning behind their choice, Participant 4 stated the content that ultimately led to their decision was the information they found in the photos:

"From the photos it seems it would be the most comfortable in terms of the bed and bathroom and kitchen and the things they provided in terms of that. The

coffee bar, good parking space, which is a plus, and the outdoor was nice but wasn't all about the outdoors. Nice outdoor space and indoors."
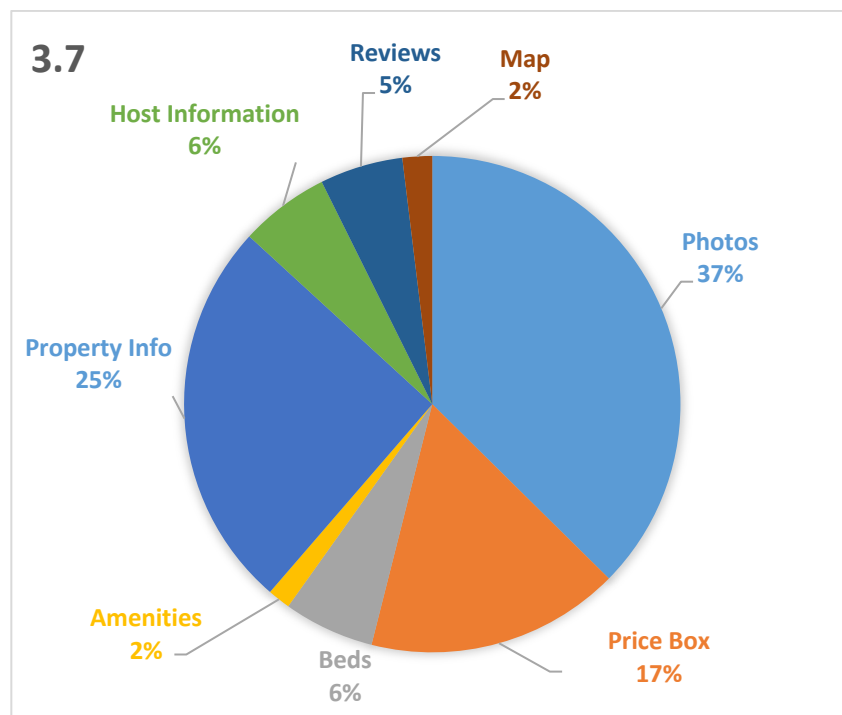

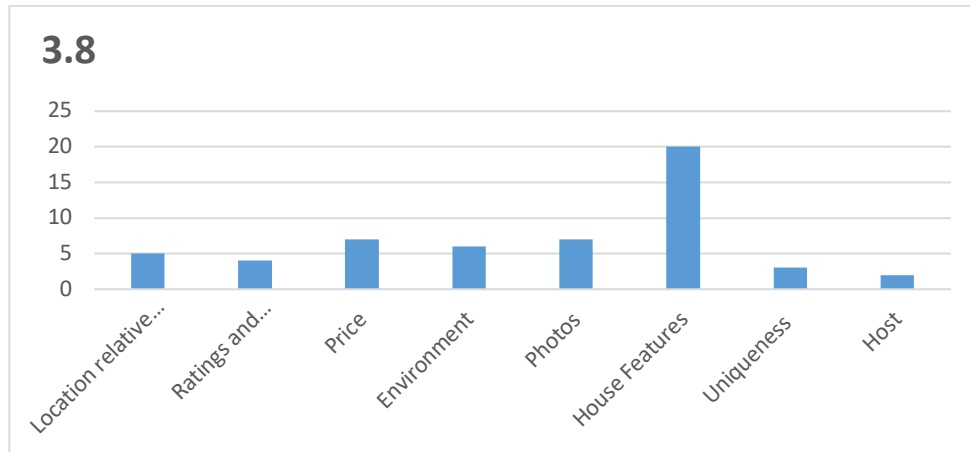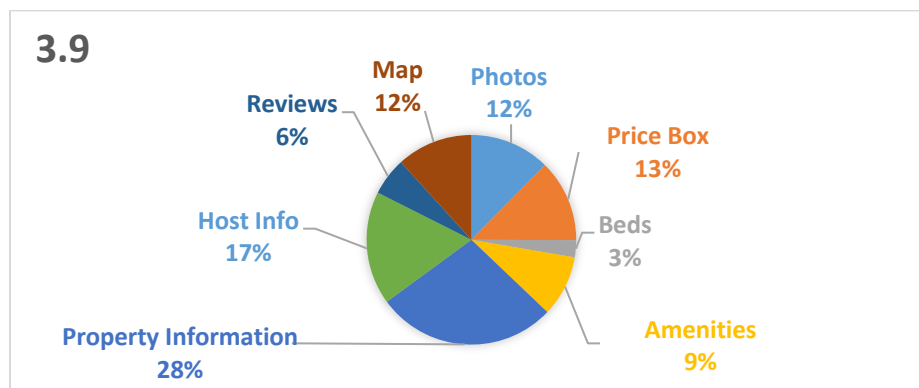Figure 3.9 Percentages of time Participant 4 spent on each listing AOI.

Figure 3.10 CTA data for Participant 4, with a Y-axis showing number of comments fitting into each coding category, shown on the X-axis.

Feedback on the listings that weren't chosen also focused on visual content:

> "The indoor wasn't very nice, but they emphasized the outdoor stuff and then the stuffed fish and stuff so it was very lodgy feeling and that's not really what I'm going for."

> "And then the last place, seemed nice, more nice on the outside than on the inside."

This feedback demonstrates the photographic content on the listing was the primary source of information for Participant 4, and the ultimate determinant for their choice of listing.

3.7.3. Results Across Participants. To evaluate the results for the eye-tracking and CTA study, I collected the total times for each identified AOI across all listings and all participants, then compiled the eye-tracking and CTA data into one dataset providing a general understanding of what content attracts user attention on an Airbnb listing. The data demonstrate an emphasis on host-sourced content on Airbnb listings, and a tendency of participants to find information through photo content over text content.

3.7.3.1. Total times across participants – excluding photos. Figure 3.10 shows the total percentage share for each AOI as a sum of all participants' data for all listings,[14] excluding time spent looking at photos, since photos were demonstrated to be a vessel for content about the physical attributes of the property.

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[14] Two technical issues occurred, one for Participant 1 and one for Participant 2, that required the exclusion of some listing data to maintain the accuracy in the reporting of results. These exclusions are described in footnotes for each participant.

