

**CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT IN THE SHARING  
ACCOMMODATION INDUSTRY IN CHINA: THE IMPACT OF  
MESSAGE APPEAL**

A dissertation submitted to  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the effect of celebrity endorsement in the context of a sharing accommodation brand in China. More specifically, how the degree of congruency between the celebrity endorsers and the endorsed brand can affect customers' purchase intentions of the brand was tested in this study. This study also investigated the moderating role of message appeal (hard-sell vs. soft-sell) on the impact of endorser-brand congruency on purchase intentions.

This study adopted an experimental design method to answer the research questions. Scenario-based online questionnaires were used as the research instrument, and four scenarios were created to test the hypotheses. Data were collected from 216 Chinese customers recruited by the Chinese panel data company, Sojump.

The study results showed that customers' preferences for an online sharing accommodation platform were significantly influenced by the degree of endorser-brand congruency shown in the advertisement. Furthermore, a high degree of endorser-brand congruency was shown to have a positive effect on customers' purchase intentions, while the advertisement's type of message appeal was found to moderate the effect of endorser-brand congruency on purchase intentions. The degree of endorser-brand congruency had a stronger effect on customers' purchase intentions in a hard-sell appeal advertisement than in a soft-sell appeal advertisement.

The findings of the study enhance the current understanding of customers' preferences when choosing a sharing accommodation platform in terms of the moderating role of message appeal in a celebrity-endorsed advertisement in the Chinese context. The implications of the findings are discussed for hospitality researchers and practitioners alike.

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## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date 16/12/2019

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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background of the Research

In recent years, the sharing economy, also referred to as the peer-to-peer economy or collaborative consumption, has rapidly become a widespread global trend (Liu & Mattila, 2017). As part of the sharing economy, the sharing accommodation industry has gained worldwide popularity. According to the State Information Centre (2019), from 2015 to 2018, the average annual growth rate of sharing accommodation income reached about 45.7% in the Chinese market; 12.7 times the revenue of traditional accommodation. Unlike traditional accommodation providers (e.g., hotels) that rarely incorporate celebrity endorsements, sharing accommodation platforms have worked with celebrities to endorse their brands or to participate in their commercial campaigns to attract Chinese customers. For example, in 2015, Airbnb invited super model Liu Wen for its brand campaign “Night at” and then announced famous actor Peng Yuyan as its official endorser in 2016. Celebrity endorsement has proven to be a useful marketing tool which has a positive effect on consumers’ attitudes to brands, quality perceptions, and purchase intentions in the goods market (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Hence, it is important for sharing accommodation brands to understand consumers’ attitudes towards celebrity endorsements, in order to develop more efficient marketing strategies. However, there has been a lack of empirical studies focusing on the sharing accommodation industry in China thus far.

Celebrity endorsement has been defined as an agreement between an entity and an individual, in which the entity brand aims to utilise the public recognition of the individual to promote its brand (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Numerous studies have confirmed that celebrity endorsement is an effective marketing tool for promotions (Nanda & Khandelwal, 2017). However, some studies have also cast doubts on the effectiveness of applying these experiences to the hospitality industry, since there are fundamental differences between the goods market and the services market (Yang,

2018). In the hospitality context, Magnini, Honeycutt, and Cross (2008) argued that a good fit between celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand will benefit the brand image and sales, whilst an inappropriate endorser will decrease brand reputation and income. Hence, finding out what makes an appropriate celebrity endorser, is important for the success of promoting a sharing accommodation brand.

In terms of the effectiveness of an advertisement, not only is the celebrity endorser playing an important role, but the message appeal type also has significant impact on the outcomes of the advertising (Biswas, Hussain, & O'Donnell, 2009; Kim, Kim, Kim, & Magnini, 2016; Um, 2013; Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018; Wang & Lehto, 2019). In terms of message appeal, there are two types: hard-sell and soft-sell.

Okazaki, Muller, and Taylor (2010) defined “hard-sell” as a more direct and rational appeal, and “soft-sell” as a more indirect and emotional appeal. Previous studies’ conclusions on the effect of message appeal on customers’ purchase intentions were mixed (Okazaki, Muller, & Diehl, 2010; Okazaki, Muller, & Taylor, 2010; Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018). In the sharing accommodation context, only a few studies have paid attention to the role of message appeal for advertising (Liu, Yuen, & Jiang, 2019). Moreover, no such study has been conducted considering celebrity endorsement at the same time. Thus, this study intends to investigate the role of the message appeal in celebrity endorsing advertisements for a sharing accommodation brand in China.

This study uses the sharing accommodation company, Airbnb, as the testing platform. Airbnb was founded in August 2008 and is headquartered in San Francisco, California. It is a global travel rental community where users can make reservations for accommodation or other hospitality services via its website or mobile app. In August 2015, Airbnb officially entered the Chinese market. According to the State Information Centre (2018), Airbnb has become one of the leading sharing accommodation brands in China and has gained strong brand awareness amongst Chinese customers.

## **1.2. Problem Statement and Objectives of the Study**

As a rapidly developing new hotel sector, the sharing accommodation industry has attracted dramatic attention and investment. It plays a significant role in the Chinese economy and is also an interesting and advanced topic within hospitality research. However, to the author's best knowledge, the current hospitality literature has paid little attention to the advertising strategies of sharing accommodation organisations. Following the growing customer demands, it is important for both industry practitioners and hospitality scholars to gain a better understanding about the impact of promotion methods for sharing accommodation brands.

This study aims to test the efficiency of celebrity endorsements from the customer's perspective and attempts to answer the following primary research question:

RQ1: Does higher endorser-brand congruency lead to higher purchase intention towards the endorsed sharing accommodation brand?

Although congruency theory has been repeatedly tested in the broader marketing context, only a limited number of empirical studies have been undertaken within the hospitality context (Yang, 2018). Furthermore, literature has presented mixed findings on the effect of congruency on customers' purchase intentions (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Choi & Rifon, 2012; McCormick, 2016; Nanda & Khandelwal, 2017; Seiler & Kucza, 2017; Xu & Pratt, 2018). Therefore, a gap exists, and empirical evidence is required to indicate the efficiency of celebrity endorsement within the hospitality context. Hence, this study attempts to examine the congruency theory of celebrity endorsement as an advertising method for sharing accommodation brands.

In addition, previous literature has also highlighted that the type of message appeal in advertising may affect the effectiveness of the advertisement, but somehow the conclusions are mixed (Hernandez, Wright, & Ferminiano Rodrigues, 2015; Kim, Kim, Kim, & Magnini, 2016; Okazaki, Mueller, & Diehl, 2013; Okazaki, Muller, & Taylor, 2010; Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018; Wang & Lehto, 2019). In the hospitality

literature, the role of message appeal in advertising is also under-researched and therefore remains uncertain. Wang, Kim, and Agrusa (2018) found that soft-sell appeal had a positive effect on travellers' visit intentions. However, Wang and Lehto (2019) argued that the effect of advertising appeals depends on the temporal and spatial distance of a traveller's plan. In the sharing accommodation context, Liu, Yuen, and Jiang's (2019) research was the only study that examined the role of message appeal. This research also found that the effects of message appeal were different in terms of the customer's travel purposes. However, this research focused on individual sharing accommodation advertising, leaving the study of promotion for sharing accommodation brands absent in this academic field.

According to Kim, Kim, Kim, and Magnini (2016), textual/pictorial appeal moderated the customer's evaluation of the hospitality advertisement by strengthening the congruency between the adopted information media and the perceived hotel information from the perspective of construal level. Following a similar pattern, the current study intends to use message appeal as a moderator in the research model and aims to answer the second research question:

RQ2: Does message appeal (hard-sell appeal or soft-sell appeal) moderate the effect of celebrity-brand congruency on customers' purchase intentions?

The following objectives guided this research in order to answer the research questions:

1. To find out how different levels of endorser-brand congruency influence customers' purchase intentions towards the endorsed sharing accommodation brands.
2. To find out if and how message appeals (hard-sell appeal vs. soft-sell appeal) have a moderating effect on the relationship between celebrity-brand congruency and customers' purchase intentions.

### **1.3. Significance of the Research**

This study contributes to the understanding of the celebrity endorsement in the sharing accommodation context in China, particularly to test the match-up hypothesis (congruency theory), which needs more empirical evidence to fill the research gaps. This study also introduces the role of message appeal in advertising and attempts to examine its moderation effect to expand the knowledge of advertising in the hospitality context.

Firstly, the extant studies on celebrity endorsement have been predominantly focused on destination advertising (e.g., McCartney & Pinto, 2014; Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018; Xu & Pratt, 2018) and traditional hotel brands advertising (Kim, Lee, & Prideaux, 2014; Magnini, Honeycutt, & Cross, 2008). Sharing accommodation as a newly emerging sector is yet to be explored. Secondly, in this study, empirical research based on congruency theory contributes to the celebrity endorsement literature in the hospitality context. In addition, the role of message appeal has been under-researched, with only a few studies evident within the hospitality literature (Kim, Kim, Kim, & Magnini, 2016; Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018; Wang & Lehto, 2019). Hence, the current study is significant for extending the understanding of the role of message appeal in hospitality advertising. Furthermore, this study expands the knowledge of celebrity endorsement advertising by introducing message appeal as the moderator.

