THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ADVERTISING/PUBLIC RELATIONS

BRAND PERSONALITIES OF SHARING ECONOMY COMPANIES:
A STUDY OF AIRBNB AND UBER

KEVIN KELLEY
SPRING 2017

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for baccalaureate degrees
in Advertising/Public Relations and English
with honors in Advertising/Public Relations

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

George Anghelcev
Associate Professor of Advertising/Public Relations
Thesis Supervisor

Susan Strohm
Senior Lecturer of Advertising/Public Relations
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.
ABSTRACT

This research investigated brand personalities of two sharing economy companies, Airbnb and Uber. Understanding how college students perceive the brand personalities of Airbnb and Uber helped to develop a set of recommendations these companies might consider. Since brand personality influences consumers’ opinions, brands which project a personality that both connects to the product’s features and to their desired audience can help create a relationship.

Focus groups were used, with the research consisting of two focus groups – one about Airbnb and one about Uber. The findings revealed that participants’ views of sharing economy companies matched four dimensions of Aaker’s (1997) brand personality model. For Airbnb and Uber, excitement and competence were the most applicable dimensions. Participants revealed that the unique features Airbnb and Uber influenced their positive perception of these two dimensions. Results from this study suggest effective brand personalities for the future of the sharing economy, and large marketplace studies could further study this research.
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I would like to thank Professor George Anghelcev for all of his assistance as I completed this thesis. You helped me figure out exactly what I wanted to study, and you’ve always had advice on how to make my thesis stronger. Anytime I’ve had a question or was stuck on what direction to go, you provided great guidance. If it were not for you, I would not have finished the thesis.

I would also like to thank Susan Strohm for her help as my honors advisor for the past two years. In addition, my advertising campaign for your COMM 424 class helped me realize my interest in sharing economy companies. Thank you for taking the time out to review my thesis.

Lastly, thank you to all the participants in my focus group, my parents, my Spotify library of music, coffee, and moments of clarity when writing.
INTRODUCTION

Brand personality and sharing economy companies are the central concepts of this thesis. Brand personality is the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. The idea of brand personality originated from a branch of relationship marketing, which alleged that consumers relate to brands similarly to how they relate to humans. Simply stated, brand personality is the way the brand ‘talks.’ Researchers have found that people talk about exciting or boring brands similarly to how they talk about exciting or boring people. A brand’s communication to the public helps to shape brand personality. A successful brand personality will lead consumers to understand the brand better and to create potential emotional attachments to the brand.

Sharing economy companies structure its business model around the peer-to-peer sharing of goods or services. These companies do not own the goods or services available for rental on its website or app. Instead, they act as an intermediary between the ‘prosumer’ (jobs like the Airbnb hosts or the Uber drivers) and the purchasing consumer. These companies have developed through the use of recommendations, the implementation of a rating system, and growth of technology. Companies that fit underneath the definition of sharing economy companies include eBay, Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, and Indiegogo. Sharing economy companies with a successful brand personality can build relationships with new users. Given the nature of sharing economy companies, consumers must purchase the service without any previous trial. To overcome this potential hurdle, the brand must develop trust and connection with the consumer.

The use of focus groups helps gain insight into individuals’ thoughts and attitudes. Uber and Airbnb were chosen due to its successful position in its industries. These two focus groups work to understand perceptions of brand personality better within sharing economy companies.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand personality

Description of brand personality

Brand personality is defined as the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker 1997). Consumers connect to the brand personality, as it is the ‘human’ component of a product (Ilicic and Webster 2014). The traits within a particular brand personality tend to be distinct, with many brand personalities replicating the identities of its target audience (Ahn and Chung 2013). For example, the personality traits of Mac computers are imaginative and stylish, which helps set the brand apart from competitors as well as relate to young creative professionals. Brand personality influences and drives the creation of a brand image, which can augment a product’s value positively or negatively (Niros and Pollalis 2014). Consumers will assess the brand personality in deciding whether to build a relationship with the product or not.

Research developed the concept of brand personality several decades ago, when studies revealed that characterization could describe elements of a brand (Plummer 1984). This research into brand personality gained momentum after the publication of Aaker’s (1997) study “Dimensions of Brand Personality.” Both academic and commercial brand personality research have heavily referenced Aaker’s (1997) study (Emile and Lee 2012).

Jennifer Aaker’s “Dimensions of Brand Personality”

Aaker (1997) wanted to see if brands indeed have a human-like personality. Furthermore, Aaker (1997) considered if using a Big Five-like model could measure a wide variety of brands. The Big Five, a model originated in psychology, contends that there are five core traits within
human personality (Aaker 1997). Aaker (1997) reasoned that since consumers imbued brands with human personality traits, there was a strong association between human personality and brand personality. In addition, she found that existing brand personality models were not helpful in measuring dimensions effectively (Aaker 1997). After running a series of surveys, Aaker (1997) created a scale with five dimensions to measure brand personality.

Aaker (1997) discovered that the Big Five dimensions for brand personalities are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Underneath these dimensions, there are sets of traits that designate these further. For example, under the dimension of sincerity, the personality characteristics are “down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful” (Aaker 1997). This scale is now used to investigate the current status of a brand, to find its desired future status, and to compare across categories to identify “benchmark” brands (Emile and Lee 2012).

**Figure #1: Aaker’s model**

![Brand Personality Diagram](http://iqreport.develop.mediarain.com/img/chapters/img_brand_personality_Ch2.jpg)

Aaker (1997) initially argued that the robust differences in culture might not influence brand personality. Aaker (1997), however, investigated brand personality solely in the American
context, an element that other researchers have criticized. In a later paper that continued this brand personality research, Aaker and other researchers revealed two brand personality dimensions particular to a specific country (Johar 2005). In Japan, individuals viewed brands as peaceful and, in Spain, individuals viewed brands as passionate (Johar 2005). This continuation of her brand personality research shows how models of brand personality may function differently depending on the criteria like geography, psychographics, and more.

**Antecedents of brand personality**

Trust, authenticity, and commitment are major elements that are necessary for consumers to connect to the brand personality (Niros and Pollalis 2014). Trust in relationship marketing is defined as confidence that the other party would not do something harmful or risky (Brink and Berndt 2009). For instance, in a study on relationship marketing that studied automobile tire retailers, Morgan and Hunt (1994) found trust to be a key variable in influencing the success of the relationship to the brand. In contrast, a significant obstacle to the creation of relationships with brands is the lack of trust (Sherman 1992). Next, in the context of brands, authenticity is the consumer’s assessment of the brand’s genuineness in the relationship (Ilicic and Webster 2014). Consumers are constantly searching for brand authenticity in an increasingly homogenized marketplace (Thompson et. al 2006). In a study using both food products and electrical goods, Ilicic and Webster (2014) found authenticity to be a significant predictor of positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions even when trust was considered. Finally, commitment is the long-term desire to maintain a valued partnership (Brink and Berndt 2009). In designing an experiment around a new cellphone service provider, Fullerton (2003) argued that consumers feeling committed to the company might be willing to stay in the relationship and acquiesce to
certain price increases. All of these elements influence attachment, and favorable purchase intentions and brand commitment are linked to brand attachment (Ilicic and Webster 2014).

It is important for a brand personality to maintain trust, authenticity, and commitment, as good application of personality will benefit the brand while bad application can be harmful. For example, if a brand is perceived as having high integrity and reliable, it becomes associated with such qualities as consistent, competent, honest, responsible, helpful, and benevolent (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Inversely, if consumers feel the brand is untrusting or inauthentic, there is uncertainty towards using the brand in the future, which may encourage customers to use the brand less or to brand switch (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Niros and Pollalis 2014). It is this potential to help or to hinder that makes brand personality a key part of relationship marketing.

**Brand personality in building relationships**

Brand personality is a key component of relationship marketing. In all kind of relationships, relationships grow and alter due to the changing benefits the parties provide to one another (Fournier 1998). The dynamics in relationships between consumers and brands are not much different, as brand loyalty research has found that consumers use brands not just to benefit their livelihoods but also to give their lives meaning (Fournier 1998). Initiating this relationship with consumers, however, can prove difficult. As mentioned earlier, it is important for the consumers to trust the brand, to feel committed to the brand, and to feel that brand is authentic. Furthermore, a brand must continuously work to maintain a good relationship with consumers (Fournier 1998). Fournier (1998) argued that interdependence between partners must be evident; that is, both partners must collectively define and redefine the relationship.
Brand relationship in the hotel and transportation industry literature

As service industries, hotels and taxis place customer satisfaction at a priority to sharpen competitive edge against rivals (Thongthip and Polyorat 2015). Successful usage of brand personality can benefit the service business by creating a higher perception of service quality and service value (Thongthip and Polyorat 2015). In studying the relationship between product quality and brand personality in US hotels, Tran et. al (2013) argued that companies should develop appropriate features to match the prominent dimensions of its brand personalities. This research emphasized the importance in paralleling brand personality to its brand quality. There is no current literature on taxis specifically; regardless, this research on the service industries should remain mostly relevant to the role of brand personality for transportation companies.