Figure 3.10 shows a primary interest in physical attributes of Airbnb listings, with smaller shares of time being spent on other listing content, such as host information, reviews, location, and price. The figure shows that the participants were looking primarily for content that shows the physical attributes of a listing.
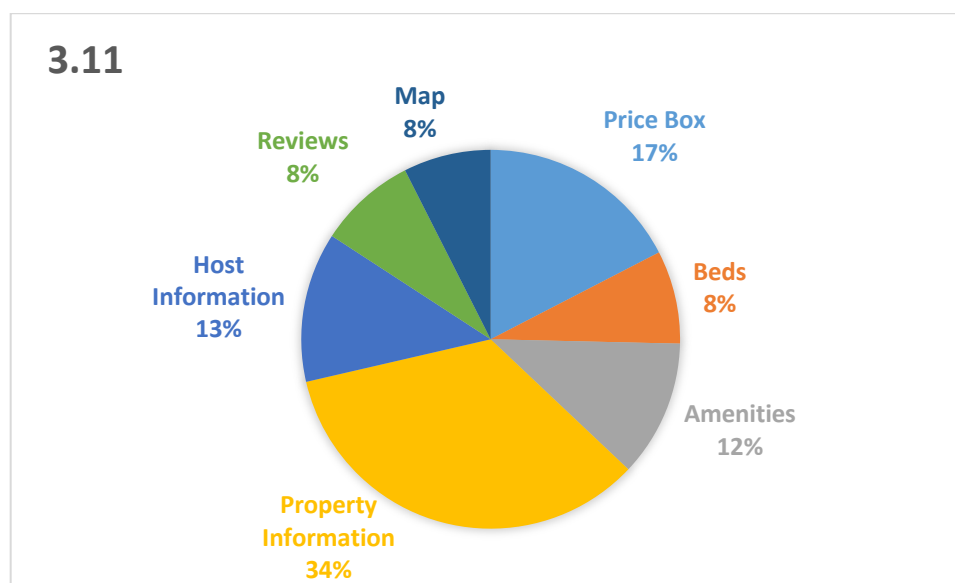
Figure 3.11 Percentages of total time spent on each listing AOI across all participants, excluding photo content.

When taken together, physical attributes' (that is, the beds, amenities, and property information) times total 54% of the total time spent on the listings. Analysis of individual-participant data suggested that price was often a major factor in decision-making, which is reflected here as well, representing 17% of total time, the highest coding category that is not focused on the physical attributes of the listed properties.

Information about hosts represents 13% of the total time spent across listings. Most of the

total time spent on host information came from Participant 4, who spent twice as much

time (53.86 seconds) looking at host information as compared to the next highest

participant who looked at host information for a total of 23.88 seconds. Interestingly,

comparing the eye-tracking data to the CTA data suggests possible connection between

host information and reviews. Eye-tracking data shows that host information captured

17% of the total time Participant 4 spent on the three listings, while reviews were only

examined for 6% of the time. The CTA data flips this relationship, with 5 verbal

mentions of reviews and only 2 mentions of the host. Finally, both Reviews and the Map

each accounted for 8% of total time spent across listings, representing a comparatively

small, but not nonexistent focus of participants' attention.

3.7.3.2. Total times across participants – including photos. As discussed

previously, participants used photo content as a vessel for other information about the

Airbnb properties, leading to a disproportionate amount of time spent on photos. As such,

the eye-tracking data clearly demonstrate a significant majority of total time spent

looking at photo content when compared with other listing components. Figure 3.12

shows the total percentage share for each AOI, including photo content[15.]

While the listing is split into two primary pages, participants seemed to view both

pages as one set of content that provides them information about the property. As a result,

the inclusion of the full photo page in addition to the photo grid on the main listing page

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[15] Both figures exclude the Accessibility AOI because it was only present on one of three
Airbnb listings, making it impossible to compare with other total times that were
collected across three listings.

gives a more comprehensive picture of user behavior on Airbnb listings, recognizing the

significant amount of attention paid to the photos included on the listing.
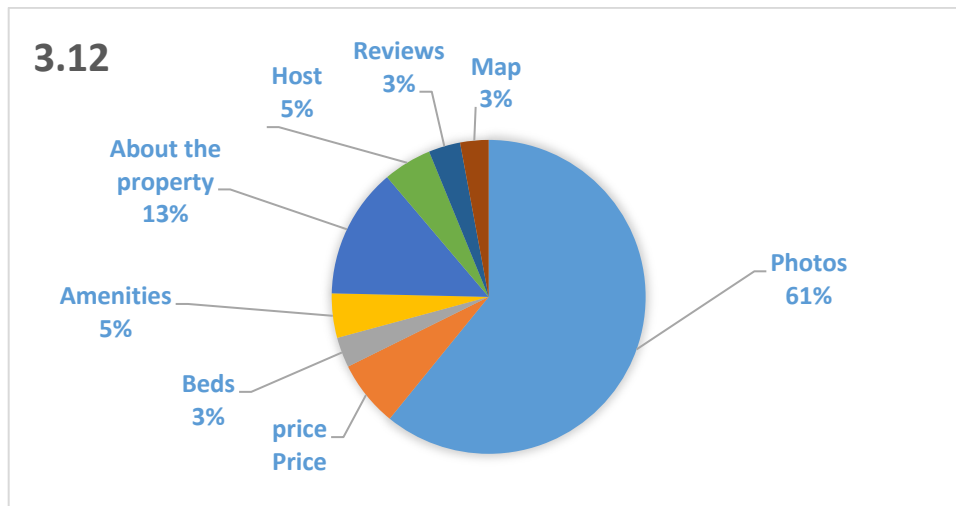
Figure 3.12 Percentages of total time spent on each listing AOI across all participants, including photo content.
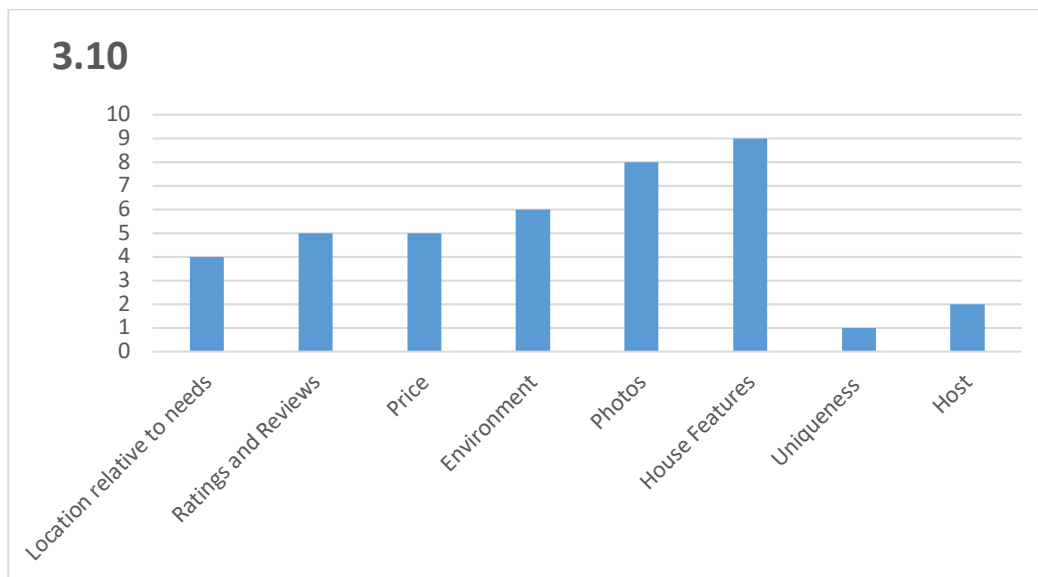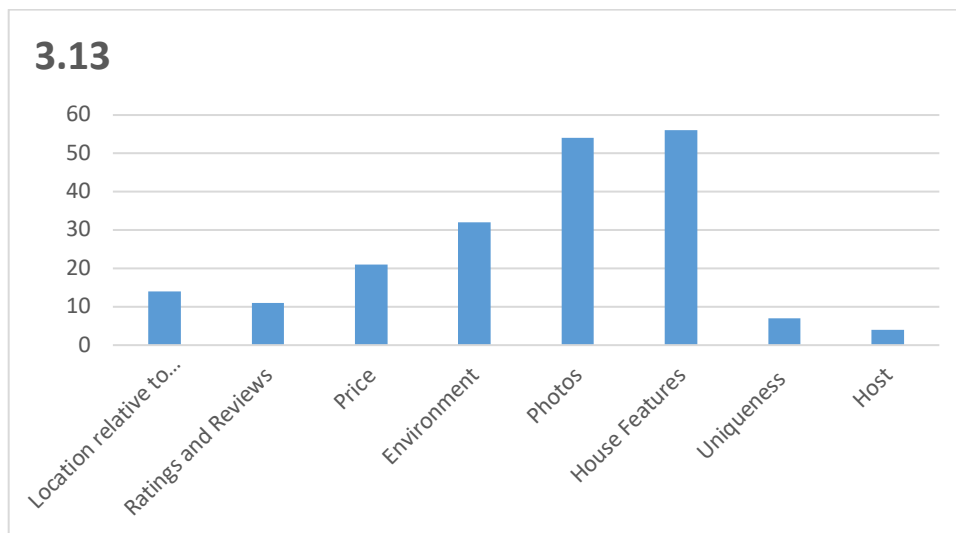