Practically, this study provides valuable insights into a sharing accommodation platform on better advertising strategies in terms of choosing appropriate celebrity endorsers and efficient message appeal. By providing specific advice on effective promotional strategies for brands in the Chinese context in this dissertation, practitioners will be better informed. This matters, as celebrity endorsement normally requires a great deal of financial investment.

#### **1.4. Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation has five chapters. An introductory section outlining the background, objectives, and the significance of the research is given in this chapter. Chapter 2 provides a literature review and outlines the conceptual framework and hypotheses of this research. In Chapter 3, the methodology and research design are presented, including the research paradigm, study design, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 states the results of the study and measures taken to enhance the trustworthiness, reliability and validity of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the study findings and provides research and managerial implications. Limitations of the study and directions for future studies are also offered in this chapter. An overall conclusion will be included at the end of this final section.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter discusses celebrity endorsement literature in the context of sharing accommodation. Firstly, the concept of celebrity endorsement is introduced, with three major streams of research. Then, previous studies on celebrity endorsement, particularly those in the hospitality context, are discussed. The concept of sharing accommodation, and the difference between individual sharing accommodation and sharing accommodation platforms/brands is presented next, highlighting research gaps. After that, literature on endorser-brand congruency and the effect of congruency on customers' purchase intentions is discussed before the hypotheses are presented. Additionally, literature on advertising appeals is reviewed, illustrating the moderating role of message appeal, followed by the research framework.

### **2.1. Celebrity Endorsement and Sharing Accommodation Brands**

Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) defined celebrity endorsement as an agreement between an entity and an individual, in which the entity aims to utilise the public recognition of the individual to promote its brand. More recently, the definition of celebrity endorser has been expanded to include ordinary people, rather than being limited to famous film stars, models, and dancers. Nowadays, anyone who can be recognised by a special group of people and can attract public attention, can be classified as a celebrity (Yang, 2018).

There are three major streams of research within the celebrity endorsement literature: (1) the source models; (2) the meaning transfer model; and (3) the congruency or match-up hypothesis. The source models are the oldest models in the celebrity endorsement literature, and come from the social influence theory (Mishra, 2015). The social influence theory states that the receiver of a message may be positively affected by the various features of the perceived communication source (Erdogan, 1999). The source credibility model, initially introduced by Hovland and Weiss (1951), indicates that trustworthiness and expertise are important personalities of a

successful celebrity endorser. McGuire (1985) expanded the source models by developing a source attractive model, proposing that attractive appearance and perceived social value are two effective attributes of an effective endorser. The second stream is the meaning transfer model proposed by McCracken (1989). In a three-stage process, the celebrity endorser firstly acquires meaning from his or her public roles, then this meaning is transferred to the endorsed brand by the advertising system, and finally, the meaning is perceived by the consumer and that meaning then drives endorsement outcomes. The meaning of the celebrity endorser is an extensive concept, which contains but is not limited to the person's age, gender, status, class, personality, and lifestyle (Erdogan, 1999). The last stream is the congruency or so-called match-up hypothesis. This hypothesis proposes that effective endorsements occur when there is a match-up, fit, or congruency between the image of the celebrity endorser and the image of the endorsed brand/product (McCormick, 2016; Mishra, 2015).

Most studies in celebrity endorsement literature have been undertaken in the broader marketing context. These studies predominantly examined the effectiveness of celebrity persuasion (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Nanda and Khandelwal (2017) showed that customers will hold both positive and negative attitudes to celebrity endorsement. However, the majority of these researchers have provided evidence that celebrity endorsement has a positive effect on brand evaluations, such as on attitude to brand, purchase intention and brand loyalty (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Magnini, Honeycutt, & Cross, 2008; Nanda & Khandelwal, 2017). Compared to the plentiful studies conducted in the general market, relatively few studies have undertaken empirical research on celebrity endorsement for the hospitality and tourism industry (Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018; Yang, 2018). In the hospitality literature, Yang (2018) cast doubt on the effectiveness of directly applying the general market's experiences to the hospitality industry since there are fundamental differences between the goods market and the services market. Regarding the sharing accommodation industry, to

the author's best knowledge, no study on this topic has been conducted in this context to date.

In recent decades, a new economy model has attracted huge attention and gained popularity: the so-called sharing economy, also known as peer-to-peer economy or collaborative consumption (Han, Shin, & Koo, 2019; Pucihar, Ravesteijn, Seitz, & Bons, 2018). Sharing accommodation, as a part of the sharing economy, has become a strong competitor to traditional hotels (Pappas, 2019; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017). This new hospitality sector distinguishes itself in the hospitality industry by offering two exceptional feelings to customers: “belongingness” and “uniqueness” (Liu & Mattila, 2017, p. 33). It is worth noticing that sharing accommodation websites or platforms should be differentiated from peer accommodation sellers (Liang, Choi, & Joppe, 2018). A sharing accommodation brand represents a company that is internet-based and has no physical property, but provides a platform where numerous individual hosts make offers to travellers. When a customer chooses a sharing accommodation to stay at, the consumption behaviours are affected by the customer's perception of both the individual hosts and the platform itself (Liang, Choi, & Joppe, 2018).

This dissertation uses Airbnb as the test platform to represent sharing accommodation brands. Airbnb was founded in 2008 and developed rapidly all over the world. The concept of sharing accommodation was introduced into Chinese market in 2010 and the first local sharing accommodation brand was established in 2011 (IiMedia Research, 2019). When Airbnb entered the Chinese market in 2015, there were many local competitors. After 2018, China's sharing economy market had passed the stage of homogeneous competition and reached a new stage of multidimensional competition (Qiu, Zhong, & Wei, 2020; Trustdata, 2019). According to industrial analysis reports, the future direction of sharing accommodation brands is to differentiate themselves from each other and target different customer groups (Iimedia Research, 2019; Trustdata, 2019).

In summary, more empirical research is needed to examine whether the previous experiences based on the studies on traditional hotels can be applied to the sharing accommodation industry's needs. Furthermore, to cope with the rapidly changing and developing Chinese market, the topic of celebrity endorsement for a sharing accommodation brand should be scrutinised with more in-depth studies in terms of its effectiveness.

## **2.2. Endorser-Brand Congruency and Customers' Purchase Intentions**

In the celebrity endorsement literature, the match-up hypothesis was introduced by Kahle and Homer (1985) based on social adaptation theory. This theory states that the impact of information depends on its "adaptive significance" or "usefulness for adaptation" (Kahle & Homer, 1985, p. 954). In other words, if the message receiver does not perceive adaptation in a particular source of information, his/her attention will shift to another source of information. Misra and Beatty (1990) further developed the match-up hypothesis by defining the existence of congruency as "the highly relevant characteristics of the spokesperson are consistent with the highly relevant attributes of the brands" (p. 161). For example, in Gong and Li's (2017) study, there was a perceived high degree of endorser-product congruency between fashion model Zhang Liang and clothes, while a perceived low degree of congruency existed between this endorser and mobile telephones.

Although there are three major streams of celebrity endorsement theories, this study focuses on the congruency/match-up hypothesis. The match-up hypothesis has included various attributes of other streams to measure match-up, such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of the endorser (Mishra, 2015; Seiler & Kucza, 2017; Till & Busler, 2013). It also shares the similar psychological rationale to the meaning transfer model (Fleck, Korchia, and Roy, 2012; Misra & Beatty, 1990). Hence, this study adopts congruency theory to test the effect of celebrity endorsement for promoting sharing accommodation brands.

The match-up hypothesis states that a higher degree of congruency between the source and the receiver of an advertisement leads to more effectiveness of advertising (Nanda & Khandelwal, 2017). Albert, Ambroise, and Valette-Florence (2017) proposed that there are three types of congruency: (1) endorser-brand/product congruency, which requires a fit between celebrity's image and the image of product/brand; (2) endorser-consumer congruency, which refers to a similarity between the celebrity and the consumer's ideal self; and (3) brand-consumer congruency, which indicates a match between the brand's image and the consumer's self-image. The crucial idea of congruency theory is that the perceived fit, match, or similarity will ensure effective communication and lead to stronger brand identification and more positive customer attitudes. Although both endorser-product congruency and endorser-brand congruency are treated as the same concept in many studies, Mishra (2015) emphasised that endorser-brand congruency should be considered an independent category in the literature. In consideration of the fundamental distinction between individual sharing accommodations and sharing accommodation platforms, the current study focuses on the endorser-brand congruency.