Reactions to Aaker’s “Dimensions of Brand Personality”

Scholars have revisited Aaker’s 1997 dimensions and have sought to analyze the accuracy of her model. Emile and Lee (2012) found substantive evidence in expanding Aaker’s model to include demographic-related characteristics, personal interests, and even recreational activities. These researchers concluded how consumers use brand and products to express more about themselves than the established set of five personality traits (Emile and Lee 2012). However, these two researchers conceded the uncertainty about this model’s theoretical or practical usage (Emile and Lee 2012). The benefit of Aaker’s model is in its concision, as she initially desired to create a Big Five model to be able to compare easily across product categories. Emile and Lee’s (2012) model faces problems in its complexity, mainly in the range of components that fit under categories of demographic or personal interests.

Geuens et. al (2009) criticized Aaker’s model and sought to tweak it. These researchers’
criticism towards Aaker’s model were Aaker’s loose definition of brand personality, the non-
generalizability of the factor structure, and the setbacks to these factors cross-culturally (Geuens
et. al 2009). Geuens et. al (2009) believed that Aaker’s model mixed up elements, particularly
how Aaker included socio-demographic characteristics, which Big Five researchers deliberately
exclude. Since sophistication and ruggedness are not Big Five dimensions, Geuens et. al (2009)
argued that a brand personality model could not include these traits. To these researchers,
frameworks become useless if the same measurement is not consistent across each of its
dimensions (Geuens et. al 2009). In their research, they ran focus groups where the participants
imagined the brand as a person and described the personality of brands (Geuens et. al 2009).
Through their research, they amended Aaker’s Big Five into the dimensions of “responsibility,
activity, aggressiveness, simplicity, and emotionally” (Geuens et. al 2009).

These two studies emphasize the importance in re-evaluating Aaker’s Big Five. For this
thesis, Aaker’s Big Five model is important to analyze, as her model was created when sharing
economy companies did not exist. Sharing economy companies possess features different from
traditional economy companies; it is potential that there are certain dimensions missing within
Aaker’s model that would be more representative of both sharing and traditional brands.

Sharing economy

The original economies of the world revolved around sharing between one another. When
the industrialization and the consumer revolution began, however, the number of ‘producers’
decreased. In the 21st century world, though, various factors – globalization, digital services, and
economic downturns – have led to the rise of sharing economy companies (Howard 2015). eBay
proved to be a model that consumer-to-consumer and business-to-consumer sales could work via
the Internet, as people learned to trust the services enough (Stein 2015). Furthermore, Stein (2015) argued that eBay needed to succeed and become commonplace for the American consumer to allow the rise of new sharing economies. In addition to eBay, Paypal made it safe to do business online, Apple to provide a reachable, findable consumer and for Facebook to prove people will be “relatively” honest online (Stein 2015). Besides these companies, however, other factors have made the sharing economy more desirable and more receptive to economic growth.

**Features prominent in sharing economy companies**

The type of companies that fit underneath the term ‘sharing economy’ is diverse. There is a wide range of business models that fit this categorization, spanning from purely social ventures to intensely commercial (Ure 2015). There are certain facets that sharing economy companies need for it to 1) work effectively and 2) to fit the definition of ‘sharing economy.’ One definition of the sharing economy is that this company uses a loop of assets, Internet, community, value and convenience (Stephany 2015). Despite differences in vocation or industry, these sharing economy companies use the Internet to connect buyers and sellers (Hill 2015). This technology makes it easier to share underutilized assets, leading to a reduced need of ownership (Stephany 2015). These sharing economy companies try to leverage these new platforms to pinpoint who is using what, where, and why (Hawthorne-Castro 2016). Without these digital technologies, the current state of the sharing economy would not exist.

Next, the ability to offer on-demand services, such as Uber’s availability in situations where taxis may not be present, helps these companies market its capabilities. Sharing economy companies need to possess a ‘value chain’ that proves more effective with today’s market than the more traditional offerings (Andjelic 2015). For instance, these sharing economy companies are influencing the emerging business models; companies are now focusing on providing
products-on-demand as a service versus selling them (Andjelic 2015). Another aspect is how these sharing economy companies revolve around ratings and trust, a feature prominently expanded from eBay’s system. In building an economy based on trust, it assumes that this reliability can be crowdsourced through consumers (PWC 2015). Instead of reviews from professionals or insiders, there is a switch to public user reviews (Hill 2015). As new competition comes to challenge the original sharing economy companies – like Lyft – there is an increased attention on branded experiences that drive emotional consumption (PWC 2015).

**Change in consumer attitudes**

A focus on renting has become more commonplace in American society, stemming primarily from the Great Recession of the late 2000s and early 2010s (PWC 2015). For 43% of consumers, “owning today” feels like a burden (PWC 2015). Instead of purchasing items solely for individual use, there’s a growing interest in renting. Four in five consumers agree that there are sometimes real advantages to renting over owning (PWC 2015). This shows an interest in access over ownership (PWC 2015). Besides economic reasons, utilizing the sharing economy presents a viable lifestyle change in terms of ownership for a large percentage of consumers.

Daryl Weber, the Director of Creative Strategy at Coca-Cola, believes this sharing economy reflects a different mentality – less consumerism, less materialism, and more of a community building approach (PWC 2015). Around 66% of consumers [77% of millennials] preferred a pared down lifestyle with fewer possessions (PWC 2015). Surveys, though, have underlined a divide of opinion between millennials [ages 18 to 34] and older generations. Most noticeably, this interest in sharing economy is at its highest with adults 18 to 24, who are nearly twice as likely as those ages 25 and older to say that access is the new ownership (PWC 2015). Overall, these changes in psychographics are fueling the growth in these sharing economy companies.
Another factor that has boosted interest in the sharing economy is a distrust of
corporations. Boston Consulting Group (2010) found that the majority of consumers in the US
and Europe and more than 40% of consumers in Japan said that the credit crunch increased their
distrust of big business (Stephany 2015). With this increasing distrust of large corporate
messaging, consumers use other means to find out about new brands. Nielsen’s 2012 study of 56
different countries discovered that 92% of consumers said they trusted word-of-mouth or
recommendations from their friends and family above all other forms of advertising (PWC
2015). This trust in their immediate network, however, does not necessarily expand to the public.
In fact, only 29% of consumers surveyed said they trust people more today than they did in the
past (PWC 2015). Thus, while the distrust of big business has helped the sharing economy to
grow, there are still potential issues with trust.

Mirroring the success of these companies, there has been a significant change in US
consumer in attitudes towards the sharing economy. About 44% of US consumers are currently
familiar with aspects of the sharing economy, with 19% of US adult population having engaged
in a sharing economy transaction (PWC 2015). Additionally, 78% of consumers agreed that the
sharing economy reduces clutter and waste (PWC 2015). Similar to opinions on the sharing
economy, there has been a divide in sharing economy usage between generations. In 2015,
38.9% of millennials used peer-to-peer ride service versus 7% for baby boom or 7.4% for pre-
baby boom (Francis-Cummings 2016). For those that have not tried it, younger millennials and
those with households with incomes between $50 thousand and $75 thousand are most excited
about trying the services of sharing economy companies (PWC 2015).
Growth in sharing economy

The sharing economy is growing significantly. Domestically, total revenues in the collaborative economy sector domestically were estimated at $3.5 billion in 2013, with a growth of 25% from 2012 (Forbes 2013). In the UK, the sector is expected to grow from £500 million to £9 billion over the next decade (Davidson 2016). By 2025, crowdfunding is predicted to reach $96 billion - half of which is expected to come from China (Knowles 2016). The sharing economy has excited the media, with The Economist proclaiming 2013 “The Year of Collaborative Consumption” (Howard 2015). Companies and writers have attempted to predict future growth for the sharing economy market. Rachel Botsman, in her book What’s Mine Is Yours, believed the person-to-person rental market alone is worth $23 billion (Andjelic 2014).

Globally, PwC claimed that while the current sharing economy in 2015 was worth approximately $15 billion, they projected five sharing sectors – travel, car sharing, finance, staffing and music/video streaming – to reach close to $335 billion in 10 years (PwC 2015). That’s a 2233% increase. These figures emphasize the predicted growth for sharing economy.

For several reasons, the sharing economy has been successful with consumers, with ‘prosumers’, and with the corporations themselves. Consumers have had an increased focus spending finances on experiences than products, as almost all happiness studies show that experience increases content (Stein 2015). Another way this sharing economy has been persuasive to consumers is the way it influences a desire for consumers to be more spontaneous. With a focus on the lifestyle and the choices made, these have contributed to an interest in experiential identity and, thus, the sharing economy (Andjelic 2015). The sharing economy has also lead to the growth of prosumers – individuals offering up their services for a sharing economy company, like driving for Uber or renting out their apartment on Airbnb. JP Morgan
reported that working for these sharing economy companies could boost income by up to 15% (Davidson 2016). In the US, it is estimated that 10.3 million people made money from the sharing economy during the period of Oct. 2012 to Aug. 2015, of which the number increased 47% over the course of those three years (Davidson 2016). In any given month, 2.5 million, or 1% of adults in the US, earned money from the sharing economy (Davidson 2016). Globally, Forbes estimated about $3.5 billion of revenue went to the prosumers in 2013 (Geron 2013).