Figure 3.13 CTA data across participants with a Y-axis showing number of comments fitting into each coding category, shown on the X-axis.

The importance of photo content is also reflected in the results from the CTA feedback provided by participants during the eye-tracking study, illustrated in Figure 3.13. Across all participants and all listings, 54 participant statements referenced listing photos, second only to the 56 mentions of house features.

Participants often discussed house features while their gaze was directed at the photographs that showed particular features. Additionally, information about the environment, house features, uniqueness, and even sometimes the location can be found both in listing photos and also through the text of the listing. For example, while viewing the "Midwestern Charm Kansas City Area" listing, Participant 4 stated the following as their rationale for choosing it over the other two listings:

> "From the photos it seems it would be the most comfortable in terms of the bed and bathroom and kitchen and the things they provided in terms of that. The coffee bar, good parking space, which is a plus, and the outdoor was nice but wasn't all about the outdoors."

This statement focuses on house features and the outdoor environment, but is predicated by the fact that this information was collected through looking at the photos. The environment, photos, and house features all describe the physical attributes of an Airbnb property, making the CTA data in line with the eye-tracking data.

3.8. SUMMARY

The results of the data collected through eye-tracking and CTA methods suggest a user preference for listing content that provides information about the physical attributes of an Airbnb property, especially photographs that feature the indoor attributes of a

property. This suggests that photos are the most effective content on Airbnb listings in influencing decision-making of Airbnb users, as it is their primary source of information about the property. The next section will examine the results of this study with the results from the survey, analyzing both halves of this research project to connect stated user preferences with user behavior and decision-making processes.

4. ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF SURVEY, EYE-TRACKING AND CONCURRENT THINK ALOUD RESULTS

In the last two sections, I presented results for my online survey and eye tracking study. These two methods produced datasets that help understand what listing content is most compelling to Airbnb users seeking to book properties. In this section, I will analyze the results from both research methods, suggesting four primary findings: the importance of photos as a vessel for property information, price as a determining factor, perceived trustworthiness of hosts, and attitudes towards rural locations of Airbnb listings on the decision-making processes of users. Recommendations for Airbnb hosts based on these findings will follow in Section 5. The following analysis is based on conclusions drawn from the online survey results, the eye-tracking study, and the concurrent-think aloud feedback. This analysis provides useful insights into the preferences and behavior of Airbnb users. The survey's dependability is evidenced through the large sample-size and the diversity of perspectives gained through peer reviewed coding. The credibility and transferability of the survey lies in the transparent recruitment process of anonymous participants. On the other hand, the dependability of the eye-tracking and CTA study was established through the diversity of participants, the deductive coding based on the survey, and the triangulation between eye-tracking and CTA results. The following sections discuss key takeaways from the survey and eye-tracking study.

4.1. PHOTOS AS VESSELS FOR PROPERTY INFORMATION

The listing photos were originally conceptualized as a content category providing Airbnb users a unique set of information about a property; however, both datasets suggest

that users utilize the listing photos as their primary source of information about a property, making photos the most important listing component in terms of attention and influence on decision-making. The importance of photos to the effectiveness of listing content first became apparent when inductively coding the online survey results. 97% of survey respondents stated they look at all available photos on an Airbnb listing, and photos were the second highest answer to the question "what do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?" Users' attention to photos is supported by the eye-tracking results, which showed participants spent 61% of the total time on the listing looking at photos. So, it is quite clear that photos receive significant attention and are important sources of information to Airbnb users.

To understand the impact of photo content on decision-making, it is important to know what kinds of information users look for when they examine listing photos. The survey question "what information are you looking for in the photos included in Airbnb listings?" began to interrogate the function of photos in the decision-making processes of guests. On the survey, responses focused primarily on physical spaces, with 69 responses, and cleanliness, with 47 responses. The physical spaces code references rooms, amenities, layout, lighting, and appliances—in other words, the physical attributes of the property that are represented by photos and written content on the property listing. Answers that referenced physical spaces were often accompanied by mentions of cleanliness, which discusses the apparent cleanliness of the property as evidenced through photos. In fact, 30 of the 47 responses that referenced cleanliness also included mentions of physical spaces, tying these two codes together into an overall impression of how the physical property is presented through the listing content.

Comparatively, the verbal responses of the eye-tracking participants also focused on features of the physical spaces as demonstrated by attention to the photographic content on the listing. 56 statements mentioned indoor household features, with an additional 32 statements discussing the surrounding outdoor environment. When compared with the timestamps from the eye-tracking equipment, it became apparent that participants were talking about the physical spaces of the property while looking at the photos, rather than the text content that covered the same information. In other words, while the listing page might include a specific section on the physical attributes of a property, such as the number and size of beds, participants usually found that information from the listing photos. Salinas (2002) discusses the increasing "reliance on and preference for image-intensive communication" (p. 165), recognizing that "images are integral to all forms of writing" (p. 166). The combined results from the survey and the eye-tracking study suggest that photos are the preferred tool for users to collect the information they need to decide between listings.