The majority of studies on the effect of congruency, reported that congruency has a positive influence on a customer's attitude to the endorsed brand (Bergkvist & Zou, 2016). However, congruency's effect on rising customer purchase intention is mixed. McCormick (2016) found no significant positive effect of unfamiliar product-endorser congruency on purchase intention. Choi and Rifon (2012) showed that endorser-consumer congruency positively affected purchase intention, while endorser-brand congruency had no significant effect. Seiler and Kucza (2017) argued that congruency's positive effect has been reversed by the current information era. Congruency even negatively affects customers' attitudes towards the advertisement and their intention of purchasing. Conversely, in a hospitality context, Xu and Pratt (2018), who adopted research methods from Choi and Rifon (2012), found a positive effect of endorser-destination congruency (which can be viewed as endorser-brand

congruency) on customer visit intention (which can be viewed as purchase intention). Due to the complex nature of the service market, more empirical studies are needed to test congruency theory in the sharing accommodation industry context. Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: A high degree of endorser-brand congruency will positively influence customers' purchase intentions.

### **2.3. Moderating Role of Message Appeal**

By their nature, advertisements are persuasive messages that intend to inform and persuade targeted consumers to purchase products, services, organisations, or ideas (Alhelalat & Habiballah, 2017). In advertising, the types of message appeal are numerous and ever-changing. Okazaki, Muller, and Taylor (2010) categorised the various types of message appeal into two distinct appeals: hard-sell and soft-sell. The former, also known as rational appeal (Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018) or attribute appeal (Wang & Lehto, 2019), employs a sales-oriented approach and specifies the direct, rational, logical, factual, and informative components of the product or service (Okazaki, Muller, & Taylor, 2010). It presents the advertising message through a cognitive method, such as by highlighting product features through the use of statistics (Liu, Yuen, & Jiang, 2019). In contrast, soft-sell advertising is more indirect, emotional, subtle, and image-oriented (Okazaki, Muller, & Diehl, 2013). It uses implicit and pictorial elements to evoke consumers' feelings or emotional responses to the product and creates general associations with the brand (Liu, Yuen, & Jiang, 2019; Okazaki, Muller, & Diehl, 2013).

It is worth noticing that all the previous studies focused on consumers' consumption intentions for the individual accommodation options rather than the sharing accommodation brands in the hospitality literature. In addition, the direct effect of message appeal for gaining positive outcomes is somewhat mixed. Customers' responses to different message appeals depend on the situation. For example, customers' preferences for message appeal types may be affected by their culture

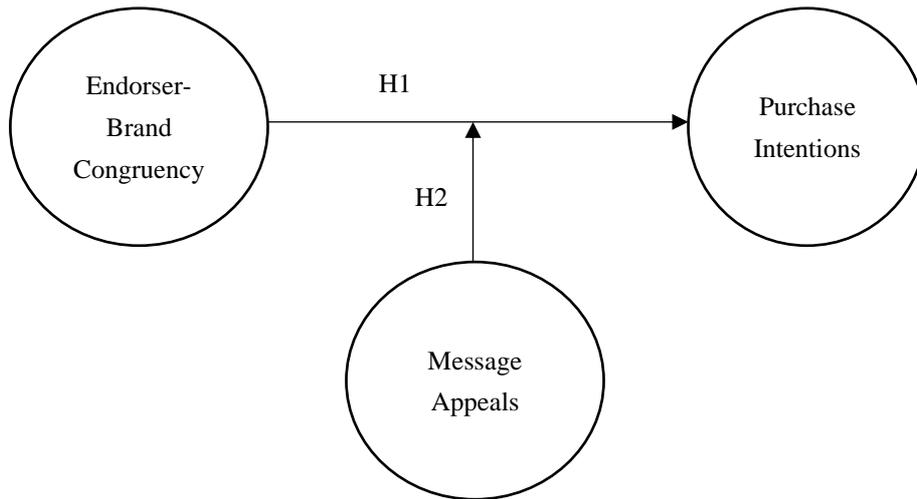
(Biswas, Hussain, & O'Donnell, 2009; Choi & Lewis, 2017; Um, 2013). In a wider context, Okazaki, Mueller, and Diehl (2013) found that soft-sell appeal was favoured by customers from both Eastern and Western cultures, but no evidence showed that soft-sell appeals would drive higher purchase intention in Eastern countries. In the hospitality literature, Wang, Kim, and Agrusa (2018) examined the effectiveness of endorsement for destination advertising by considering message appeal types and endorsement types simultaneously. The results of this study showed that generally hard-sell appeal was perceived more informative than soft-sell appeal by customers of three different nationalities (American, Chinese, and Japanese), but Chinese customers preferred soft-sell appeal overall. In addition, psychological distance in terms of temporal and spatial distance, has also been identified as a potential influence for customers in terms of favourable message appeal types (Hernandez, Wright, & Ferminiano Rodrigues, 2015). Wang and Lehto's (2019) study showed that customers prefer messages providing concrete features and characteristics (hard-sell appeal) when they plan for a near future or short distance trip. However, customers preferred messages containing holistic value and experience (soft-sell appeal) when they planned for a far future or long-distance trip. Moreover, customers' travel purposes affect their perception of the preferred message appeal type. In the sharing accommodation context, Liu, Yuen, and Jiang (2019) provided insights into how hard-sell and soft-sell appeal affect travellers' consumption intentions in relation to shared homes. On one hand, hard-sell appeal that emphasised the factual perspective of the environmental sustainability benefits of shared homes, was preferred by the utilitarian-oriented consumers. On the other hand, soft-sell appeal was more favoured by the hedonic-oriented consumers for the emotional perspective it provided. In summary, hard-sell or soft-sell message appeal does not solely determine a customer's attitude or purchase intention, but often combines with other conditions.

In order to find out the role of message appeal for promoting sharing accommodation brands, the characteristics of the sharing accommodation platform should be considered. Economic benefit is an important determinant of customers' consumption

intentions to participate in sharing accommodation platforms (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016; Möhlmann, 2015; Tussyadiah, 2016). Trustdata (2019) showed that cost performance is the primary concern (87%) of Chinese customers when making online sharing accommodation reservations, compared to other aspects such as sharing accommodation quality (84%), surrounding areas regarding food/shopping/entertainment (78%), traffic convenience (69%), and integrated service (56%). According to Burman, Albinsson, Hyatt, and Robles (2017), when hotel consumers were choosing economic accommodation, they were more likely to seek logical and factual information. Kim, Kim, Kim, and Magnini (2016) paid attention to the moderating effect of message appeals in hospitality advertising. Their study revealed that when people are searching for concrete and rational information for their hospitality decisions, a textual appeal strengthens their evaluation of the advertisement. In this study, the functional process of hemispheres was adopted as the explanation of the moderating role of textual/pictorial appeals. For example, textual information is processed automatically in the right hemisphere, so it will be viewed as a concrete representation. Kim, Kim, Kim, and Magnini (2016) confirmed that when the information medium was presented in concrete form (textual appeal), the evaluation of the hotel promotion message will be positively influenced when customers construe in concrete terms. Thus, if the message appeal is compatible with the construal level of the information, the effect of information is predicted to be enhanced by the message appeal. In a similar pattern, we can expect that hard-sell appeal can strengthen the rational link between endorser and brand, in order to positively influence the effect of congruency on a customer's purchase intention when the customer is searching for logical and factual information on a sharing accommodation platform.

Hence, the current study aims to examine the moderating role of message appeal for celebrity endorsement advertising in the context of the sharing accommodation industry. Therefore, this study proposes the second hypothesis as below – see Figure 1 for the research model.

H2: Message appeals moderate the effect of endorser-brand congruency on customers' purchase intentions; the positive effect of endorser-brand congruency on customers' purchase intentions will be strengthened more by a hard-sell appeal than a soft-sell appeal advertisement.



**Figure 1. The research model**

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the methodology adopted for this study. Firstly, the research paradigm is introduced, then the study design and measurements are presented. Data collection methods and process are discussed next, followed by a brief introduction of the statistical methods applied in the data analysis.

### 3.1. Research Paradigm

The understanding of the philosophy of research paradigms helps researchers choose the appropriate research method (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2013). Crotty (1998) suggested that researchers consider epistemology, theoretical paradigms, methodology, and research methods, as four crucial elements of the research process. This study employs an objectivist epistemology which believes objective truth exists and can be discovered regardless of individuals' awareness of its existence or not (Crotty, 1998). It requires researchers to exclude their own bias (feelings and values) in the research.

In terms of theoretical perspectives, this study applies a positivist paradigm, which holds that the world is external and objective and independent from the observer (Gray, 2013). Gray (2013) further explained that a positivist paradigm suggests researchers focus on facts and investigate the causality between constructs by empirical and scientific observations. Hence, quantitative methods with relatively larger samples and measuring operationalising concepts are common tools of research within the positivist paradigm.

This study uses experimental research as its methodological approach. In addition, an online questionnaire survey is utilised as an instrument to address the research questions and test the hypotheses.