**Uber and Airbnb**

Uber and Airbnb have distinguished its status from the majority of other sharing economy companies in its impact on its markets. An average of 425,000 people use Airbnb every night worldwide, and the company is valued at $13 billion, almost half as much as the 96-year-old Hilton Worldwide (Stein 2015). According to the Airbnb website, the service has more than 60,000,000 total guests, 34,000 cities, 191 countries, and 2,000,000 listings worldwide (Airbnb). This growth has led to a noticeable effect on the local hotel markets. In cities like London and New York, the number of Airbnb listings amount to about 17% of the city’s hotel listings (Knowles 2016). In a report on Airbnb’s impact on the Austin hotel market, Airbnb contributed to a lowering of hotel prices, which harms hotel revenue but benefits travelers (Zervas and Prospero 2016). Online peer-to-peer lodging companies could take up to a combined 20% market share of this sector within 10 years (Knowles 2016). Airbnb has helped utilize technology to bring a new set of products to the travel market (Zervas and Prospero 2016). In 2016, Airbnb’s branding focused on urging would-be travelers to think differently about their next trip. Its campaign “Live There” explores this concept through highlighting the diverse offerings that allow the traveler to feel more connected to the local community (Ting 2016).
Uber, founded in 2009 by Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp, is valued at $41.2 billion, one of the 150 biggest companies in the world—larger than Delta, FedEx or Viacom (Stein 2015). Uber’s offerings – quick, trackable taxi-like service at the click of the button – resonated with consumers wanting something more than the current offerings of an owned car, public transportation, or the taxi system. Interestingly, the number of cars bought by Americans ages 18 to 34 dropped from 16% in 2007 to 12% 2012 (Geron 2013). This statistic, coupled with Uber’s rise in popularity reflects a trend of not owning a car, but wanting to use the convenience of one. Uber’s current brand personality is to combine a focus on its high level of service with injections of wit – for example, in Mexico City, Uber used drones to advertise UberPool to drivers about how driving by themselves contributes to the smog problem (Kiefber 2016).

**Controversy and issues with Airbnb and Uber**

Though Airbnb and Uber’s growth has been swift, it has not gone without its hiccups; Stephany (2015) described Uber’s expansion as a “war”. Airbnb’s business model has faced legal challenges in cities like Berlin, New York City, and San Francisco (Ure 2015). In New York City, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a bill enforcing fines up to $7,500 on residents who sublet their entire homes for more than 30 days a year (Tigg 2016). In the areas where Uber operates, both domestically and internationally, there have been countless legal issues between the startup and the authorities. For example, in China, Uber experienced a multitude of issues in establishing its brand in the market. Eventually, it ended up being outright by the Chinese ride-sharing company Didi in a $35 billion deal (Kuo et. al 2016).

Regulations and taxations have remained a potential issue for expansion, particularly in terms of how these companies can enter into new regional markets. Furthermore, consumers have hesitations about the business model – 72% of consumers agree that the sharing economy is
not consistent and the 69% agree they do not trust the systems (PWC 2015). Tanz (2014) argued that companies like Uber and Airbnb expose customers (and the brand’s reputation) to a much higher potential risk. Airbnb learned this lesson the hard way during 2011’s infamous ransackgate incident when users stole furnishings from hosts. This issue made potential Airbnb hosts aware of all they might be risking by listing their home. Airbnb apologized for this incident, attempting to quell hosts’ fears by introducing its own insurance policy (Tanz 2014).

In 2017, issues for Airbnb and Uber have continued. For Airbnb, certain rental owners have not paid the “hotel tax” to their respective city governments (Roberts 2017). The resulting, secretive agreement between Airbnb and certain cities about taxes has increased negative publicity (Roberts 2017). Similarly, Uber has experienced multiple public relation issues within the first few months of 2017. First, the #DeleteUber hashtag developed in response to accusations that the ride-hailing service intended to profit from protests against Donald Trump’s travel ban (Maney 2017). Some estimates say 200,000 people deleted the app in the days after the hashtag went viral (Maney 2017). Then, a former employee, Susan Fowler, wrote an article about incidents of unresolved sexual harassment during her time at Uber (Rodriquez 2017). To fix this issue, Uber has tried to expand the size of its diversity and inclusion team (Rodriquez 2017). Lastly, there were a series of negative reports recently about Uber, including allegations of trade secrets theft and use of software to circumvent government officials (Rodriquez 2017).

**Future of sharing economy companies**

With a massive growth predicted for sharing economy companies, there are various predictions about what aspects will become particularly crucial. Fabiano Vallesi, strategic research director at wealth management firm Julius Baer, believes accommodation, transport, finance, freelancing, and consumer goods have the most market potential (Knowles 2016). This
argument reflects the current growth, as sharing economy companies in these sectors have managed to make the most significant impact on the field. However, other professionals consider growth for other aspects, such as companies digitizing and crowdsourcing B2B services for new ideas, logos and even products (Ismail 2015). Furthermore, sharing economies has caused lawmakers to consider a future with sharing economy companies. Governments around the Asia region are expressing awareness of the contribution the sharing economy can make to GDP growth. Particularly, the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CRSC) is developing a set of regulatory rules to aid in the development of crowdfunded financing (Ure 2015). Though Uber was not successful in penetrating the Chinese market, writers believe there is promise for Western companies in Asia, particularly for fields where local startups are not capable yet – like robotics, A.I., and developer tools (Kuo et. al 2016).

Suggestions for sharing economy companies

Both sharing economy companies and traditional economy companies need to keep the consumer and the overall community in mind. Brands will become critically valuable to consumers if those consumers invest their own time into developing the relationship (Andjelic 2014). By promoting its convenience, brands can develop customer loyalty and gain social trust (Regner 2014). Companies can anticipate consumer needs by staying connected to digital technologies and gathering data that can influence product development (Howard 2015). Finally, these sharing economy companies should try to value the prosumers who help run their businesses more (Hill 2015). For example, implementing profit sharing or vocational training could be potential ways to benefit the livelihood of these prosumers further (Hill 2015).

Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) argued that sharing economy companies should primarily focus on marketing convenience and price. They argued how consumers think differently about
access (where they only need to use an item for a temporary period) other than ownership (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015). Additionally, the “sharing orientation” is not a benefit for many consumers, as many want to be the sole renter for a period of time (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015). For example, they believed Airbnb’s recent rebranding – which emphasized ‘people, places, love and community’ – would be a misstep (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015). Airbnb wants its new logo to be a universal symbol of sharing, yet most consumers use Airbnb for the value they can get for their money, especially in expensive cities. Instead, Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) suggest these companies continue to develop technologies that separate its services from competitors.

Furthermore, a focus on the sharing economy’s role within the marketplace is crucial. Disruption is a key phrase used by academics and writers in thinking about the sharing economy, as it focuses on producing a new experience for the consumer (PWC 2015). By emphasizing design in a brand-heavy market, there is a potential to increase the revenue for particular services (Andjelic 2014). Howard (2015) highlights the rise of ‘cult’ companies like Zappos, Redbull or Starbucks that provide a personalized, inclusive set of offerings. Sharing economy companies could follow these business models to differentiate themselves similarly. Next, these companies should focus on the consumer’s experience to grow the brand’s reputation. Staying on top of the latest technologies could help these companies keep a competitive edge. Whether through the evolution of e-commerce or through the use of nontraditional media, sharing economy companies have worked to establish its presence digitally (Regner 2014; Howard 2015).

To maintain its competitiveness while limiting the amount of potential grief its business model may create, companies should play an active role in trying to shape regulatory and policy frameworks or transform legislation (PWC 2015; Howard 2015). At the very least, companies should develop a mitigation strategy in order to minimize any risks that a potentially damaging
experience could create. Creating a strategy like this would also make it less likely that more
pertinent or prohibitive regulations would occur (Howard 2015). Ultimately, Uber and Airbnb
captured the attention of consumers – particularly the younger generation – with its subversive
business model. Can these two companies, however, maintain that brand personality?
THEORETICAL MODEL AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Aaker’s (1997) model remains heavily used in both academic and commercial brand personality research, and yet, there has been little attention on how sharing economy companies fit within her model. This study seeks to consider if the personalities of sharing economy companies should augment Aaker’s (1997) model. To represent the relationship between sharing economy companies and brand personality visually, this theoretical model was created.

Figure #2: Theoretical model

Brand personalities reveal a tremendous amount of information about the consumer, the brand, and the relationship between the two (Ahn and Chung 2013). In this model, brand personality is a key contributor to the relationship between the consumer and the product. There are multiple ways that brand personality influences the consumer and the product, and vice versa.
The arrow from brand personality to product (#1) signifies how companies use brand personality to differentiate the product within the marketplace. For products that are not intrinsically exciting, like car insurance or toilet paper, a strong brand personality may be necessary to develop consumer interest. Geico’s quirky gecko and Progressive’s peppy Flo are examples of brands developing a personality that makes them more uniquely personable.