The results from both datasets also suggest a preference for descriptive, indoor photos, with a secondary interest in outdoor photos of the surrounding environment. Photos can be considered descriptive if they show details of the listing that might also be demonstrated through the textual content of the listing. Descriptive photos give visual information about the physical property, such as room layout, bed size, kitchen amenities, and other details, in contrast to non-descriptive photos that show staged décor items or isolated elements of the property out of context. Survey respondents stated they used photos to find information about physical spaces (29 responses), a code which includes indoor features. On the other hand, far fewer survey responses stated photos were used to

collect information about the environment (13 responses), a code which includes outdoor areas surrounding the property. The disparity between the total number of physical spaces responses and environment responses suggests users prefer photos that demonstrate indoor features of a property. This gap is smaller, but still present, among eye-tracking participants, who mentioned photos showing indoor house features 56 times and photos showing the surrounding environment 32 times. Additionally, verbal feedback from eye-tracking participants pointed to a preference for descriptive indoor photos:

> "The second {listing} needed more interior pictures. I don't know what that house looks like and that made me not want to pick it" - (Participant 3)

> "I think I'd rather have the photos of the place first and the pictures of the outside second." – (Participant 4)

> "From the photos it seems it would be the most comfortable in terms of the bed and bathroom and kitchen and the things they provided in terms of that. The coffee bar, good parking space which is a plus, and the outdoor was nice but wasn't all about the outdoors." – (Participant 4)

All three of these quotes demonstrate a preference for descriptive, indoor photos. Even if outdoor photos are appreciated, indoor photos are prioritized because Airbnb users are looking for information about the indoor amenities and features of the property. These findings are somewhat unexpected when considered in the wider context of users' reasons for traveling to rural areas, which focus on escapism; however, while Airbnb users might visit rural areas to connect with the outdoors, they seem to choose lodging based primarily on indoor features as depicted in the listing photos. Descriptive photos

that provide users with information about the indoor features are important tools for users to evaluate whether the listing meets their needs and preferences.

4.2. PRICE AS A DETERMINING FACTOR IN BOOKING DECISIONS

The influence of price on Airbnb users' behavior is too significant be left undiscussed. Survey participants seemed to be focused on price from the first moment they encounter a listing to the ultimate decision moment. Price was the most frequently cited listing component mentioned when respondents were asked "what do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?" which mirrors the overwhelming number (71 mentions) of answers citing price as the factor that ultimately determines the likelihood of booking an Airbnb property. Price was also mentioned by 23% of survey respondents as a reason for using Airbnb rather than traditional lodging options. So, price is at the forefront of Airbnb users' minds throughout the process of finding a place to stay while traveling, both when deciding between Airbnb and other lodging and when choosing between Airbnb listings.

Price was also a significant focal point for eye-tracking participants as evidenced through the concurrent think-aloud (CTA) results. Eye-tracking data showed that the time spent looking at price only accounted for 7% of the total time spent on listings across all participants; however, CTA data showed that price was a significant factor in decision-making. Price is a concrete fact of the listing, and users do not get additional information by spending longer periods of timing looking at the price box on the listing page. Participants quickly glanced at the price, often early on in their perusal of each listing, but then quantified their verbal feedback based on the perceived value proposition of the

listing frequently throughout the rest of their time on that listing. The post-interview feedback especially demonstrated that price is significant in the decision-making process. For example, Participant 3 focused on whether the content on the listing proved the value of the property relative to the price when describing their reason for choosing their desired listing:

"I think it's – you get the most value for your money, lots of room, really wonderful outdoors, you have the creek."

This statement mentions a list of attractive features, such as the spaciousness of the home and the outdoor areas, but these features are listed as proof that the property is a good value for the price. Because users can collect information about the listing price very quickly, price is underrepresented in the eye-tracking data in comparison to its importance in the decision-making process of participants as evidenced through verbal feedback. Similarly, when asked what determines likelihood of booking, survey respondents followed a similar pattern of mentioning price first, then following with other desirable features:

"Price, distance, amenities, ratings, cleanliness"

"Price combined with quality."

"Price including fees relative to other lodging options in the area"

45 of the survey responses that mention price followed the above pattern, suggesting that price, paired with other attributes, is a significant determiner in the outcome of Airbnb users' decisions. Users seem to use price as the basis for evaluating the value proposition being offered by a listing. These findings reflect research done by Chen and Xie (2017) that demonstrated price and physical characteristics are closely tied together on Airbnb

listings. The number in the price box is not considered in isolation, but in comparison to the information users look for in other listing content, culminating in a holistic evaluation of whether a listing is offering enough to the user to be worth the cost.

Price also works as a primary deterrent to booking listings. All four eye-tracking participants mentioned price in their statements explaining why they did not choose two of the three listings.

"I think it's a bit pricey. Just one bedroom, even though it says four people, how can four people stay in one bedroom? It's pricey." – Participant 1

"$95 a night, um, says you have 2 bedrooms, 1 bath, um, one has a double bed one with a single bed, um, let me see, and it's $95 a night. It's in Odessa MO, um for $95 a night, I'd want to stay in a hotel, that's my preference where I don't have to do anything, for $95. I would stay in a hotel for as high as $150 a night, that's my preference. Maybe if the price was a little down, some other people prefer Airbnb for $95 but for me I want to stay in a hotel." – Participant 2

"I think the pricing on that was a lot for what you got." – Participant 3

"The $130 one, a night to stay in Montgomery City seems high because it's way over what you could stay at a local hotel, which would have better amenities and cell service." – Participant 4

Participants 2 and 4 both evaluated price in comparison to hotel accommodations, while Participants 1 and 3 were balancing price and property features to evaluate the overall value of the listing. These statements are made about different properties, but they all share the same general theme, namely, that the perceived value of a listing is understood by comparing the property features to the price, and comparing the overall price to other

lodging options. While the survey data in isolation might have suggested Airbnb users are simply choosing the cheapest option, the results from this study as a whole suggest that price is considered by users in the context of the listing features. Therefore, price is a significant factor in Airbnb users' decision-making process, both when they compare Airbnb listings and when they consider whether to choose an Airbnb property or stay in a hotel.

4.3. TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RELIABILITY OF HOSTS AND LISTINGS

There were several interesting connections among the different content areas on Airbnb listings, one of which was Airbnb users' attempts to measure trustworthiness of both the host and the property. Previous research suggests that perceived host trustworthiness affects Airbnb users' choices on the Airbnb platform (Ert et al., 2016). The results of this thesis similarly suggest that Airbnb users use the content on the host's profile and the content of the reviews to evaluate the appeal of an Airbnb property. This supports Ert et al.'s (2016) contention that "facilitating trust among parties is even more critical" for the successful operation of Airbnb properties (p. 63). Airbnb users are looking for listing content that signals how comfortable, safe, and easy their potential stay will be, and the host profiles and property reviews provide that information.

A significant majority (73%) of survey respondents claimed they look at Airbnb hosts' profiles before booking an Airbnb property. Survey responses about what users look for on a host's profile suggested that the property reviews and host information are prioritized by users who are trying to predict and prevent any inconveniences or problems during their stay. Experienced hosts who are friendly and good communicators are likely

to solve problems quickly and professionally, giving users a sense of security. Responses to the question "if you look at the host's profile before booking, what information are you looking for?" overwhelmingly focused on the experience of the host as evidenced through reviews and other markers such as their rating and years of experience. The following responses serve as examples of the broader trend of responses to this question:

"Ratings, how long they have been doing it, any notes about the property"

"How long they've been on Airbnb, the other properties they own, their reviews"

"Host status (Superhost, preferably), as well as reviews and whether hosts are available during stay"

These answers attempt to evaluate the credibility of the host, which is also demonstrated through the content of the property reviews. Users are looking for cues of experience in the ratings provided by previous guests, how long the host has managed a property, or if they manage other properties, and whether hosts have earned SuperHost status.