### 3.2. Study Design and Measurements

This study employs an experimental design as the methodological approach. Experimental designs are generally recommended to study causal relationships in a hospitality context (Kuhfeld, Tobias, & Garratt, 1994). Fong, Law, Tang, and Yap (2016) stated that experimental designs are useful to reduce the extent of external variables' effects on research variables in marketing research. In the current study, experimental design is adopted to reach causal and conclusive results about how congruency between the celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand, influence purchase intentions towards online sharing accommodation booking platforms. In total there were four scenarios: Endorser A for a sharing accommodation brand with hard-sell appeal, Endorser A for a sharing accommodation brand with soft-sell appeal, Endorser B for a sharing accommodation brand with hard-sell appeal, and Endorser B for a sharing accommodation brand with soft-sell appeal.

For collecting data, an online questionnaire was utilised as the research instrument. There were three sections of the questionnaire. In the first section, three screening questions were designed to help eliminate respondents who were either under 18 or did not know the celebrity endorsers or the endorsed brand. After answering the screening questions, respondents needed to indicate their attitude towards the celebrity endorser before they read the manipulated advertisement. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions under a two (congruency levels: high vs. low) by two (message appeals: hard vs. soft) a between-subject design. Follow-up questions about the given advertisement were provided for respondents to answer in the second section. Respondents' perceptions of the message appeal were tested by seven semantic items for the manipulation check. All respondents were then asked to evaluate the perceived congruency between the celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand by answering four seven-point semantic scale questions. Then, respondents' purchase intentions when booking sharing accommodation on the endorsed brand's online platform were measured by three statements. Finally, respondents' demographic information was collected in the third

section. Respondents were required to answer questions about age, gender, previous consumption behaviours and future consumption plans, including the frequency of staying in commercial accommodation, and the frequency of staying in sharing accommodation during the last year, and the possible travel purpose and group size for the next stay in sharing accommodation.

Measurements for the research model constructs were adjusted based on previous studies. There were three questions derived from the study which were assessed using a seven-point semantic differential scale, asking respondents' attitudes toward the endorser, perceived message appeal type, and perceived endorser-brand congruency. An exception was made for the questions on purchase intention, which applied a seven-point Likert Scale ranging from one (extremely unlikely) to seven (extremely likely). Four items measuring attitude toward the celebrity endorser were adapted from the research of Gong and Li (2017). Message appeal was measured through seven items originating from the study of Okazaki, Muller, and Taylor (2010) and modified for the purpose of this study. Measurements of congruency were adopted from the work of Xu and Pratt (2018) and purchase intention measurements were from the study of Chung and Cho (2017). Table 1 lists the detailed measurements used to operationalise each construct.

**Table 1. Measurements used to operationalise constructs**

<b>Variables and items</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Attitude toward celebrity endorser (ATT) 1. Bad/Good 2. Unfavourable/Favourable 3. Boring/Interesting 4. Unpleasant/Pleasant	Gong & Li (2017)
Message appeal (MA) 1. Instinctive/Logical 2. Abstract/Factual 3. Insinuation/Explanation 4. Appealing/Convincing 5. Subjective/Persuasive 6. Expressive/Instructive 7. Impression-based/Evidence-based	Okazaki, Muller, & Taylor (2010)
Congruency (CONG) 5. Not compatible/Compatible 6. Bad fit/Good fit 7. Irrelevant/Relevant 8. Bad match/Good match	Xu & Pratt (2018)
Purchase Intention (PI) 1. Next time I go on a trip, I will choose the advertised brand 2. It is likely that this brand would be my first choice when considering booking a sharing accommodation 3. I will not use another online sharing accommodation brand if I can use the advertised brand	Chung & Cho (2017)

In summary, the first section of the questionnaire included screening questions, the second section included questions for research model testing (see Appendix B.a), and

the third section was for respondents' demographic profiles (see Appendix B.c). In order to collect data in China, all the sections were written in English and then translated into Chinese (refer to Appendix Bb). The same pattern was also applied to the participant information sheets (refer to Appendix B.f).

### 3.3. Pilot Test

The first step of the pilot test was inviting a group of 20 Chinese adults to decide the celebrity endorser examples for this study. They were invited to list the celebrities who were matched or unmatched to the brand. From the list, Peng Yuyan (Endorser A) and Li Dan (Endorser B) were chosen because they differed in their public images and were both familiar to participants. Peng Yuyan was perceived to have a good fit with Airbnb because of his passionate and outgoing personality and background, having grown up in a Western country. The congruency between Li Dan and Airbnb was viewed as relatively lower because Li Dan was perceived as not fond of outdoor activities.

The rest of the pilot test was conducted with a group of 20 Chinese adults who were fluent in both English and Chinese. There were two purposes of the pilot test: firstly, the validity of the design of the scenarios was tested, and secondly, the items of constructs were also tested to make sure they served the purpose of this study with no misunderstandings in the translations between the original English version and the current Chinese version. The four scenarios were designed by the author of this dissertation based on a modification of the study of Okazaki, Muller, and Diehl (2013). According to the definition of hard-sell appeal and soft-sell appeal in Okazaki et al.(2013), a hard-sell appeal is informative and fact-based. Hence, descriptions of endorsers, and general information of the brand and the match between the endorser and the brand, are presented in wording for a hard-sell appeal. A soft-sell appeal is image-oriented and intends to create an emotional response in the customers to the product. Therefore, a picture of the image of the endorsers and sharing accommodation background constitutes soft-sell appeal. Based on the results of the

pilot test, the different levels of congruency between Endorser A with a sharing accommodation brand and Endorser B with a sharing accommodation brand were perceived as significant. The contents of both the English version and the Chinese version were checked by the participants to ensure equivalence of meaning (see Adler, 1983). The measurements of the constructs were also modified following the participants' advice. In this study, five items for measuring soft-sell appeal and eight items for measuring hard-sell appeal were deleted from the Okazaki, Muller, and Taylor's (2010) questionnaire to improve the length of the survey and reduce semantic repetition in the Chinese context.

### **3.4. Data Collection**

The questionnaire was pretested online with 54 respondents, to test the validity and reliability of the instrument and improve the research design prior to distribution. The result of the pre-test revealed significantly different levels of endorser-brand congruency between Endorser A with a sharing accommodation brand and Endorser B with a sharing accommodation brand. The result also showed the success of manipulation of message appeal. No major issue was found from the pilot test, with only a few minor changes being made to the questionnaire instructions. For example, as many respondents were expected to take the survey on their mobile devices, a suggestion to display the questionnaire in landscape mode was added to the questionnaire instructions.

For the main survey, Chinese respondents were recruited by the online market research service company, Sojump. Sojump is one of the most popular and professional online survey firms in China (Lien, Cao, & Zhou, 2017; Zhu, Teng, Foti, & Yuan, 2019). Respondents were randomly invited by emails sent through Sojump's distribution channels in order to avoid the bias likely to result from choosing from available sources, and to increase reliability. The respondents were evenly distributed into each scenario. Once the data met the sample size requirement, the Sojump panel stopped collecting data. According to Gorsuch's study of factor analysis (as cited in

Chen, 2018), a respondent-to-questionnaire-item ratio of 5:1 can be used to calculate an acceptable sample size. In this study, there were 27 questionnaire items, so a sample of 135 participants met the recommended standard. A total of 216 respondents were recruited for the study, which was considered an appropriate sample size.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 25<sup>th</sup> and LISREL 9.1 were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to explore the respondent profile. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to test the goodness of fit of the research model. Construct validity and reliability were also examined. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was run to test the main hypothesis and moderation hypothesis. This method is one of the most common methods for testing a moderating effect (Cortina, 1993). Sets of variables were entered in steps to find out how well the variables were able to predict the outcome variable (Pallant, 2013). Age, gender, and attitude towards celebrity endorser, three control variables, were entered in step 1; message appeal and congruency were entered in step 2 as two independent variables to examine if they are related to purchase intention, and in step 3, the interaction variable between message appeal and congruency was entered to test the moderation effect of message appeal.

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analysis of the data collected, in the form of narratives and tables. First, a table of the demographic profile of the respondents is presented in terms of frequency and percentage. Then, the construct reliability and validity are discussed based on Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The final section provides the results of the hypotheses tests.

### 4.1. Respondent Profile

In total, 216 respondents in China participated in the experiment through the online panel company, Sojump. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four scenarios. During the data collection period, Sojump was responsible for checking the demographic characteristics of each group of respondents in order to keep factors other than the manipulated factors identical across the different scenarios. From 216 respondents, there were no missing data; all respondents gave valid answers to the questions. Frequency distribution analysis techniques were used to display the demographic characteristics of the respondents (see Table 2).