Next, the arrow from product to brand personality (#2) is how the product’s features influence the perception of brand personality. The product’s properties will define the broad parameters in which the brand personality can fit within. Consumers would be hesitant to believe a company that sells dated electronics but tries to portray itself as modern and forward thinking.

Then, the arrow from consumer to brand personality (#3) represents how over time, consumer trends can influence brand personality. If enough urban artists buy and wear Nike apparel, Nike may want to fit characteristics of these users within the brand personality to connect to them better. For instance, Nike hired FKA Twigs, an avant-garde musician and dancer, as a creative director to launch a new pair of compression tights (Iredale 2017). By using FKA Twigs, Nike extends its brand personality by acknowledging the interests of its users.

Subsequently, the arrow from brand personality to consumer (#4) shows how brand personality influences the consumer’s connection to the brand. If potential consumers find themselves drawn to the Old Spice’s jokester character, it may spark an interest towards the product. Over time, this interest can develop into attachment and a potential relationship.

Besides generating a connection between consumers and the products, brand personality plays a major factor in building consumer trust (#5). In this model, trust was chosen over authenticity or commitment, because many consumers still do not trust using a sharing economy company (Tanz 2014). These companies have been working to overcome this obstacle to attract
new customers, so the creation and continuation of trust are important. Once consumers find the brand personality trustworthy, there is a high chance that this trust will lead the consumers to utilize the services of a sharing economy company (#6).

This thesis aims to analyze how college students view the brand personality of Airbnb and Uber. Current college students are youngest of the millennial generation (ages 20 to 34), a group who are major users of sharing economy companies. In understanding their perceptions, this thesis has potential importance for the future of the sharing economy. It can uncover the dimensions that helped the rapid growth of sharing economy and could help future sharing economy companies develop effective brand personalities that set them apart from competitors. These two research questions help to examine and evaluate the findings from the focus groups.

**Research questions**

1. Will certain dimensions be more important for sharing economy companies?

2. Did Aaker’s brand personality model, which focused on traditional economy companies, capture all of the important dimensions for brands?
METHOD

In this study, two focus groups were used to gain a better understanding of how college students perceive Airbnb and Uber. Airbnb and Uber, as supported in the literature review, are two of the largest sharing economy companies. By running focus groups about these two companies, there can be a comparison of the respondents’ views on brand personality traits.

Focus groups were chosen for multiple reasons. First, this topic – brand personalities of sharing economy companies – is a fairly new research area. Focus groups help to produce a wide range of qualitative responses, which will be beneficial in gaining better understanding into this topic (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). Next, focus groups capitalize on group interaction. By encouraging participants to talk to one another, it can help deepen their responses and encourage further participation (Kitzinger 1994). Additionally, focus groups are beneficial when there is an interest in gaining insight into individuals’ thoughts and attitudes as well as gain information towards how these thoughts and attitudes influence behavior (Davis 1997).

Participants

The Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board approved all study procedures and focus group guides before participants were contacted about the study.

The participants of the focus groups were junior-level undergraduate students enrolled in social sciences classes at Penn State UP Campus. In the recruiting process, the researcher visited classes to explain the purpose of the focus groups and to tell participants that they would receive extra credit in reward for participation. The researcher emailed the potential participants and used an online sign-up sheet to post potential times to run the focus group. About 22 students
showed interest in participating. Once enough participants signed up for a particular time, the researcher emailed to confirm the focus group’s time and location. Both focus group #1 and focus group #2 were supposed to have nine participants, but due to time conflicts and no-shows, focus group #1 (Airbnb) had six participants and focus group #2 (Uber) had seven participants. Focus group #1 took place on March 9, 2017, and focus group #2 took place on March 10, 2017. All participants in the focus groups were college students ages 18 to 22.

**Procedures**

The focus group protocol approved by the IRB was followed. When each participant entered the room, the researcher provided them with a consent form. As the facilitator, the researcher introduced himself, explained his role in keeping the discussion moving, and let the participants read over the consent form. Specifically, he referred to how this focus group would be recorded and reported, and he gave the opportunity for participants to leave.

Once the participants consented, the focus groups started. Samples of questions are listed below. The focus groups began first with a general question of their knowledge of sharing economy companies. Then, the researcher asked the participants about their awareness, their opinions, and if applicable, their past experiences with the respective company (Airbnb or Uber). Next, each participant described the company’s brand personality as if it were a human and provided several personality traits to them. Following this, the questions were about whether or not they thought these companies were sincere, exciting, competent, sophisticated or rugged. These questions tied in Aaker’s model of brand personality without directly referencing it. Next, to compare opinions on Aaker’s personality dimensions further, each group listed these five dimensions from 0-10 twice: first, for how they thought these companies viewed its brand
personalities and second, how they personally viewed it. Finally, the members talked about the company’s industry competitor (taxis or hotel) and compared it Airbnb or Uber.

**Samples of questions used in the focus groups**

**Airbnb discussion guide**

**Introductory questions**

Can someone describe the term “sharing economy”? What are some companies that fit this description?
Who has heard of Airbnb?
What would you describe Airbnb as?
Has anyone used Airbnb?
   If you have used Airbnb, what is your experience and opinion of the brand?
   If you have not used Airbnb, what is your opinion of the brand?
Who do you believe primarily uses Airbnb? Why do they use it?
Who do you believe does not use Airbnb? Why do they use it?

**Personality questions**

If you could describe Airbnb as a human, with a few personality traits, what would these be?
If Airbnb could talk, what would it say to you?
Do you feel connected to Airbnb’s personality? Why or why not?

**Aaker’s scale questions**

Do you believe Airbnb is sincere (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, earnest)? Why?
Do you believe Airbnb is exciting (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date)? Why?
Do you believe Airbnb is competent (reliable, intelligent, successful)? Why?
Do you believe Airbnb is sophisticated (upper class, cosmopolitan)? Why?
Do you believe Airbnb is rugged (outdoorsy, tough)? Why?

From 1-10, does Airbnb want the consumer to see its brand personality as sincere?
From 1-10, does Airbnb want the consumer to see its brand personality as exciting?
From 1-10, does Airbnb want the consumer to see its brand personality as competent?
From 1-10, does Airbnb want the consumer to see its brand personality as sophisticated?
From 1-10, does Airbnb want the consumer to see its brand personality as rugged?

From 1-10, do you see Airbnb’s brand personality as sincere?
From 1-10, do you see Airbnb’s brand personality as exciting?
From 1-10, do you see Airbnb’s brand personality as competent?
From 1-10, do you see Airbnb’s brand personality as sophisticated?
From 1-10, do you see Airbnb’s brand personality as rugged?

Do you think Airbnb should try to portray itself more as one of these traits?

Hotel questions

Who uses hotels? Why do they use it?
What would be a few personality traits of hotels if you would describe them as a person?
Are there any connections of personality traits between Airbnb and hotels?

Uber discussion guide

Introductory questions

Can someone describe the term “sharing economy”? What are some companies that fit this description?
Who has heard of Uber?
What would you describe Uber as?
Has anyone used Uber?
    If you have used Uber, what is your opinion of the brand?
    If you have not used Uber, what is your opinion of the brand?
Who do you believe primarily uses Uber? Why do they use it?
Who you believe does not Uber? Why do they use it?

Personality questions

If you could describe Uber as a human, with a few personality traits, what would these be?
Have you heard of Uber in the news recently?
If Uber could talk, what would it say to you?
Do you feel connected to Uber’s personality? Why or why not?
Aaker’s scale questions

Do you believe Uber is sincere (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, earnest)? Why?
Do you believe Uber is exciting (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date)? Why?
Do you believe Uber is competent (reliable, intelligent, successful)? Why?
Do you believe Uber is sophisticated (upper class, cosmopolitan)? Why?
Do you believe Uber is rugged (outdoorsy, tough)? Why?

From 1-10, does Uber want the consumer to see its brand personality as sincere?
From 1-10, does Uber want the consumer to see its brand personality as exciting?
From 1-10, does Uber want the consumer to see its brand personality as competent?
From 1-10, does Uber want the consumer to see its brand personality as sophisticated?
From 1-10, does Uber want the consumer to see its brand personality as rugged?

From 1-10, do you see Uber’s brand personality as sincere?
From 1-10, do you see Uber’s brand personality as exciting?
From 1-10, do you see Uber’s brand personality as competent?
From 1-10, do you see Uber’s brand personality as sophisticated?
From 1-10, do you see Uber’s brand personality as rugged?

Do you think Uber should try to portray itself more as one of these traits?

Taxi cab questions

Who uses taxi cabs? Why do they use it?
What’s your general opinion on taxi cabs?
What would be a few personality traits of taxi cabs if you would describe them as a person?
Are there any connections of personality traits between Uber and taxi?

Each focus group lasted approximately an hour. Both focus groups were recorded using two digital voice recorders. Only the researcher and supervisor had access to the recordings.
After completing both focus groups, the research transcribed the recordings that weekend and the initial analysis of the focus groups finished within the week.
FINDINGS

Focus Group #1

Focus group #1 was about Airbnb. When quoting their responses, the participants are labeled with the name “Participant” followed by letters A through F to ensure confidentiality.