Reviews were consistently mentioned in survey responses to questions about what content attracted user attention and what content affected the decision-making process. Airbnb reviews have two components: a numeric star rating from 1 to 5 and a review comment that previous guests write. Reviews can be accessed from the main listing page or from the host information section. Survey respondents were not asked specific questions delineating the numerical rating from the text reviews, and most responses mentioned them in tandem. When asked what content they considered first on a listing, 16 survey responses mentioned ratings and/or reviews. This number increased significantly to 47 responses when asked what information users are looking for in host profiles.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, when survey respondents were asked "ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?" 25 responses mentioned reviews as a determining factor. Airbnb users seem to use the combination of host information and reviews to evaluate the credibility of the host which is a compelling reason to choose a listing. As one survey respondent put it, users are looking for "good reviews and whether they {the host} seem friendly and competent." If the host is perceived as friendly and competent, users might feel more confident that communication will be pleasant and any potential issues during their stay will be resolved easily. Thus, Airbnb users can utilize the content of reviews to collect information about the trustworthiness of the host.

Interestingly, eye-tracking participants were less interested in host profiles than the survey data predicted. Participant 1 spent no time looking at content about the host on any listing, and had no mentions about host information in their verbal feedback. Similarly, Participant 2 had no mentions of content about hosts in their verbal feedback and only spent 8% of their time looking at the Host Information on the listing page. Participant 3 considered host information slightly more, spending 6% of their total time, and mentioning host information twice in verbal feedback. Finally, Participant 4 was somewhat of an outlier in this category, spending 17% of their total time looking at content about hosts, but still only mentioned hosts twice in their verbal feedback. This discrepancy between survey results and eye tracking results could be due to the differences in sample size, or a discrepancy between self-reported behavior of Airbnb users and actual behavior while using the Airbnb website.

While eye-tracking respondents did not spend very much time reading host information content of reviews, they did frequently emphasize value on reliability and trustworthiness. Participant 3 was particularly concerned with the trustworthiness of the host, even when paired with positive reviews for the same listing:

> "I always read the reviews, I like how several people are coming more than once and it's their getaway. If that's what I was looking for, a getaway, this one is good."

> "Second one I liked it, but it's ridiculous to call couches beds. It's not honorable and I don't like that."

These statements suggest that Participant 3 is looking for quantity of reviews, while also reacting positively to return guests. The third statement contains a slightly more nuanced comment on the trustworthiness of the listing, or even perhaps of the host. Participant 3 states it is "not honorable" to misrepresent the number of beds on the listing and cites this as the primary reason to not choose the property in question when deciding to book. In this case, the reviews serve as a tool to give information about other users' satisfaction with an Airbnb property, giving the participant a positive impression of the property being satisfactory enough for return visits. Later, however, the participant forms a negative opinion of the host's trustworthiness, which ultimately serves as a deterrent for booking. A user's perception of the host's trustworthiness was important enough to override all other factors under consideration for their booking decision. If users lose trust in the honesty of the host, they might believe the listing misrepresents the property. Therefore, while there are many factors that must align for a user to select a particular

listing, a loss of trust in the host and doubts about the accuracy of the listing can singlehandedly lead to rejection by the user.

Participant 4 looked for information about the host through the review content, evaluating both sets of information together:

> "I didn't look at this on the other one, but I'd probably see who the host would be. I look at their reviews and how long they've had an Airbnb, if they're new at it or not. I also look at the response rate, I want them to be accessible. Also that there's been 120 reviews and the average is 4.97 is a pretty good indicator."

In this case, Participant 4 is looking for an experienced host who is accessible during their potential stay. The experience of the host is evaluated through the reviews, and how long the host has been managing the property. Both the quantity (120 reviews) and the overall rating (4.97/5) is relevant as the participant evaluates the trustworthiness of the host. Simultaneously, Participant 4 is interested in the host's response rate, which they take as a sign of accessibility during a potential stay on the property. The content of the Reviews section of the listing provides Participant 4 information about the listing and information about the host, both of which help them evaluate the listing, ultimately selecting it to book.

The content of reviews is valued by Airbnb users when evaluating listings and making predictions about how their experience will be if they choose a listing. Paired with the host's information, reviews give Airbnb users a sense of predictability and safety when booking an Airbnb property, making them important considerations when discussion user decision-making processes.

4.4. ATTITUDES TOWARD RURAL LOCATIONS

The final major finding of this research is the significant influence of an Airbnb property's location relative to the predetermined travel purposes of users. While analyzing survey results, I created the code location relative to needs to account for the diverse range of responses concerning the physical location of rural Airbnbs. When respondents were asked "When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located?" respondents provided geographical and purpose-driven answers. Specifically, some participants provided specific locations, such as "Southern Missouri/Northern Arkansas," while other responses focused on purpose of travel, such as "Somewhere near hiking or bike trails." In the latter case, the respondent is not providing a specific geographic location, but rather mentioning proximity to their purpose for travel: hiking and biking. These kinds of responses were unexpected, as the question was originally constructed as a data-sorting tool rather than a source of information about the motivations for traveling rurally. I initially expected this question to yield data about which geographical regions were popular destinations for Airbnb users, but responses additionally shed light on why users were traveling to rural areas. While the majority of answers did cite specific locations, escapism (13 responses) and special purposes for travel (21 responses) were also mentioned by respondents. Comparatively, respondents overwhelmingly cited escapism when asked "why are you typically visiting rural areas?" but other categories, such as relationships, nature, and special destinations were frequently mentioned as well. Taken together, these results suggest Airbnb users begin their search for properties with a travel purpose in mind, which dictates the location in which they search for listings.

Because they were drawn from the pool of survey respondents, who self-selected for participation based on interest in staying in rural Airbnbs, eye-tracking participants were not shown any urban listings and were not asked to justify the decision for choosing a rural destination. Participant's comments, however, suggested some assumed purposes for travel. Participant 1 framed most comments around a listing's attractiveness as a family vacation spot; Participant 2 was seeking for a personal getaway; and Participant 4 was focused on the proximity of the property to larger metropolitan areas. Participant 3 never identified a consistent purpose of travel through which to evaluate the listings. Verbal feedback from the participants reflected several of the same priorities as survey respondents by citing vacation (special purpose for travel), a preference for small towns over urban areas (escapism) and proximity to a particular geographic location (location relative to needs):

> "I think this would be a very perfect place to go for vacation, even though it looks secluded, it still looks open enough to reach out for help if there's any problem, and it's very clean and nice." – Participant 1

> "I like the whole farm setting, so that's really cool. And it looks like it's a small town, like a town like Rolla. I like going to small towns" – Participant 2

> "Then I'd zoom out and see where it was in relationship to where I was. How long it would take to get there. That would be it" – Participant 4

These three examples reflect three different views of a rural Airbnb property. Participant 1 is looking for a secluded vacation spot with a safety caveat. Participant 2 is citing a preference for the "farm setting," not for any specific purpose, but just as a personal preference. Participant 4 is interested in the physical location of listings.