Of the 216 respondents, there were 86 males, and 130 females. The majority of respondents was under 36 years old ( $N = 183$ , 84.7%). The largest age group was between 27 and 35 years old ( $N = 116$ , 53.7%). In terms of mean statistics, there were more female respondents than male respondents ( $M = 0.60$ ,  $S.D. = 0.49$ ). The respondents averaged 30 years old ( $M = 30.07$ ,  $S.D. = 6.49$ ). All respondents had experiences of staying in commercial accommodation in the past year. Of them, 38% stayed one to three times ( $N = 82$ ), 44.9% of them stayed four to six times ( $N = 97$ ), and 17.1% of them stayed more than six times ( $N = 37$ ). In terms of the frequency of staying in a sharing accommodation in the past year, 6% of respondents indicated that they never chose to stay in a sharing accommodation ( $N = 13$ ), 78.2% stayed one to three times ( $N = 169$ ), 13% stayed four to six times ( $N = 28$ ), and 2.8% stayed more than six times ( $N = 6$ ). Most respondents said they would choose sharing

accommodation for a leisure trip in the future ( $N = 208$ , 96.3%), while only 3.7% of respondents would choose sharing accommodation for a business trip ( $N = 8$ ). For a future trip during which they would stay in sharing accommodation, 5.1% of respondents planned to go alone ( $N = 11$ ), 57.9% of respondents would go with another person ( $N = 125$ ), 28.2% of respondents would go with another two people ( $N = 61$ ), and 8.8% of respondents would go with more than two people ( $N = 19$ ). The profile of the sample appears similar to that of Trustdata (2019) in the Chinese market.

**Table 2: Respondent profile**

	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	86	39.8
Female	130	60.2
<b>Age</b>		
18-26	67	31.0
27-35	116	53.7
36-44	26	12.0
45-53	6	2.8
>=54	1	.5
<b>Commercial accommodation frequency</b>		
None	0	0
1-3 times	82	38.0
4-6 times	97	44.9
More than 6 times	37	17.1
<b>Sharing accommodation frequency</b>		
None	13	6.0
1-3 times	169	78.2
4-6 times	28	13.0
More than 6 times	6	2.8
<b>Future travel purpose</b>		
Leisure	208	96.3
Business	8	3.7
<b>Future travel group size</b>		
Alone	11	5.1
With another person	125	57.9
With two more people	61	28.2
With more than two people	19	8.8

*Note: N = 216*

#### 4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Table 3) was performed to test the convergent validity and reliability of the study constructs. Construct validity is a useful tool to test the

falsifiability of the construct and thus, the theory tested (Bacharach, 1989). The result showed that the measurement model was overall a good fit (Chi-square = 208.477,  $p = .000$ ; GFI = 0.907; CFI = 0.979; RMSEA = 0.0534).

Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) stated that the factor loadings should be greater than 0.50, in order to ensure all items converge on their corresponding latent constructs. The factor loadings of this study met this standard. AVE (Average Variance Extracted) calculates the variance explained by the construct. An acceptable AVE value should be higher than 0.5, although AVE values between 0.4 to 0.5 are acceptable when Composite Reliability (CCR) is higher than 0.6 (Huang, Wang, Wu, & Wang, 2013; Jiang, Klein, & Carr, 2002). All study constructs met the threshold of CCR, with the lowest being .73 and the highest, .89. Hence, the AVE values in this study are acceptable.

Construct reliability was also assessed using Cronbach's alpha. According to Lu, Yao, and Yu (2005), internal consistency coefficients above 0.70 would meet the acceptable standard. In this study, Cronbach alpha values of all study constructs ranged from .71 to .89, revealing satisfactory reliability scores. Therefore, based on the analysis of factor loading, AVE, and reliability tests, the convergent validity of study constructs was verified as acceptable.

**Table 3: Confirmatory factor analysis**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Item loadings</b>	<b><i>t</i>-value</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>	<b>CCR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
<b>Attitude toward celebrity endorser (ATT)</b>			.83	.84	.57
ATT1	0.82				
ATT2	0.82	13.08			
ATT3	0.54	7.99			
ATT4	0.79	12.38			
<b>Message appeal (MA)</b>			.86	.86	.47
MA1	0.62				
MA2	0.76	8.80			
MA3	0.53	6.73			
MA4	0.65	7.90			
MA5	0.67	8.04			
MA6	0.74	8.72			
MA7	0.80	9.14			
<b>Congruency (CONG)</b>			.89	.89	.67
CONGR1	0.84				
CONGR2	0.79	13.34			
CONGR3	0.78	13.14			
CONGR4	0.86	15.16			
<b>Purchase intention (PI)</b>			.71	.73	.47
PI1	0.80				
PI2	0.70	8.07			
PI3	0.55	6.85			

*Note:*  $N = 216$ , Fit indices: Chi-square (129) = 208.477,  $p = .000$ ; Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.907; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.877; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .979; Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = 0.104; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.0534

### 4.3. Correlation and Discriminant Validity

Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, square root of the AVE and significant correlations that were found amongst the study variables.

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to find the relationships between different variables. The variables investigated included one control variable, one attribute-based variable, one outcome variable, and two demographic variables. In order to perform correlation analysis and hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the demographic variable of gender was firstly recoded into dummy variables using the values 0 and 1 (i.e. male = 0, female = 1). The attributes variable (congruency between endorser and brand) was positively related to the dependent variable (purchase intention). More specifically, congruency was strongly correlated with customers' purchase intentions ( $r = .40$ ). Age was significantly and positively correlated with the outcome variable ( $r = .17$ ), but gender showed an insignificant correlation with purchase intention ( $r = -.11$ ).

**Table 4: Mean, standard deviation, and correlation**

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Age	30.07	6.49						
2.Gender	0.60	.49	-.10					
3.ATT	5.37	1.06	-.03	-.03	<b>.75</b>			
4.MA	4.37	1.25	.12	-.09	.06	<b>.69</b>		
5.CONGR	5.20	1.19	.17*	-.05	.65**	.079	<b>.82</b>	
6.PI	5.65	.88	.17*	-.11	.40**	.059	.43**	<b>.69</b>

Note: Listwise N=216, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , ATT = Attitude towards celebrity endorser, MA = Message appeal, CONG = Congruency, PI = Purchase intention. Square root of AVE is in diagonal, in bold.

Construct convergent validity is evident in Table 4 data. Morosan (2014) and Zait and Berteau (2011) introduced a method to test the discriminant validity by contrasting the square root of the AVE value of a construct with its corresponding inter-constructed correlations. Discriminant validity was evidenced when the square root of the AVE

value surpassed all of the correlations with the construct. All of the study constructs were shown to have discriminant validity.

#### 4.4. Hypothesis Testing

Before the hypothesis testing, a *t*-test was performed to check the manipulation of message appealing types and the congruency levels. The result showed that the hard-sell advertisement was statistically higher than the soft-sell advertisement in terms of message appeal ( $M_{hard-sell} = 5.16$ ,  $M_{soft-sell} = 3.56$ ,  $p = .000$ ), which shows successful manipulation of message appealing. Congruency between the endorser and the brand for Endorser A was 5.69, which is significantly higher than that for Endorser B (4.70), which was significant at the .000 level.

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the predictive power of the attribute variable (congruency between celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand) on customers' purchase intentions, after controlling for the influence of demographic variables and customers' attitudes toward the celebrity endorser. Age, gender and respondents' attitudes toward the endorser were entered at step 1, explaining 19.7% of the variance in purchase intention. Beta values for age and respondents' attitudes toward the endorser were statistically significant, with respondents' attitudes toward the endorser recording the highest beta value ( $\beta = .399$ ,  $p < .01$ ), followed by age ( $\beta = .176$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (Table 5).

**Table 5: Multiple regression results of hypotheses testing**

Step	PI		
	1	2	3
<b>Beta</b>			
AGE	.176**	.131*	.130*
GEN	-.081	-.078	-.080
ATT	.399**	.239**	.222**
MA		.002	-.035
CONGRUENCY		.244**	.252**
CONGRUENCY x MA			.150*
<b>R<sub>2</sub></b>	.197	.230	.251
<b>Δ R<sub>2</sub></b>		.033	.021
<b>Δ F</b>		4.455*	5.863*
<b>df</b>		2, 210	1, 209

Note: Listwise  $N=216$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ,  $\Delta R_2$  = R-squared change,  $\Delta F = F$  change; ATT = Attitude towards celebrity endorser, MA = Message appeal, CONG = Congruency, PI = Purchase intention.

Once the endorser-brand congruency and message appealing were entered in step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 23%, increased by 3.3%,  $\Delta F(2,210) = 4.455, p < .05$ . Endorser-brand congruency was statistically significant ( $\beta = .244, p < .01$ ), while respondents' perceptions of message appealing types was not ( $\beta = .002, p > .05$ ). Therefore, the hypothetical relationship (H1) between endorser-brand congruency and purchase intention was supported.

The interaction variable between congruency and message appealing (CONGRUENCY x MA) was entered at step 3 as an indicator variable. The final model explained 25.1% of the variance in purchase intention. Message appeal had significant positive moderating effect on the relationship between endorser-brand congruency and purchase intention ( $\beta = .150, p < .05$ ). Hence, the hypothesis (H2) in

relation to the moderation role of message appeal on the relationship between endorser-brand congruency and purchase intention was supported.