Opening responses:

Four out of six focus group members had used Airbnb. In describing their experiences, there was quite a range in both the opinions of their experience and what the Airbnb rental offered. For the individuals who stayed multiple times at different Airbnb rentals, the lodging situations differed widely. Out of these four members, three had overall positive opinions. One (Participant B) had issues with the dependability of their rental owner to help them.

- “It was nice living in an actual apartment opposed to a hotel. The Airbnb website itself is just super professional.” (Participant C)
- “Yeah, I stayed once. It was in Philly and it was for a day trip. The woman definitely wasn’t as hands-on. I didn’t book it, my sister booked it, but we kind of had a hard time unlocking the door and she wasn’t answering her phone call.” (Participant B)

Two of the six focus group members had not used Airbnb. For these two individuals, the researcher asked to explain their opinion of Airbnb. Their responses were rather similar; they had hesitations about using a lodging service that put them staying in a stranger’s place, particularly focusing on how the option of only renting a single room would be especially strange.

- “I’ve never used it, I’ve never been on the website but for me, it’s just the whole aspect that someone might live there and it’s a matter that is their personal space. Even though you are renting it out, you are in their personal space for a period of time and you see a part of their lives others don’t really see.” (Participant E)

In asking who primarily uses Airbnb, the majority of participants agreed that individuals around their age and a bit older were major consumers. Other responses expanded that age range
to include people up to 40 and people who are interested in non-traditional stays. Since a heavy focus was on millennials, the researcher asked what the main draw for them was. In their perspective, it stemmed to price and experience – which appealed to them more than older generations. Another major draw was the large number of living arrangement Airbnb offers.

- “Millennials, definitely. It’s definitely something new and upcoming, and I think millennials are very adventurous.” (Participant F)
- “If I was going on a trip with some friends, we would being staying all the in same Airbnb room if it was for a good price. But if my mom was going on a girl’s weekend with her friends, they wouldn’t be as cool with crashing in one room and rather go the traditional hotel route. For me – for our demographic – price outweighs any potential discomforts.” (Participant D)

In contrast, the participants believed that older crowds, parents with young children, and affluent individuals are groups of people that do not use Airbnb. These groups of people did not use it because of potential technological barrier to entry, the desire for hotel amenities, and especially the sense of uncertainty in staying in someone else’s space. Additionally, due to Airbnb’s relative newness in comparison to most hotel chains, the participants included individuals who have a more traditional mindset about their lodging options.

- “Also, my parents are booking an Airbnb over the summer, and my dad is like ‘Oh… we are going to live in someone’s else’, so I think it’s that traditional mentality is in a hotel. When you are older, you just want your own space that is clean.” (Participant B)
- “It’s kind of like the safety aspect. I know my parents wouldn’t want to rent a place with the fear that you might get robbed. No one is going to rob you at a hotel, as there are multiple people there.” (Participant C)

Responses to questions on personality:

The researcher asked each participant to respond to the question “If you could describe Airbnb as a human, with a few personality traits, what would these be?” The range of qualities demonstrates how the brand personality had a range to it, but certain key commonalities arose.
• “The other word I was thinking was adventurous. You said they were spontaneous, which is a bit of a weird word cause it is like tug-and-pull as it can be a bad thing too if people are seen as too impulsive… Also, someone that might host, you said a trendy, chic jetsetter. But I think it as like straight moneymaker.” (Participant A)
• “Much more transparent and welcoming. I picture it as the type of person who’s like ‘Come on in – I just met you and stay with us for four days.’” (Participant B)
• “It’s someone who is very inviting and will do anything for you, as I think Airbnb is more than a hotel as it has kitchens or pools or that extra level of details.” (Participant C)
• “I see some who is outgoing and spontaneous, because who would want to choose Airbnb over a hotel. At a hotel, you are not going to get that level of personal service as at an Airbnb.” (Participant D)
• “I also see it as someone who’s really trustworthy, because to be able to tell someone ‘Hey, you can stay here for a week’, you have to believe that this is a good person and you will allow them to live in your home.” (Participant E)
• “I’m not really getting the trendy hipster vibe. It is new and something that’s never been out there before, so people are attracted to it.” (Participant F)

In this discussion of brand personality, traits heavily referenced were: adventurous, spontaneous, transparent/trustworthy, and engaging. In describing the personality traits, some of participants described Airbnb as person with a specific but varied identity, whether that is a “30-something liberal kind of guy” (Participant A) or a “cool mom trying to create something cool and inviting” (Participant E). This character creation demonstrates how Airbnb’s personality relates to the identities of its hosts. When asked what Airbnb would talk about in a conversation, participants focused on how Airbnb would talk about the local events in “the neighborhoods where people live, the heart of the city” (Participant D).

• “That ties back into the shared economy thing, because technically Airbnb is local everywhere as they don’t own anything and it’s just shared.” (Participant A)

Next, in asking the participants about their feelings of connection to Airbnb, many talked about how they generally felt the personality was authentic. There was reference to how people interested in using Airbnb could probably find what they desired due to the different types of
options and living arrangements. With this wide range though, there was reference to how since the hosts are in control, some of the listings can potentially be set up generically like a hotel.

- “For the second part of the question, I do think it is authentic, as these are real people and it’s not manufactured to fit a certain mold. There’s so many different options and so many different homes, styles of homes, and living arrangements…” (Participant B)
- “When you are staying in an Airbnb, you are going on vacation or doing something outside your normal routine. I just feel like when you go to a hotel, everyone’s like “Let’s just put our stuff in there and then get out”. The whole idea is to not spend time at the hotel. At an Airbnb, you can kind of hang out. It’s a house you don’t live in, so I think that adds to the whole “going away” aspect, the adventure, the staying at a place that is not a hotel.” (Participant C)

Responses to questions about Aaker (1997) dimensions:

The lengthiest part of the focus group focused on individually evaluating each of Aaker’s personality dimensions in her model of brand personality – sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. There was no reference to Aaker in these questions. First, the researcher asked if participants believed Airbnb was sincere. The participants’ responses were fairly mixed. Some thought it was sincere, but in discussing, other participants referenced Airbnb’s controversy with taxes and rent spikes. Yet, most interestingly, though the participants viewed these news events negatively, it did not significantly change their opinion on its sincerity. The majority agreed that it came down to the landlords/renters and not Airbnb itself.

- “I think it’s sincere cause it’s just true. It’s nothing that was made for consumers. Apartments were something that already existed, so they are offering it up for consumers. So yeah, sincere.” (Participant B)
- “But what I know is happening and has morphed into is all these people buying properties exclusively to rent it out on Airbnb, so it loses its sincerity in that way.” (Participant D)
- “Plus, I feel like controversy surrounds anything that is new. For Uber’s case, we always hear stories about how “oh, another Uber driver attacked a passenger”. But you are not going to get the same news if a cabbie attacked someone”(Participant A)
In discussing the next dimension – exciting – the conversation turned into a discussion about Airbnb’s risk. The participants began to talk about the liabilities of both staying in an Airbnb and renting out your apartment on an Airbnb, as well as the review system.

- “I think it’s daring because you are putting yourself out there for anyone in the entire world to take advantage of.” (Participant F)

These comments about the uncertainty with choosing a listing initially made it seem like they were hesitant about Airbnb. The majority of participants, however, gave positive opinions about its personality being exciting and the set-up being engaging. There was a comment, though, that Airbnb’s excitement not anything revolutionary for the travel business.

- “Different, there’s something about staying there.” (Participant C)
- “No two rooms are the same.” (Participant D)
- “I don’t think it’s extraordinarily exciting or daring as opposed to just like normal travel. My mom has a beach house that she rents out, so there’s a similar risk, but I guess Airbnb has a lot more traffic to seeing the property and it gets more of what you asked for in the first place. I think it is as exciting as travel always is.” (Participant A)

For competent, the participants believed Airbnb was fairly reliable and successful with its offerings. The responses focused on how Airbnb’s abilities to facilitate renting between host and consumer was a smart move, as it is everyone else doing work for the brand. Despite this, participants debated the competency of Airbnb if there was a particularly bad experience.

- “I would say it’s successful, as it started with those two guys on the couch and then it transformed all over the world. So, it’s definitely something that everyone’s buying into. If someone stays and enjoys their experience, they might choose to start putting their own properties up.” (Participant F)
- “They want you to think they are reliable so you’ll stay in their places. They may not be.” (Participant C)
- “I would say maybe slightly lower than 8, just because they want to put out that nothing can go wrong, but there’s no way for them to ensure that though they may take responsibility.” (Participant B)
In considering whether Airbnb’s personality fit the descriptor of sophistication, the participants believed that was too high of a status for what they are. Some thought they may want to be upper class, but the wide range of offerings (particularly how many are simple apartments) makes it difficult to view them as upscale. The participants most agreed on Airbnb as connecting to cosmopolitan, because of its worldview brand and its diversity.