These differences in approach to the rural location of the listings support the diversity of survey responses regarding the influence of location on booking decisions. Rural Airbnbs are attractive escape from urban life, but the specific reasons for choosing a particular location to stay seem to be unique and almost exclusively dependent on the purpose for travel. When Airbnb users begin their search for property listings, they likely have a travel purpose already identified, and the selection of location is at least somewhat dependent on that pre-established purpose. As a result, information on the property listing location is likely to influence user decision-making only if the location is related to their particular travel purpose.

4.5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section discussed four primary findings that emerged from the results of the online survey and eye tracking study. Photos were identified as the primary vessels for property information, and a primary determinant in booking decisions. Secondly, price was discussed as a priority for Airbnb users as they evaluate Airbnb listings in comparison with both traditional lodging options and other listings. Reviews and Host Information were discussed in tandem as tools for Airbnb users to evaluate a listing and predict their experience if they choose that property. Finally, the location of rural listings was determined to be significant in comparison to the pre-determined reason for travel held by Airbnb users. The next section will translate these findings into practical implications and recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of Airbnb listing content.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AIRBNB HOSTS AND FUTURE WORK FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCHERS

In the previous section, I analyzed the findings from the online survey responses, eye tracking data, and Concurrent Think Aloud feedback. In this section, I will provide recommendations for Airbnb hosts who are seeking to improve the content of their property listings on the Airbnb platform. As a former rural Airbnb host, I know it is difficult to find resources on how to improve listing content to increase booking frequency in a rural context. For hosts in rural areas, especially in regions that are struggling economically, the recommendations in this section are intended to provide practical insights into effective listing content creation that will hopefully lead to increased bookings.

5.1. RECCOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PHOTOGRAPHIC CONTENT

Recommendation: Present descriptive, indoor photos first on the photo page, followed by outdoor photos of the surrounding environment.

The clearest takeaway from this research study is the importance of photos as vessels for property information and a variety of other features that Airbnb users evaluate when looking at listings. As a result, it is crucial for hosts to be "skilled at design/writing images" (Salinas, 2002, p. 166) in addition to the textual elements of their listings. The data collected through both the survey and the eye tracking study suggest Airbnb users prefer to see primarily indoor photos that show the property features and amenities. Photos of the outdoor environment are valued, but in comparison, users prioritize indoor photos that provide valuable information about the listing, appreciating outdoor photos as

a sign of a pleasant surrounding environment. Photos should be descriptive and high quality, although it was unclear whether professional photography improved the effectiveness of the photo content. Airbnb users look for photos that give them information about the layout, amenities, and features of the property such as bed size, kitchen appliances, and the bathroom. Staged photos of minor details, like the art on the wall, or a cup of coffee sitting on the dining table do not help users determine whether the listing meets their needs and preferences. Photographic content should give Airbnb users a vision of how their experience will be, and prove to them the property will meet their needs.

The photo content on Airbnb listings should convey the same information about the property as the text. This ensures users will find the information they need to make booking decisions whether they read the text content or spend most of their time looking at the photographic content. After all, study results showed most users prefer to look at photographic content. Therefore, photo content should be a priority in listing content creation, so Airbnb users can find valuable property information in their preferred format, ultimately leading to a higher likelihood of booking.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PRICE

Recommendation 1: Research other hotels and Airbnb listings in your area, and consider those prices when setting the price for your listing.

Recommendation 2: Communicate the value proposition clearly through the listing content.

Price is a highly significant decision-factor for Airbnb users, but the results from this study indicate that the value proposition of the listing is compared both to other Airbnb listings and to other accommodations in the area. In other words, Airbnb users are not loyal to the site if pricing is not competitive. As a result, when setting the price, Airbnb hosts should consider the price in other similar listings in the area, but also do some research on local hotel prices and other accommodation options.

This is especially relevant in rural areas because the concentration of Airbnbs is lower, causing the Airbnb pricing algorithm to function less efficiently. Often the pricing algorithm for rural Airbnbs will significantly undervalue a property because no other properties are listed in the area, so the Airbnb platform assumes there is no demand. As a result, the host must do their own research to determine a pricing metric that reflects other competitor lodging options in the area. As an additional layer of consideration, hosts should also consider their value proposition, and how the listing demonstrates the value of the property. Once a price has been set, hosts should construct the listing content to persuade Airbnb users that the price is reasonable. Straightforward descriptions of the number and size of beds, the size of the property, and other amenities that might justify a higher price can help users evaluate whether the property fits their needs at the price point at which it is being offered.

Price is often the determining factor in booking decisions, but the effectiveness of other listing content seems to be considered in tandem with the listing price. As a result, the price point should be considered in context of other listing content. Hosts can improve their value proposition by creating informative and compelling content through photos and text throughout the listing to encourage Airbnb users to consider all listing

content when deciding whether the price is desirable and whether they accept the value proposition the listing offers.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Recommendation 1: Spend time constructing a host biography that is informative and friendly.

Recommendation 2: Be honest and transparent about the property features.

Airbnb users in this study evaluated the trustworthiness of listings through a combination of host information and reviews. Ratings and reviews are somewhat out of the control of Airbnb hosts because they are submitted by previous guests and there is no way to remove negative reviews from a listing if they appear. As a result, the best way for hosts to affect users' opinion of the listing's trustworthiness is to focus on the content of the host biography and information. Based on the data collected from the survey, the host biography is more effective if it contains a level of personalization that shows users that hosts are friendly, communicative, and experienced human beings. Hosts can personalize their biography by telling their story of becoming an Airbnb host, sharing interests and hobbies, or giving personal details about pets, favorite foods, or other relatable content. The results from this study do not suggest that the host information is a determining factor in booking decisions; however, users did mention information found in the host biography in both the survey and eye tracking studies, suggesting that the content is relevant to Airbnb users, and can be used as an effective tool to support positive opinions about an Airbnb listing. If Airbnb users feel connected emotionally to

the host as an individual, they might see the rest of the listing content in a more positive light because they hold a good impression of the host.

Additionally, Airbnb users evaluate the trustworthiness of the host based on how honest they perceive the listing to be. For example, listings that are categorized as whole homes should actually offer an entire unit or standalone structure to guests, not a guest suite or basement apartment. Similarly, if the listing page states there are multiple beds but the photos show that there is only one bed with multiple couches that might substitute as beds, users are left with doubts about the host's honesty, which leads to doubts about the property itself. Airbnb users are using listing content to predict how their traveling experience might be, so they need to feel secure that the listing content reflects the property itself, giving them the confidence to make a booking decision.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING LOCATION

Recommendation: Give information about the specific location on the listing for Airbnb users to use as a reference point.

Airbnb users have three primary reasons for choosing to book Airbnb is rural locations:

1. Users are visiting a specific geographical area for a specific purpose (i.e., a work conference or visiting family)

2. Users are escaping urban environments and seeking rural getaways (i.e., unplugged family vacation)

3. Users are looking for a property in close proximity to their purpose for travel (i.e., hiking, swimming in the ocean, skiing, etc.).