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION**

This study was inspired by the emerging trend of sharing accommodation businesses in the hospitality industry. The study also attempted to fill a gap in the literature on hospitality marketing and advertising research. The proposed research model has extended the findings of previous studies by introducing a moderator to the congruency-purchase intention relationship. In this chapter, the major implications of the findings for industry practitioners are presented. Finally, the limitations of this study and directions for future research are discussed.

The results of the hypothesis testing showed that a positive relationship between endorser-brand congruency and customers' purchase intentions exists. Perceived high endorser-brand congruency was found to increase purchase intention.

The results also showed that message appeal has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between endorser-brand congruency and purchase intention.

Moreover, the hard-sell appeal advertisement was found to strengthen the effect of endorser-brand congruency on customers' purchase intentions.

In summary, the proposed research model explains approximately 25% of the total variance in purchase intention, which may add to the validation of congruency theory in the hospitality advertising context and lend support to the extended research model.

### **5.1. Research Implications**

This dissertation makes several research contributions. Firstly, the study aimed to test the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in a newly emerged hospitality context: the sharing accommodation industry. The role of celebrity endorsement has been repeatedly studied in the broader marketing context (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Nanda & Khandelwal, 2017), but relatively little attention has been paid to the same topic in the hospitality context (Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018; Yang, 2018). Moreover, to the author's best knowledge, no similar study has been conducted in the sharing

accommodation context in China. Sharing accommodation as a new business model has differentiated itself from traditional hotels (Liu & Mattila, 2017). Customers' consumption behaviours on sharing accommodation platforms are affected by the nature of the sharing economy (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016; Möhlmann, 2015; Tussyadiah, 2016). Previous studies reported that empirical studies on the same theory may obtain different results because of the different study context (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Hence, this study extends knowledge about celebrity endorsement's efficiency in a new context, the sharing accommodation industry, and provides insights to stimulate further research.

Secondly, the current study supports the efficiency of endorser-brand congruency theory in a hospitality advertising context. In previous studies, the positive effect of endorser-brand congruency on customers' purchase intention had not gained much support (Bergkvist & Zou, 2016; Nanda & Khandelwal, 2017). Seiler and Kucza (2017) even argued that congruency will generate negative economic outcomes. However, the different results between the studies of Choi and Rifon (2012) and Xu and Pratt (2018) revealed the different effectiveness of congruency theory in the goods market and the service market. The results of the present study are aligned with the conclusion of Xu and Pratt (2018), that higher endorser-brand congruency leads to higher purchase intention in hospitality advertising. Hence, this study contributes to enhancing the understanding of congruency theory and hospitality advertising simultaneously.

One of the most important theoretical contributions of this study is to adopt message appeal as a moderator and confirm the moderating effect of this variable. In contrast with the work of Wang, Kim, and Agrusa (2018), firstly, the results of this study show that message appeal has no direct effect on customers' hospitality consumption behaviours. One possible explanation is that differences exist between destination marketing and sharing accommodation brand promotion. The results of this study show that message appeal plays different roles in different consumption processes. Secondly, the results show that when endorser-brand congruency is perceived by

customers, a hard-sell appeal advertisement will strengthen the positive effect of congruency on customers' purchase intentions for sharing accommodation brands. This study is the first to examine the moderating role of message appeal for sharing accommodation brands advertising. Therefore, it expands the understanding of message appeal's effect from both theoretical and empirical perspectives.

This study also adds to the understanding of the effect of customers' attitudes towards the celebrity endorser. Firstly, according to Ranjbarian, Shekarchizade and Momeni (2010), customers' attitudes to a celebrity endorser have no significant impact on their purchase intentions. Conversely, Kumar and Kumar (2015) confirmed that customers' attitudes to a celebrity endorser have significant influence on the purchase intention. The current study supports the conclusion of Kumar and Kumar (2015) and expands it to a hospitality context. Secondly, the current study also shows that, regardless of the customer's attitude to the endorser, endorser-brand congruency is still significantly related to the customer's purchase intentions. To the author's best knowledge, no previous study has adopted customer attitude towards a celebrity endorser as a control variable. Hence, this study theoretically and empirically expands the understanding of customer attitude to the celebrity endorser in hospitality advertising.

The final theoretical contribution of this study is the examination of how demographic characteristics of customers affect their purchase intentions after watching an endorsed advertisement. The result shows that when promoting a sharing accommodation brand using celebrity endorsement, customer age matters, but gender does not. Previous studies argued that customer gender may influence the effect of endorsement (Phua & Lim, 2018). This study does not support this finding. In the current study's context, it was found that a customer's gender has no significant effect on their purchase intentions. Rather, this study illustrates that customer age is an important factor; older customers have stronger purchase intentions based on the endorsed advertisement. One plausible explanation for this finding is that when Chinese customers become older, they will be more rational and place more value on

endorser-brand congruency shown in the advertisement. This implication gives insights into the importance of customers' demographic characteristics.

## **5.2. Practical Implications**

Three important practical implications emanate from this dissertation. First, when promoting a sharing accommodation brand with celebrity endorsement, marketers should pay close attention to endorser-brand congruency. A celebrity endorser who is well-matched to the endorsed brand can increase customers' purchase intentions. For example, an enthusiastic and outgoing celebrity endorser is appropriate to a sharing accommodation brand that encourages a novel and exploring spirit. On the other hand, a celebrity whose public image is a good husband or wife, is suitable for a sharing accommodation brand targeting customers travelling with families.

Another important practical implication suggests that when a good fit between the endorser and the brand exists, marketers should also consider adopting hard-sell appeal in their advertisements to strengthen the congruency effect. It is worth noting that no matter the type of appeal, hard-sell or soft-sell, when endorser-brand congruency is not strong, it has no significant effect on increasing customers' purchase intentions. Hard-sell appeal advertisements will strengthen the positive effect of celebrity endorsement only when there is a good match between the celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand. Hence, for promoting a sharing accommodation brand with celebrity endorsement, marketers should adopt the more efficient method of firstly choosing a celebrity who matches the brand's image, and secondly, using a hard-sell appeal for the advertisement.

Lastly, the current study shows that if customers hold a positive attitude to a celebrity endorser, they will have positive purchase intentions. Hence, this study suggests that if there are several celebrity candidates who are well matched to the brand's image, the one who is most favourable to the customers should be chosen to be the endorser.

### **5.3. Limitations and Direction for Future Studies**

Although this study contributes to the literature by addressing some important issues, it also has some limitations. First, this study tested endorser-brand congruency only, excluding other aspects of congruency theory. For a more comprehensive understanding of congruency theory, further empirical studies could be conducted to test endorser-customer congruency and brand-customer congruency theory.

The current study was undertaken in a Chinese context; subsequent studies should be extended to other cultures and societies to enhance generalisability. Moreover, following Wang, Kim and Agrusa's (2018) suggestion, demographic factors such as customers' education, income, and occupation, are important factors that may affect customers' consumption behaviours. Demographic questions were limited to age and gender, so other demographic factors should be taken into account for future studies. In addition, the majority of respondents were under 36 years old (84.7%). According to Trustdata (2019), 83% of the online short-term rental users are under 36 years old. Therefore, the inferences from such a sample can be generalisable to the population. However, the results show that age is statistically significant for the outcome variables. Hence, future studies should pay more attention to older age groups to mitigate the sample bias to the greatest extent.

Finally, this study adopted the experimental method and incorporated four scenarios with two male celebrities and two types of stimuli-presenting modes (literal and pictorial). Advertising strategies have become much more sophisticated and heterogeneous, so other scenarios such as those including female celebrities, social media influencers, as well as audio and video modes should also be considered for future studies.

### **5.4. Conclusion**

In summary, this dissertation explored the effectiveness of using celebrity endorsement in the Chinese sharing accommodation market. In particular, Chinese customers' perceptions of the congruency between celebrity endorsers and the

endorsed brands, and how this congruency affects Chinese customers' purchase intentions were tested. The findings of the study extend knowledge about congruency theory and expand the research field to a newly emerged hospitality sector; the sharing accommodation industry. Moreover, message appeal was considered and confirmed to be an important moderator in the research model. Hard-sell appeal was proven to have a positive effect on the relationship between endorse-brand congruency and customers' purchase intentions. Practical implications to marketers for selecting appropriate endorsers and advertising appeal were also provided in the study. Continued research effort should be made in this academic field since the service market is complex and ever-changing.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL



### Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH)

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

11 September 2019

BeomCheol (Peter) Kim  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear BeomCheol (Peter)

Ethics Application: 19/323 **Celebrity endorsement in the sharing accommodation industry in China: The impact of message appeal**

I wish to advise you that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH) has **approved** your ethics application.

This approval is for three years, expiring 10 September 2022.

#### Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. On all participant facing material please ensure the current AUT logo is used.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTECH before commencing your study.

#### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted. When the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all ethical, legal, and locality obligations or requirements for those jurisdictions.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz). The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: [gjk1016@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:gjk1016@autuni.ac.nz); [chloeskim60@gmail.com](mailto:chloeskim60@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX B: TOOLS

### B.a Questionnaire (English)

The survey will be based entirely on voluntary principles and will be conducted on an anonymous basis and will not collect your personal information. By filling out this questionnaire, you will be deemed to have agreed to participate in this survey.