- “Yeah, I think so, for I see celebrities being like “Thanks Airbnb for my mansion, beach-front” and it makes me think they are really trying to cater to that fancy lifestyle. But I also think of it in terms of my friends… and we aren’t renting mansions, and a majority of the listings that are out there are just decent homes and rooms. So, while they might be going for that image, the people who are using it aren’t really matching it” (Participant B)

Lastly, in considering ruggedness, it was clear that the participants believed this personality trait fit Airbnb the least. At most, the participants thought that they might relate to millennials in “the hipster undercut with a beard” identity (Participant A). There was mention on how Airbnb’s spirit of adventure may present an “off-the-grid” ruggedness, but only slightly.

- “When I think of rugged, it’s the element of surprise… I don’t see it really fitting with word.” (Participant B)

After these discussions, the researcher wanted the participants to represent these opinions with numbers 0-10. These values collected were not supposed to draw any quantifiable significance, but to get the participants to consider the relationship between these personality traits and to visualize their opinions better. In the first round of ranking each trait from 0-10, the participants were supposed to consider Airbnb’s perception of its own brand personality. While ranking, the participant’s responses for the values were mostly consistent (see values in Chart #1 below). However, there was an interesting statement from Participant A when asked if Airbnb thought its personality was “exciting.” He thought Airbnb being seen as too “daring” could be
ultimately detrimental to its success. Participant A’s opinion emphasizes how the brand personality terms can be subjective, with exciting potentially being a positive or negative.

Exciting:
- “They want it to be an integral part of your trip. They want you to be excited about where you are staying and they want that place to be some place you’ll return to.” (Participant F)
- “Spontaneity, in that sense, is not always great.” (Participant A)

Competent:
- “I would say 9, as they like to make themselves seem very responsible.” (Participant B)

Sophistication:
- “They don’t want to seem too good that average people can’t stay there.” (Participant C)

In the second round of ranking each trait from 0-10, the participants considered their own perception of Airbnb’s brand personality. Their perspective on Airbnb’s personality were similar to their ranking of Airbnb’s views – exciting was highest and rugged was lowest. For the most part, each value was lower than Airbnb’s views by a bit. However, their view of sincerity was in line and slightly higher than Airbnb’s view of sincerity. Between both rankings, exciting, sincerity, and competence are the three most prominent brand personality qualities they have. Sophistication was still a positive value (6-8) while rugged was ranked as the least relevant.

Using these numerical values of Aaker’s dimensions and participants’ descriptions of Airbnb, the first flowchart on the next page visualizes the perception of Airbnb’s brand personality. Certain Airbnb features share dimensions, so these features act as the links. To consider the differences in the hotel industry, the second flowchart is about hotels in general.
Figure #3: Flowchart on Airbnb’s brand personality

Figure #4: Flowchart on hotels’ brand personality
After having the participants rate these personality traits, the next question focused on whether Airbnb should portray its brand personality differently and if that would be beneficial. First, participants considered that if Airbnb wanted to relate to the audiences whom currently do not use the service, its personality should change. Particularly, this change would focus on upping competence and sophistication, which would entice these potential consumers away from traditional lodgings. However, this would diminish its novelty.

- “They would want the hotel qualities without being in a hotel. They are going to be taken care of, nothing is going to happen to them, they are safe, they can lock their bolts, it’s clean. But at a trade-off for excitement.” (Participant C)

However, in wondering if millennials would desire a re-adjusting of its personality traits, the participants thought striving for a different personality would have a more detrimental effect for these users. In their perspective, the participants believed Airbnb should keep its energy.

- “I think that it is good and covers the bases, because you definitely don’t want to pretend to be something you are not. You don’t want to market something you wouldn’t be, as that would lose credibility and customers.” (Participant F)

Responses to questions about hotels:

The last major section of the focus group related to hotels. The researcher first asked who used hotels and why as well as who does not and why not. The participants considered that primary users are business people, families on vacation and couples. These groups tend to use hotels for their perceived values of its trustworthiness and the uniformity of experience. Then, when asked about the personality traits of hotels, the participants considered hotels as more conservative and cookie-cutter. However, they stressed the reliability and the cleanliness.

- “I would say they are a very clean person, as when you walk in, you never see it dirty, you never see it from a person before you.” (Participant E)
- “They are there in the background. If Airbnb is the freelancer, hotels are the people with 9-to-5 jobs. The majority but kind of boring. Reliable but ehh.” (Participant D)
The final two questions looked at the connections and divergences between the personalities of hotels and Airbnb. Since Airbnb has entered into the hotel market, it is important to clarify the similarities (the ways it has managed to use hotel-style amenities) and differences (the way Airbnb has stood out personality-wise from competitors). For connections, the participants believed they shared a certain excitement factor to them. For these participants, most travel is exciting, which is they saw a variety of accommodations as ‘fun.’

- “The convenience, I guess. You’ll find a hotel somewhere just like you can find an Airbnb somewhere. No matter where or when you are looking, you’ll find what you need for the price you want.” (Participant C)
- “Different forms of excitement, like when you get the hotel card, there’s still the “I’m on my trip”, but with Airbnb, I’m going to Airbnb to chill out and also on vacation. We already talked about this, but with hotel, it’s like “get the hell out”. But you are still there to have fun.” (Participant A)

In regards to differences, the participants felt that the Airbnb feels more congenial and more engaging. With hotels, uniformity is key, with one participant referencing how “chances are you are going to get a really ugly carpet with really disgusting curtains” (Participant F). With Airbnb, however, the participants thought that there is a higher potential to build relationships and to meet people, whether that be the host itself or the residents in the neighborhood you stay.

- “Airbnb wants you to immerse yourself while hotels just want you to stay.” (Participant D)
- “I feel like Airbnb comes across as more human. They are more personable.” (Participant A)

Overall, these participants emphasized the importance of Airbnb’s excitement, both in capitalizing on the fun of travel and in representing a brand personality about the uniqueness of its features. Furthermore, they (for the most part) connect to the current brand personality Airbnb exudes, particularly with how the potential relationship to the hosts. Airbnb may want to adapt
its personality if they want to take on hotels more, such as offering more amenities in certain listings. However, it also risks losing its primary customers of millennials. The participants did not mention any major sharing economy competitor to Airbnb, so Airbnb could continually work to differentiate its business model as adventurous and culturally immersive.

Focus Group #2

Focus Group #2 was about Uber. When quoting their responses, the participants are labeled with the name “Participant” and the numbers 1 through 7 to ensure confidentiality.

Opening responses:

All seven focus group members had used Uber. In providing initial thoughts about Uber, the participants focused heavily on the features available – the ability to split a fare, the wide varieties of cars you can rent in the city like Uber Black, and its GPS functionality. One participant even had experience with the self-driving Ubers they are currently testing.

- “It’s just more customized to what you are looking for, rather than just flagging a taxi down and just waiting for a taxi to pick you up.” (Participant 2)

Next, since everyone had used Uber, participants talked about their overall experience and anything particularly worth mentioning. Multiple participants brought up using Lyft – Uber’s main competitor in the sharing economy transportation sector, with one participant mentioning how she tends to use Lyft more. Participants who used Lyft more did so because of pricing. This seemed to be one of the main reasons to use one company over another. In addition, when talking about Lyft and Uber, there was a reference to the #BanUber controversy.

- “I know there has been drama, so like that is a tiny factor, but at the end of the day, I need to get where I’m going.” (Participant 3)
Overall, six of the seven participants had positive things to say about Uber. For these individuals, Uber is a convenient source of transportation that is growing in its features. One participant, however, had a neutral opinion, for he had a bad experience with a particular driver. This participant’s experiences demonstrated how the drivers are a significant factor in the overall satisfaction with Uber. Another participant was in Barcelona over spring break, and Uber was not available for use. Her negative experience with this taxi app Halo demonstrated how for certain millennials, they feel lost without the functionalities of an Uber-like company.

- “They have this other app called Halo, which is just cabs and it connects to your debit cards, but it wasn’t really working. Every time we requested a cab, it would never come. And then, the cabs won’t run until 6am. It was like a nightmare.” (Participant 5)
- “I only had one bad experience, I guess. I got the ride for free, but it was really busy at night and everyone was getting out of the bars and my driver wanted to pick someone else in addition to me. It wasn’t a ride, he just wanted to pick someone else. It was weird. Once he got me to the right place, he apologized, so I got a free ride at the end of the day.” (Participant 7)

In asking who primarily uses Uber, the participants believed it was college students or young professionals living in an urban area. Particularly, a participant mentioned how a significant number of users were people 21 and over that enjoy going out to the bars. Conversely, the groups who do not use Airbnb are older people not as updated on technologies, individuals with cars, people in the suburbs. One participant mentioned how high school students would not use it much, because they may be inexperienced in using a taxi or taxi-like service. Yet, this participant referenced how her sister would probably be more inclined to order a taxi.

- “I guess taxi would be better for her cause she knows in a taxi, but with Uber, she is getting into a random car.” (Participant 3)
Responses to questions on personality:

The researcher asked each participant to respond to the question “If you could describe Uber as a human, with a few personality traits, what would these be?” The range of qualities demonstrates how the brand personality had a range to it, but certain key commonalities arose.