These three categories represent the primary purposes for travel to rural areas and are pre-determined before Airbnb users start looking at specific listings. In other words, users typically search for their preferred location before beginning their search for accommodations. In this way, while location is an important factor in booking decisions, the listing content about location has limited influence on users. That said, hosts can include text and photos on their listing to appeal to all three of the travel purposes mentioned above. In addition to the physical map included on the listing, photos of local attractions, travel time to the nearest airport, and/or an emphasis on the escapist aspects of the rural area can appeal to users regardless of their reasons for looking for a rural Airbnb. The listing content about location is unlikely to determine booking over another Airbnb listing because users search for properties first by location; however, listing content that describes the location of the property and emphasizes the benefits of that location can be an effective way to promote the property.

Emphasizing the rurality of the listed property can also support the local rural community surrounding the Airbnb property. Rural economies benefit from secondary economic activity related to successful Airbnb properties. Listing content that encourages Airbnb users to stay rurally and gives users information about local tourist attractions and provides information about local amenities can serve a dual purpose of promoting the local community while encouraging users to book the property.

5.5. FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis is just the beginning of an evaluation of Airbnb listing content through the lens of technical communication, recognizing the increasing importance of peer-to-peer platforms within the wider context of online communication. The findings of this research serve as a starting-point for future work examining the content and communication practices related to the Airbnb platform and other peer-to-peer services. While the techniques implemented in this research support its dependability and credibility, Airbnb users' self-reported behavior, as demonstrated through the survey, should be further compared to observed behavior of users while interacting with the Airbnb platform. The eye tracking study included in this research demonstrates observed behavior of users in real-time, while also enriching the findings with the qualitative concurrent think aloud data; however, a larger sample-size for this research would further support the dependability of results.

There are rich research opportunities focusing on Airbnb listing content as technical communication. Further research should examine the rhetorical strategies hosts employ when creating their listings, comparing their process of content creation to the effectiveness of that content, as established in this research. Additionally, more focused research should be done on Airbnb listing photos to evaluate what kinds of photos are most effective; whether professionally staged photos are more effective than photos taken by hosts; and whether the order of photos on the listing matters substantially to user attention and decision-making processes.

APPENDIX A

ONLINE SURVEY TEXT

1. CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study that will be used for a master's thesis in technical communication about Airbnb listings and booking decisions regarding rural Airbnbs. This study, conducted by Mary Russell (Researcher) and Dr. Carleigh Davis (Supervisor) from Missouri University of Science and Technology is entitled "Connecting Hosts and Guests through platform-facilitated rhetorical activity: Airbnbs in the rural Midwest" and its IRB number is 2050182.

This study seeks to understand both the rhetorical choices made by hosts when constructing their property listing, and also the response of guests to the rhetoric on Airbnb listings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical activity taking place on the Airbnb platform.

To participate in this survey, you must be at least 18 years old, and you must have previously stayed or plan to stay in a rural Airbnb. Potential benefits of this survey include improving the experience of guests who stay in rural Airbnbs. Potential risks include emotional distress from remembering any previous bad experiences in rural Airbnbs, but risks are not expected to exceed those encountered in everyday life.

This survey has 17 questions and will take you 10-15 minutes to complete. You will not be compensated for completing this survey. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you can decide to terminate your participation at any time.

There is an optional question at the end of this survey asking you for your email address. If you choose to provide your email address, it will be used to request your

participation in a related study. Your email address will be kept on a password-protected drive, only accessible to Mary Russell and Carleigh Davis.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mary Russell at mcrnr4@mst.edu. You also may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have any questions about your rights as a study participant, want to report any problems or complaints, or feel under any pressure to take part or stay in this study. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights of participants are protected. You can reach them at 573- 882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights or any issues related to your participation in this study, you can contact University of Missouri Research Participant Advocacy by calling 888-280-5002 (a free call), or emailing MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu.

By clicking Continue, you understand the information provided in this consent and agree to participate in this research study.

2. QUESTIONS

Why do you use Airbnb? (Check all that apply)

- o Airbnbs are cheaper than traditional lodging options (ie. hotels)
- o Airbnbs provide a unique travel experience
- o Airbnbs are more spacious than traditional lodging options (ie. hotels)
- o Airbnbs have more amenities than traditional lodging options (ie. hotels)
- o There are no traditional lodging options (ie. hotels) where you want to travel to

o   Other _____

What travel purpose do you have for staying in an Airbnb? (Check all that apply)

o   Work

o   Vacation

o   Visiting family/friends

o   Other _____

If you have the choice, how likely are you to choose an Airbnb instead of a hotel?

o   Very likely

o   Somewhat likely

o   Somewhat unlikely

o   Very unlikely

Have you ever stayed in the same Airbnb more than once?

o   Yes

o   No

o   Other _____

Have you ever stayed in a rural Airbnb? (Rural is defined as a property at least 20

minutes away from a city or tourist attraction)

o   Yes

o   No

    o   Other _____

If you have not previously stayed in a rural Airbnb, would you like to visit one?

    o   Yes

    o   No

    o   Other _____

Given the choice, would you prefer to vacation in a rural area or an urban area?

    o   Rural

    o   Urban

    o   No preference

    o   Other _____

When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located geographically?

Why are you typically visiting rural areas?

How important are the following attributes while booking a rural Airbnb?

    1. Proximity to nature

        o   Very important

        o   Somewhat important

        o   Neutral

        o   Somewhat unimportant

o   Very unimportant

2. Privacy

     o   Very important

     o   Somewhat important

     o   Neutral

     o   Somewhat unimportant

     o   Very unimportant

3. Conveniences (proximity to major highways, larger towns/cities nearby, etc.)

     o   Very important

     o   Somewhat important

     o   Neutral

     o   Somewhat unimportant

     o   Very unimportant

4. Amenities (ie. washer/dryer, keypad entry, coffee pot, etc.)

     o   Very important

     o   Somewhat important

     o   Neutral

     o   Somewhat unimportant

     o   Very unimportant

What do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?

Do you look at the host's profile before booking an Airbnb?

o   Yes

o   No

If you look at the host's profile before booking an Airbnb, what information are you looking for?

How many photos do you look at on an Airbnb listing?

o   All available photos

o   Some photos

o   A few photos

o   Only the cover photo

o   None- Photos don't factor into my decision-making process

What information are you looking for in the photos included in Airbnb listings?

Ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?

What is your email address? Providing your email is optional, and not required as part of this survey. Your email address will only be used to contact you about a follow-up related study.