Your survey will be stopped, if your answer **No** to any of these three following questions. If you answer **Yes** to all of the following questions, you will be able to continue this survey.

#### Please select an answer for the following questions

1. Are you at least 18 years of age?

- Yes
- No

2. Do you know the brand and industry for the trademark as below?



- Yes
- No

3. Do you know the person in the photo as below? (Photo displays followed the advertisement in Question 6)



Yes

No

**It is recommended that the mobile phone user display the following questionnaire in landscape mode. The smaller the value of the option you choose, the more you agree with the statement on the left side of the option. The higher the value of the option, the more you agree with the statement on the right side of the option.**

4. Please select the extent of your attitude toward the celebrity.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	Good						
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable						
Boring	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting						
Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	Pleasant						

**Please read the following information carefully.**

**Airbnb**

Global leading sharing accommodation online booking platform.

**Peng Yuyan (Displayed followed the advertisement)**

Famous Chinese actor with westernized character.

**Li Dan (Displayed followed the advertisement)**

Famous Chinese talk-show actor.

**Please take a moment to read the advertisement, then answer question 5 and question 6 based on your perception of the advertisement and the given information. (Four advertisements are randomly displayed.)**

**“Airbnb x Peng Yuyan, let’s live there”**

Peng Yuyan, grew up in Canada, returned to China and becomes a well-known actor. He has both the humility of the East and the enthusiasm of the West. He is synonymous with curiosity and exploration. He is an explorer who travels all over the world.

Airbnb, rooted in the United States, and develops to a leading brand in the global sharing accommodation market. More than 6 million unique places for you to stay are on Airbnb from more than 100,000 cities in more than 191 countries. Airbnb entered the Chinese market in 2015, aiming to build a community which provides a local, authentic, diverse, inclusive and sustainable way to travel. Airbnb offers travelers unique accommodation options and unprecedented travel experiences.

Airbnb x Peng Yuyan, 6 million sharing homes in 191 countries for you.



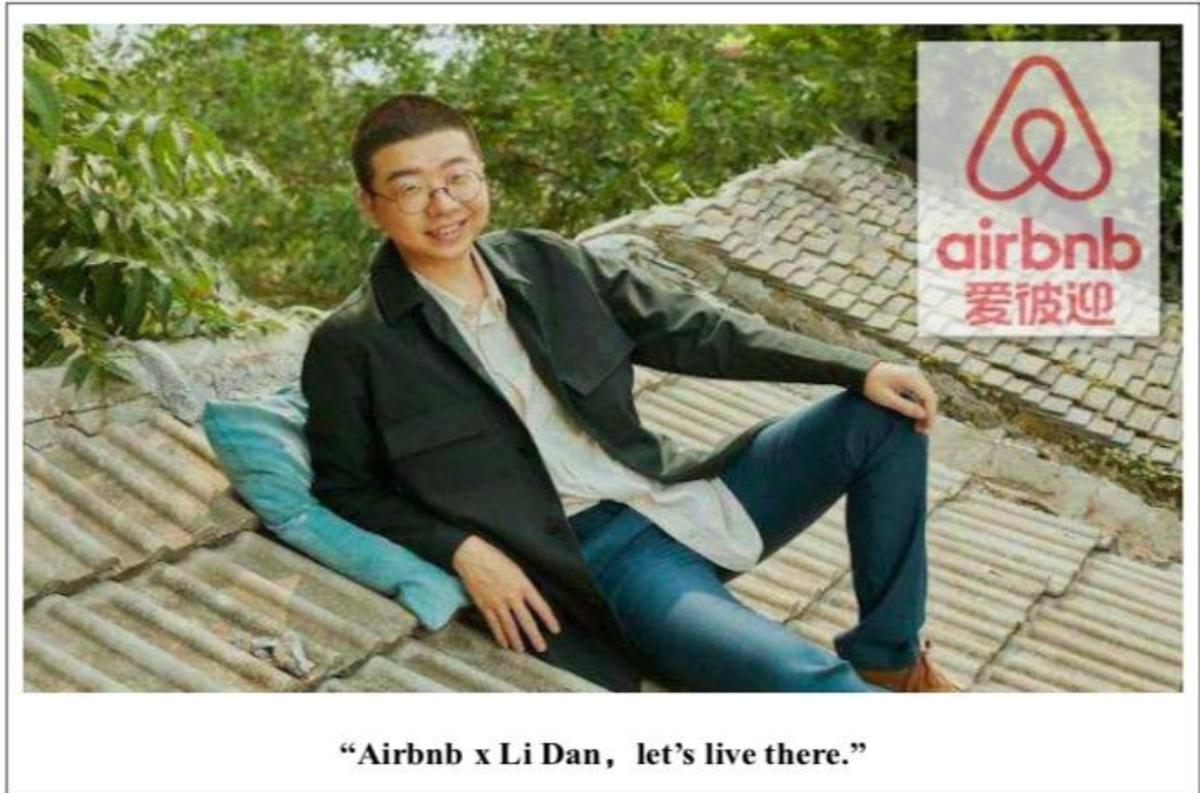
**“Airbnb x Peng Yuyan, let’s live there.”**

**“Airbnb x Li Dan, let’s live there”**

Li Dan was born in Xilin Gol, Inner Mongolia. He is a famous Chinese talk show actor, screenwriter, curator and writer. He is both a young artist and a master comedian. He is synonymous with humor and talent. He is the leader of the Chinese talk show industry.

Airbnb, rooted in the United States, and develops to a leading brand in the global sharing accommodation market. More than 6 million unique places for you to stay are on Airbnb from more than 100,000 cities in more than 191 countries. Airbnb entered the Chinese market in 2015, aiming to build a community which provides a local, authentic, diverse, inclusive and sustainable way to travel. Airbnb offers travelers unique accommodation options and unprecedented travel experiences.

Airbnb x Li Dan, 6 million sharing homes in 191 countries for you.



5. Please select the extent of your perceptions of the **message appeal** of this advertisement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Instinctive	<input type="radio"/>	Logical						
Abstract	<input type="radio"/>	Factual						
Insinuation	<input type="radio"/>	Explanation						
Appealing	<input type="radio"/>	Convincing						
Subjective	<input type="radio"/>	Persuasion						
Expressive	<input type="radio"/>	Instructive						
Impression-based	<input type="radio"/>	Evidence-based						

6. Please select the extent of your perceived **congruency** between the celebrity endorser and the brand.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not compatible	<input type="radio"/>	Compatible						
Bad fit	<input type="radio"/>	Good fit						
Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant						
Bad match	<input type="radio"/>	Good Match						

**Please answer question 7 by imagining that you are booking a sharing accommodation after you read the above advertisement.**

7. Please select the extent of your agreement with the following statements.

**“Next time I go on a trip, I will choose the advertised brand.”**

Extremely unlikely	Neutral				Extremely likely	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>						

**“It is likely that this brand would be my first choice when considering booking a sharing accommodation.”**

Extremely unlikely	Neutral				Extremely likely	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>						

**“I will not use another online sharing accommodation brand if I can use the advertised brand.”**

Extremely unlikely		Neutral			Extremely likely	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>						

## B.b Questionnaire (Chinese)

此次问卷调查将完全基于自愿的原则，在匿名的基础上进行，不会收集您的个人信息。填写此问卷将视作您同意参与此次问卷调查。

如果您对以下三个问题中的任何一个回答为“否”，您的调查将停止。如果您对以下所有问题的回答均为“是”，则可以继续进行此调查。

### 请为以下问题选择答案

1. 您已满 18 岁了吗？

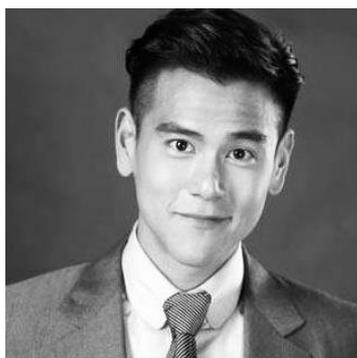
- 是
- 否

2. 您是否知道下方商标所属的品牌和行业？



- 是
- 否

3. 您是否知道下方照片中的人？(照片跟随广告显示)



- 是
- 否

**建议手机用户横屏显示以下问卷。您所选的选项数值越小表明您越同意选项左侧的说法，选项数值越大表明您越同意选项右侧的说法。**

4. 请选择您对该明星的态度

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
没好感	<input type="radio"/>	好感						
不欣赏	<input type="radio"/>	欣赏						
无聊	<input type="radio"/>	有趣						
不令人愉悦	<input type="radio"/>	令人愉悦						