- “I would say personalized or personal because it suits the individual person that is using it. Also, organized because depending matter where you are, they’ll pick you up anywhere.” (Participant 1)
- “I would say they are like a smart, techy person who is popular because everyone knows them. Very savvy. I guess, again, like customized to the user experience.” (Participant 2)
- “I would say fun because they have karaoke Ubers. Fast, definitely efficient, and well-timed most of the time, and very respective because they’ll either try to have a conversation with you or remain quiet cause they know you are not in the mood to talk.” (Participant 3)
- “If I had to picture Uber, I think it’s someone who is very efficient, very in-the-know. If they actually were someone our age, I would think of that person as always knows what’s going on, knowing what’s the coolest thing is… And then, very protective, because I feel like they are a really protective company despite certain publicity issues with the immigration thing and, of course, there are those few people like in the sexual assault cases. I feel like they try to be perceived as really protective.” (Participant 4)
- “As everyone said, like hip. Not so much the ones around here but the ones in the city are like nice cars. I always picture like a black, nice car, but the ones around here are not like that.” (Participant 5)
- “Organized and helpful… when we need to go somewhere, we can always use Uber.” (Participant 6)
- “I would say someone that knows what’s going on, like it’s a cool kind of thing. Someone could go to it, and know what to do with your situation.” (Participant 7)

As shown in these participant’s descriptions of Uber’s personality, traits like savvy, organized, efficient, and cool were most used. The conversation turned to a brief discussion on the recent controversies with Uber, which helped gauge the participants’ level of knowledge. The participants mentioned the #BanUber trending topic, though not with a significant amount of detail. After they discussed this, the researcher asked if this changed the opinion of the company.
Only one participant answered this question, but from this individual’s perspective, the news had not changed their loyalty to the company, as this person likes the convenience of Uber.

- “I know it’s unfortunate that some of the things that have happened in the news with Uber as a company but I’m still going to use it.” (Participant 1)

After asking about what would Uber talk about if it would have a conversation, participants believed that it would ask loads of questions and be very supportive. Based on the type of answers provided, the researcher was curious about the participants’ feelings of connection to Uber and its brand personality. They viewed it as dependable, but was this an element of the personality or mainly the level of features available? In response, Uber’s personality drew in some participants and Uber’s features – namely price – drew in others. Particularly, the one participant who uses Lyft more (Participant 3) liked the discounts Lyft offered, which these deals sparked attachment to its services. These responses demonstrated how a personality that references the uniqueness of its features might be best.

- “I don’t care whichever. I just care whenever I need a car, which one has cars.” (Participant 6)
- “They seem, in my eyes, better. Not better than Lyft, as I still use Lyft for price reasons, whatever ones cheaper, but Uber is the top dog and have the best features” (Participant 2)
- “I know for me, it’s more whichever one is more popular wherever I am.” (Participant 4)

Responses to questions about Aaker (1997) dimensions:

First, the researcher wondered if the participants thought Uber was sincere. The participants, for the most part, had average views about Uber’s sincerity. Some of the features built into Uber’s model either made the participants hesitate to use the service or gave them cause for concern. For example, the participants referenced how the review system has led to incidents where the drivers exhibit a fake sincerity so they receive 5-star ratings. Furthermore, certain participants referenced how Uber’s personality feels, at times, inauthentic.
• I don’t know, I think the surges are like not honest.” (Participant 5)
• “I think the ratings are honest, but I think also it is a lot of fake sincere-ness, as everyone’s trying to get that 5 stars. Occasionally, people will be like “Okay, you are going to give me that 5 stars”, and I’m like “Don’t push them. I will give it to you if I want to.” (Participant 2)
• “Yeah, if Uber was a person, I would probably wouldn’t be friends with Uber.” (Participant 7)

In this conversation about Uber’s sincerity, a participant’s response emphasized how the drivers have a major position in influencing brand personality. Furthermore, a participant talked about an argument between Uber’s CEO Travis Kalanick and one of his company’s drivers. In the discussion of this incident, the participant believed that many personal experiences with Uber come down to the individual drivers, so they should represent the company appropriately.

- “There’s a lot more power with the individual drivers than people tend to realize.” (Participant 4)

For exciting, many of the participants agreed that Uber was trendy and was actively trying to market itself as ‘up-to-date.’ Additionally, the participants believed that Uber’s business model was imaginative enough that for millennials, it had become synonymous with requesting a ride, similar to how people say ‘Google’ as a verb. There was a mention of how transportation is not exactly interesting, so the excitement of using Uber faded after the first few times.

- “I would definitely say up-to-date. It’s up to the speed of a good smartphone app and what the trends are now, at least for college students and for young professionals.” (Participant 1)
- “I think for the first couple of times that I used it, it was cool and fun. But now, I’m so used to it, so I wouldn’t say it’s exciting but convenient.” (Participant 1)

When asked if they thought Uber’s brand personality focused on convenience, all participants felt that trait fit Uber well. In this discussion, the participants expanded on their feelings of Uber’s competency by remarking how the competency depended on the setting.
China and Puerto Rico were two areas brought up where Uber faced difficulties in growing, and the participants believed part of that reason was because the taxi systems in these locations were more capable. In the US, Uber’s services are different depending on if it is a city or a rural area.

- “Uber can be used in other countries, but not as successful as in US” (Participant 6)
- “But, I feel like maybe in the US, it’s there – it’s trendy, it’s moving forward – but it needs to expand. Like even in State College, it’s not the same as it is in a big city.” (Participant 7)

In considering if Uber was sophisticated, the participants felt hesitant to list Uber’s brand personality as upper-class and cosmopolitan. They argued that maybe in its initial days, Uber seemed sophisticated. Though Uber has a more sophisticated personality and image than a taxi, the participants believed that since the everyday person uses it, they do not think it sophisticated.

- “Okay, now I’m going back on my previous answer a bit. I would say Uber is sophisticated to a certain extent but it is not like an upper class good, because everyone uses it. But I would still think people would prefer driving in an Uber than in a taxi just because it has a better image to it than a taxi does.” (Participant 1)

Lastly, in considering ruggedness, the participants thought ruggedness was the opposite of Uber. From the marketing design, to the target demographics, to the places they offer the majority of its services, the participants could not see any aspect of Uber being rugged.

- “It’s not like that at all. Even the icons, it looks snazzy and the app itself is very techie looking. There are no elements of outdoorsy-ness at all.” (Participant 5)

In the first round of ranking each trait from 0-10, the participants were supposed to consider Uber’s perception of its own brand personality. Then, in the second round of ranking each trait from 0-10, the participants picked a number that represented their own perception of Uber’s brand personality. Similar to focus group #1, the two sets of rankings were mostly similar to one another. Competency was the highest ranked and rugged was lowest ranked. Participants ranked exciting and sophistication second, with the variety of available services influenced the
ranking of these two traits. For example, Participant 2 remarked how the existence of Uber’s self-driving car influenced their view of Uber’s qualities of exciting and sophistication. Sincerity was next, with both rankings putting it average; Participant 5 believed Uber wishes it were higher. Ruggedness, like focus group #1, was ranked as least relevant to Uber’s personality.

Using these numerical values of Aaker’s dimensions and participant’s descriptions of Uber, the first flowchart on the next page visualizes the perception of Uber’s brand personality. Certain Uber features share dimensions, so these dimensions work as the links. To consider the differences in the taxi industry, the second flowchart is about taxis in general.
Figure #5: Flowchart of Uber’s brand personality

Figure #6: Flowchart of taxis’ brand personality
After having the participants rate these personality traits, the follow-up question focused on whether Uber should portray its brand personality any other way. Immediately, a participant went into a series of suggestions on how Uber could implement features that are more advanced. Another participant thought that Uber should offer more coupons/discounts to frequent users. Though not directly referencing brand personality, these opinions suggest how the participants believed increasing its competency in function is the best plan for Uber.

- “Maybe some function in the app that when the driver is coming, it would zoom into his car account to see more clearly. And sometimes, in big cities, the GPS is not working really well. Like I drop a pin and then the driver can’t find me.” (Participant 6)

After asking for more opinions on whether Uber should change its personality, one participant talked about the dangers of changing Uber’s personality too much. Instead, this individual believed that Uber could improve by focusing on improving its best features.