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FOR THE ONLINE SURVEY

Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia
FWA Number: 00002876
IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

February 23, 2021

Principal Investigator: Mary Catherine Russell
Department: English & Tech Communication

Your IRB Application to project entitled "Connecting Hosts and Guests through Platform-facilitated Rhetorical Activity: Airbnbs in the Rural Midwest" was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2050182
IRB Review Number	304324
Initial Application Approval Date	February 23, 2021
IRB Expiration Date	February 23, 2022
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(ii)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Approved Documents	Survey Questions Informed Consent Social Media Post and Email

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. **COVID-19 Specific Information**
   Enrollment and study related procedures must remain in compliance with the University of Missouri regulations related to interaction with human participants following guidance at research.missouri.edu/about/covid-19-info.php
   In addition, any restarting of in-person research activities must comply with the policies and guiding principles provided at research.missouri.edu/about/research-restart.php, including appropriate approvals for return to work authorization for individuals as well as human subject research projects.
2. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

Figure B.1 IRB Approval Letter for Survey

APPENDIX C

TOTAL NUMBER OF SURVEY RESPONSES FOR EACH QUESTION

Question Text	Numbers of Responses
Why do you use Airbnb? (Check all that apply)	105
What travel purpose do you have for staying in an Airbnb? (Check all that apply)	105
If you have the choice, how likely are you to choose an Airbnb instead of a hotel?	105
Have you ever stayed in the same Airbnb more than once?	105
Have you ever stayed in a rural Airbnb? (Rural is defined as a property at least 20 minutes away from a city or tourist attraction)	105
If you have not previously stayed in a rural Airbnb, would you like to visit one?	58
Given the choice, would you prefer to vacation in a rural area or an urban area?	104
When you stay in rural Airbnbs, where are they located geographically?	87
Why are you typically visiting rural areas?	94
How important are the following attributes while booking a rural Airbnb	104
What do you look at first on an Airbnb listing?	104
Do you look at the host's profile before booking an Airbnb?	104
If you look at the host's profile before booking, what information are you looking for?	77
How many photos do you look at on an Airbnb listing?	105
What information are you looking for in the photos included in Airbnb listings?	105
Ultimately, what determines your likelihood of booking an Airbnb property?	103
What is your email address? Providing your email is optional, and not required as part of this survey. Your email address will only be used to contact you about a follow-up related study.	45

APPENDIX D

EYE-TRACKING TESTING SCRIPT

Thank you for your time today and for your participation in this eye-tracking study. This research is studying Airbnb listings and interviewing hosts and guests to learn about booking decisions regarding rural Airbnbs. This research will be used for a master's thesis in technical communication, and I hope to publish these results in one or more academic publications and/or conferences.

I'm going to ask you to look at three Airbnb listings today. The camera will record your eye movements as you look at the listings and the iMotions software will record where your mouse moves and what you click on. Do you have any questions before we get started?

First, we'll need to calibrate the camera to your eyes. *(Go through the calibration process which requires participants look at dots at different parts of the screen)*

Ok, now we're ready to go. Please start by clicking the red "record" button

https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/34583351?adults=2&check_in=2021-01-14&check_out=2021-01-16&source_impression_id=p3_1601912806_XA%2Bew9pLeEeIeyHA

What stands out to you about this listing?

Go ahead and look around on the listing as if you're looking for options to book. As you're looking, please describe what you see for me –what do you like, not like, or find interesting about this listing?

Can you describe the style?

https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/36265480?adults=2&check_in=2021-01-14&check_out=2021-01-16&source_impression_id=p3_1601912598_hNJKSts4oaNFAIg5

What stands out to you about this listing?

Go ahead and look around on the listing as if you're looking for options to book. As you're looking, please describe what you see for me –what do you like, not like, or find interesting about this listing?

Can you describe the style?

https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/33307621?adults=2&check_in=2021-01-14&check_out=2021-01-16&source_impression_id=p3_1601912866_9T0IDRWc4rrXy6ph&guests=1

What stands out to you about this listing?

Go ahead and look around on the listing as if you're looking for options to book. As you're looking, please describe what you see for me –what do you like, not like, or find interesting about this listing?

Can you describe the style?

(Post-test questions)

Which listing would you like to book? Why?

What part of winning listing stuck out to you?

What did you like and dislike about the other three listings?

Is there anything else you noticed about the listings you want to talk about?

(Closing)

Thank you so much for participating in this study today. Please feel free to grab a snack on your way out.

APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FOR THE EYE-TRACKING STUDY

Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia
FWA Number: 00002876
IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

May 28, 2021

Principal Investigator: Mary Catherine Russell
Department: English & Tech Communication

Your IRB Application to project entitled Connecting Hosts and Guests through Platform-Facilitated
Rhetorical Activity: Airbnbs in the Rural Midwest was reviewed and approved by the MU
Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2057582
IRB Review Number	316210
Initial Application Approval Date	May 28, 2021
IRB Expiration Date	May 28, 2022
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(ii) 45 CFR 46.104d(3)(i)(B)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Approved Documents	Consent for eye tracking participants Interview script/questions to be used while conducting eye tracking sessions Recruitment Email to be sent to potential participants

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must
comply with the following conditions of the approval:

· No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the
expiration date.
· All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
· The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days
prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
· Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant
payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: http://
bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to
muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

Figure E.1 IRB Approval Letter for Survey

APPENDIX F
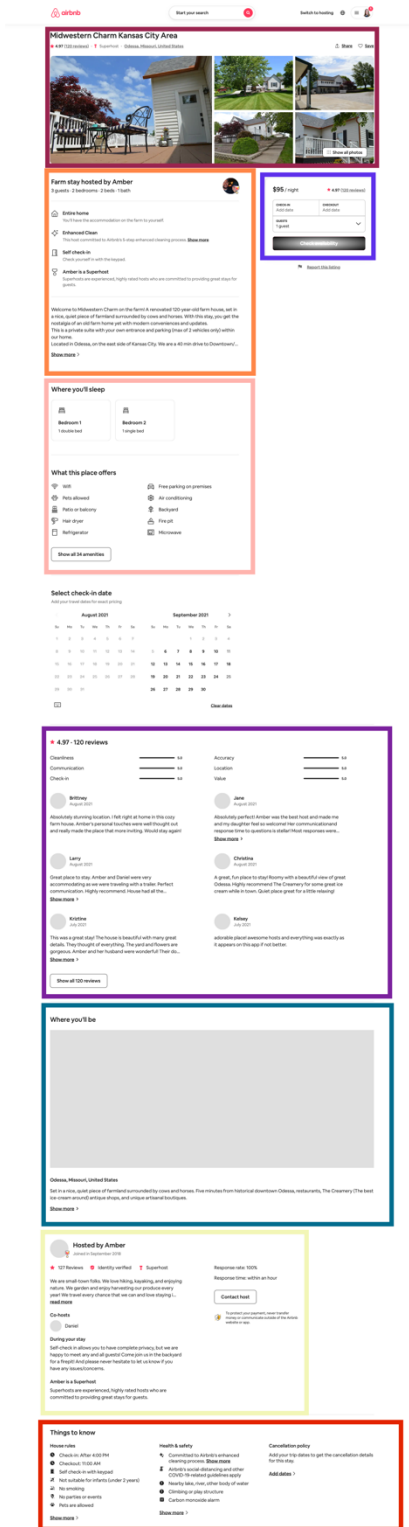

AIRBNB LISTING SAMPLE WITH AOI BOXES

Figure F.1 Sample listing with eye-tracking AOIs

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