请充分仔细阅读以下信息。

**爱彼迎**

全球领先民宿在线预订平台。

**彭于晏 (跟随广告显示)**

国际范知名中国演员。

**李诞 (跟随广告显示)**

知名中国脱口秀演员。

请充分仔细阅读以下广告，然后根据您对该广告的看法回答问题 5 - 6。（四幅广告随机显示）

**“爱彼迎 x 彭于晏，住进全世界”**

彭于晏，在加拿大长大，归国后成为实力演技派的知名演员。他既有东方的谦逊踏实，又有西方的奔放热情。他是好奇心与探索的代名词。他是行走全世界的旅行达人。

爱彼迎，成立于 2008 年 8 月，总部位于美国旧金山，全球短租领域领军者。爱彼迎住宿市场上的 600 多万间独特房源来自超过 191 个国家和地区的 100,000 余座城市。2015 年进军中国市场，旨在构建一个家在四方的社区，提供本土化、真实、多元、包容和可持续的健康旅行方式。爱彼迎为旅行者们提供独特的入住选择和前所未有的体验机会。

爱彼迎携手彭于晏，在全球 191 个国家，给你 600 万个家。



“爱彼迎 x 彭于晏，带你住进全世界。”

#### “爱彼迎 x 李诞，住进全世界”

李诞，出生于内蒙古锡林郭勒，中国内地男演员、脱口秀演员、编剧、策划人、作家。他既是文艺青年，又是吐槽高手。他是幽默与才华的代名词。他是中国脱口秀行业的领头人。

爱彼迎，成立于2008年8月，总部位于美国旧金山，全球短租领域领军者。爱彼迎住宿市场上的600多万间独特房源来自超过191个国家和地区的100,000余座城市。2015年进军中国市场，旨在构建一个家在四方的社区，提供本土化、真实、多元、包容和可持续的健康旅行方式。爱彼迎为旅行者提供独特的入住选择和前所未有的体验机会。

爱彼迎携手李诞，在全球191个国家，给你600万个家。



5. 对于这则**广告**的**呈现方式**，请选择您的看法

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
情感主导的	<input type="radio"/>	逻辑推导的						
充满想象的	<input type="radio"/>	陈述事实的						
隐晦的	<input type="radio"/>	阐述详细的						
令人心动的	<input type="radio"/>	令人信服的						
主观的	<input type="radio"/>	客观的						
表达感受的	<input type="radio"/>	描述实物的						
以印象为主的	<input type="radio"/>	以证据为主的						

6. 对于该明星与该品牌之间的**契合度**，请选择您的看法

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
不匹配的	<input type="radio"/>	匹配的						
不兼容的	<input type="radio"/>	兼容的						
不相关的	<input type="radio"/>	相关的						
不合适的	<input type="radio"/>	合适的						

请想象您在观看上方广告后正在预订共享住宿，并请回答问题 7。

7. 对于以下三个陈述，请选择您的同意程度

**“下次旅行需要住宿时，我会选择去该品牌预订。”**

极不可能			中立			极可能
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>						

**“当我选择预订民宿时，该品牌会是我的首选。”**

极不可能			中立			极可能
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>						

**“如果该品牌上有可供我选择的民宿，我就不会选择在别的品牌预订民宿。”**

极不可能			中立			极可能
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>						

### **B.c Demographic Questions (English)**

1. Please select your gender.

Male

Female

2. Please state your age.

\_\_\_\_\_ years old

3. Please indicate the number of times you stayed in a commercial accommodation (including all kinds of hotels, motels, serviced apartments, etc.) for a trip you made in the past year.

None

1-3

4-6

Above 6

4. Please indicate the number of choosing sharing accommodations (e.g. short-term rentals, homestays, short-term rental apartments, daily rentals, serviced apartments, etc.) when you made a trip in the past year.

None

1-3

4-6

Above 6

5. If you take a trip staying in a sharing accommodation in the future, what would be the purpose of your future travel?

- Leisure

- Business

6. If you take a trip staying in a sharing accommodation in the future, how many people will be in your future travel?

- Alone

- With another person

- With two more people

- With more than two people

## B.d Demographic Questions (Chinese)

### 请回答以下基本信息问题

1. 请选择您的性别

- 男
- 女

2. 请填写您的年龄

\_\_\_\_\_岁

3. 请选择您在过去一年内出行时选择了商业住宿（包括所有各式酒店、汽车旅馆、酒店式公寓和民宿等）的次数

- 没有
- 1-3 次
- 4-6 次
- 6 次以上

4. 请选择您在过去一年内出行时选择了共享住宿（如短租房、民宿、短租公寓、日租房、酒店式公寓等）的次数

- 没有
- 1-3 次
- 4-6 次
- 6 次以上

5. 如果您计划下一次出行将入住共享住宿，请问您的出行目的会是以下选项的哪一个？

- 休闲度假
- 商务

6. 如果您计划下一次出行将入住共享住宿，请问会有多少人同行？

- 独自
- 两个人
- 三个人
- 四个人或者以上

## **B.e Participant Information Sheet (English)**

27 August 2019

Dear participant,

My name is Jiamin Zhou, and I am a Master's student, studying International Hospitality Management at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in New Zealand. I am currently undertaking a research project concerning customers' perceptions of celebrity endorsement for sharing accommodation brands in the Chinese market. The project is for the dissertation that I am writing to complete my qualification.

The research aims to understand the effect of celebrity endorsement for sharing accommodation brands Airbnb. The results will contribute to knowledge of sharing accommodation advertising, and provide hospitality organisations with insights into how to develop effective marketing strategies.

I cordially invite you to participate in this 5-7 minute survey and thank you in advance for your understanding and support for my study.

Completion of the anonymous questionnaire indicates your consent to participate.

You are able to withdraw from the study at any time (however, because it is anonymous, your data won't be withdrawn). You will be directed to the questionnaire once you agree to participate in this study by clicking the link in the email invitation.

Then you will be asked to read an advertisement and indicate your attitude towards the advertisement, the celebrity endorser and the endorsed brand. Your contact details and personal information will be held by the panel provider SOJUMP and will not be shared with any third party. Your responses to the questions will be used for academic research only. The research outcomes will be available on the website of New Zealand Tourism Research Institute <http://www.nztri.org> by December 2019. You are welcome to visit the website and view the research findings.

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Associate Professor Peter BeomCheol Kim, [pkim@aut.ac.nz](mailto:pkim@aut.ac.nz); Tel: +64 921 9999 ext 6105. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), Tel: +64 921 9999 ext 6038.

For any further information about this project, please feel free to contact the researcher: Jiamin Zhou, [gjk1016@aut.ac.nz](mailto:gjk1016@aut.ac.nz) or the primary supervisor, Associate Professor Peter BeomCheol Kim, [pkim@aut.ac.nz](mailto:pkim@aut.ac.nz).

If you are willing to be a part of the questionnaire survey, please complete the online questionnaire within 5 working days. Thank you for your support.

## **B.f Participant Information Sheet (Chinese)**

2019 年 8 月 27 日

亲爱的参与者：

我是周珈敏，就读于新西兰奥克兰理工大学酒店管理专业硕士学位。由于毕业论文和学位的需要，目前我正在进行一项关于“消费者对共享住宿品牌使用明星代言的看法”的调查研究。

这次研究的主要目的是为了共享住宿品牌（如爱彼迎、蚂蚁短租）使用明星代言的效应。研究的结果将有助于加深对共享住宿行业广告营销的了解，并为共享住宿品牌提供如何制定有效营销策略的见解。

我诚挚地邀请您参与这个费时 5 到 7 分钟的问卷调查。感谢您对我的学习的理解和支持。

完成本次匿名问卷将视作您同意参与此次问卷调查。在填写过程中，您可以随时退出此次问卷调查。但由于这是匿名问卷，您已提交的信息将不会被撤回。

一旦您通过点击电子邮件邀请中的链接参与到此次问卷中，您将会阅读问卷的操作提示。在阅读广告信息后，您可根据问题表明您对该广告、该明星代言人以及该品牌的看法。问卷星持有您的联系方式和个人信息，并保证不会泄露给任何第三方。本次问卷所有资料只用于本次课题研究，研究的结果将在 2019 年 12 月公布于新西兰旅游研究机构的网站：<http://www.nztri.org>。欢迎您上网浏览和查看结果。

如果您对此课题本质有任何疑问，欢迎与项目负责人/第一导师 Dr. Peter BeomCheol Kim 博士联系，邮箱： [pkim@aut.ac.nz](mailto:pkim@aut.ac.nz); 电话: +64 921 9999 转 6105。 对此次调查的执行有任何疑问请联系 AUTEK 执行秘书 Kate O'Connor, 邮箱： [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), Tel: +64 921 9999 转 6038。

如果您想进一步了解此次课题，欢迎联系课题调研人：周珈敏（邮箱：[gjk1016@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:gjk1016@autuni.ac.nz)）和她的第一导师：Dr. Peter BeomCheol Kim （邮箱：[pkim@aut.ac.nz](mailto:pkim@aut.ac.nz)）。

如果您愿意加入问卷调查，请于五个工作日内完成在线问卷。

再次感谢您对本人的学习和工作的支持!