- “I think it’s really hard to work on a sincere level just because there’s so many drivers out there and it’s constantly going to be a thing with ratings and making sure… I think it’s just too hard of a goal to increase that, maybe a little bit. But if they keep going with their strong suits, in being competent and sophisticated and in increasing their functions and technologies, it doesn’t necessarily matter, since it’s more of a functional thing.” (Participant 2)

**Responses to questions about taxis:**

The last major section of the focus group related to taxis. The researcher first asked why people use taxis. The responses mainly focused on the function of taxis in big cities. In a city where there were plenty of taxis, the participants felt like using Uber would be far less enticing. One participant mentioned how they use taxis to “book” a trip, like when they need to catch an early morning flight because it would reassure them. In regards to why people do not use taxis, the participants focused on people loyal to Uber and people with access to other transportation. To gain more insight, the research asked each person to describe his or her opinion of taxis:
• “And then also what you were saying earlier, it’s a little more reliable than Uber, just because you can distinguish a cab versus you can’t really distinguish an Uber car. Some have the Uber sticker and some of them don’t, so that may decrease their legitimacy maybe. If I had a choice between a cab or an Uber, it would kind of a toss-up, at least for me.” (Participant 1)

• “I’ve never had a good experience with taxis... like I lived in New York last summer. It was always a pain flagging them down, even though it was kind of cheaper than Uber.” (Participant 2)

• “I don’t feel really different with them from Uber. They might be a little more professional since they come outside and help you with your luggage and that’s not always the case with an Uber. They are just there to pick you and take you where you need to be. It feels more old school.” (Participant 3)

• “I honestly don’t think I’ve ever used a taxi, except when I was in New York City. And I don’t know, it’s easy to catch a taxi really quick to get around the city and it’s just there. I like the taxi experience in New York because I think like it’s a part of the New York experience. But Uber is just as prevalent there, and it’s kind of running that business out of town. And I just use Uber here because it is easier, it makes more sense and it’s what everyone else is doing.” (Participant 4)

• “I don’t really like cabs at all. Splitting the fare is a nightmare.” (Participant 5)

• “I think taxis are not convenient, you have to call in advance to book it. And I think the reason why Uber and other kinds of app is not so popular in China because our taxi system is much more convenient.” (Participant 6)

• “I would say reliable, and I don’t even feel that much of a difference as I’ve used taxis before. It is this solid thing, it’s their job, it’s what they do... It feels safe.” (Participant 7)

When asked about the taxi’s personality traits, there was a range of responses. There were positive traits, like on time and conventional, and negative traits, like rougher and unreliable.

• “Yeah, they are like in their late 50s/early 60s. They are in the know of things but they aren’t super up-to-date but they are reliable and helpful.” (Participant 1)

• “I would say unreliable, because for Uber, you can pick everything and you know everything but with taxis, you don’t know what you are getting into.” (Participant 3)

The final two questions looked at the connections and divergences between the personalities of taxis and Uber. Since Uber has entered into the taxi market, it is important to clarify the similarities (the ways it has managed to use taxi services) and differences (the way Uber has stood out personality-wise from competitors). The main similarities the participants
mentioned were competency, as they acknowledged that both taxis and Ubers get people where they need to go without any significance difference in time. Additionally, the participants considered that taxis and Uber have similar levels of potential sincerity, as it is dependent on the driver’s personality. In this conversation about connections, the issue of safety came up. Between the participants, there was a disagreement whether or not they felt safer entering into a taxi as well as what the potential reparations one would receive if an incident did occur.

- “Probably competency. You said something about how taxis are the culture of New York, so that can be exciting, and Uber might be less exciting in New York. But Uber might be more exciting in State College than a cab.” (Participant 1)
- “I feel like, god forbid, I’d rather get in an accident with Uber. Cause then you could cause a big scene. Uber is such a national brand, and a taxi company… you can’t name one taxi company. Uber, you could file a lawsuit and be very public, and a taxi would be worse.” (Participant 5)

Finally, in the differences, the main point the participants made related to how Uber is catering to the smartphone generation. By positioning themselves alongside the changes in technology, the participants believed Uber could connect to younger individuals. Additionally, the participants referenced how the services run differently in the overall experience.

- “Yeah, I agree with that, versus a cab driver who doesn’t even talk to you. It’s fine, it just depends on what you want and what you know you are going to expect.” (Participant 1)

Overall, these participants emphasized the importance of Uber’s up-to-date features, as its competence is its most emphasized and most compelling personality trait. For millennials, Uber’s use of digital technologies (ride sharing, split fares, and GPS locators) made taxi-like services more appealing. Interestingly, though Uber faces growing competition from Lyft and other services, the participants believe it’s more important for Uber to invest in the best features and prices than portraying a personality of sincerity or sophistication. If Uber cannot manage to stay competitive with its user-friendliness, it potentially faces a high level of brand switching.
DISCUSSION

The two focus groups revealed strong overlaps in brand personality between Airbnb and Uber, at least in how millennials perceive these personalities. The findings addressed the brand personality literature by uncovering that four of Aaker’s five dimensions fit with Airbnb and Uber’s current brand personality. These perceptions have managerial implications for sharing economy companies, both large and small, as well as traditional economy companies.

The two highest ranked dimensions of Aaker’s (1997) model for both Airbnb and Uber were competency and excitement. Participants viewed competence as the most characteristic dimension for Uber. For instance, they mentioned repeatedly about the benefits and the interest in Uber’s app design, the variety of cars to request, and the prompt service. These features influenced their opinion as to why Uber’s brand personality matched the qualities of reliable, savvy, efficient and organized. Participants ranked Airbnb’s competence lower, as the participants referred to past controversies with consumer incidents and negative experiences.

In terms of the excitement, the participants viewed this dimension as the most characteristic for Airbnb. For these participants, Airbnb’s variety of accommodation styles and the sense of ‘immersion’ influenced Airbnb’s personality to be seen as adventurous, outgoing, and daring. They ranked Uber’s excitement lower. The participants argued that after the first few times using the service, the excitement becomes only slightly above using a typical transportation service like a taxi or a bus. There was a reference, though, to the excitement of certain aspects like the self-driving cars. For both Airbnb and Uber, the participants believed the brand personalities help to differentiate the companies’ capabilities from its competitors.
Participants ranked sophistication and sincerity lower than competency and excitement. However, based on the responses, they believed that these dimensions were relevant enough within the current brand personality of Airbnb and Uber. For both Airbnb and Uber, they ranked sophistication evenly with similar responses from both focus groups. The participants felt these companies provided offerings that could create a more sophisticated experience (higher-end Airbnb accommodations or Uber Black). In general, though, the overall brand personality does not want to alienate its consumers by being ‘too sophisticated.’

For sincerity, though, there was a clear difference between participants’ perceptions of Airbnb’s sincerity versus Uber’s sincerity. Interestingly, participants connected the elements of sincerity to the experience the prosumer provided. As the face of the brand, these prosumers are a major force in building the relationship with the consumers. The participants’ opinions reflect this attitude, with participants in Airbnb’s group having noticeable higher opinions of Airbnb’s prosumers than the participants in Uber’s group of Uber’s prosumers. For instance, participants in the Uber group felt that there was an element of ‘fake sincerity’ to the drivers while participants felt Airbnb’s hosts were authentic. Though this emphasizes a difference in brand personality, it shows the importance of the prosumer in conveying that brand personality.

Finally, ruggedness was the least related to Airbnb and Uber. With the technological focus of these companies and its primary usage within relatively urban environments, the participants felt rugged was inapplicable to its brand personalities. For Airbnb and Uber, ruggedness is the only dimension in Aaker’s (1997) model that participants felt had little relevancy. It would be, however, interesting to study if ruggedness is a prominent personality in any other sharing economy companies or is low across the whole category.
Within the industries of hospitality and transportation, Airbnb and Uber have distinguished its brand personalities from traditional economy competitors. For instance, travel is supposed to be a generally exciting experience and, yet, the participants saw Airbnb as more exciting to use than hotels. This contrast between Airbnb and hotels suggests that consumers see Airbnb’s brand personality as providing travel that is more appealing. Conversely, participants believed Uber and taxis possessed similar competency but provided it in different manners. Uber’s brand relationship to taxis emphasized how its personality capitalizes on taxis’ weakness.

Cross-industry, these responses suggest that four of the five dimensions within Aaker’s (1997) model are present within Airbnb and Uber’s brand personalities. Even with the changing business models within the 21st century, the dimensions of Aaker’s (1997) model remain relevant as a measurement. Furthermore, the range of responses for certain dimensions – like excitement and sincerity – demonstrate how sharing economy companies possess noteworthy differences in its brand personalities. Though there are close similarities between Airbnb and Uber’s brand personalities, these variances demonstrate the importance of differentiation.

Moreover, these responses suggest that future models might add flexibility as a dimension when measuring brand personality across all types of companies. Participants remarked on how Airbnb and Uber’s services function effectively by promoting a customized experience to match the consumer’s particular desires. Furthermore, customer experience is extremely dependent on the capabilities of the prosumers. The behaviors of employees influence all companies; prosumers for sharing economy companies, however, function as the primary ‘ambassadors’ for a brand that they may not work for often. All prosumers have a major influence on maintaining, deepening, or ruining a consumer’s relationship to the brand. Thus, flexibility appears to be a dimension sharing economy companies share that traditional economy
companies do not experience to the same degree. This flexibility for Airbnb and Uber is both an attraction to the brand personality and a potential hindrance to its growth, so flexibility could be beneficial to compare this dimension to all brands. Before brand personality models could use flexibility as a valid dimension, researchers would need to substantiate it further.
CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

These responses have implications for Airbnb and Uber, other current sharing economy companies, and sharing economy companies in the future. For Airbnb and Uber, the participants reaffirmed that for many college students, the current brand personalities are functioning effectively. However, as the participants remarked, they could appeal its business model to other demographics by emphasizing other elements of its brand personality. For instance, Airbnb could focus on sophistication in its brand personality more through marketing the high-end rentals available. By highlighting accommodations that provide more stellar amenities, Airbnb could draw in an older generation of travelers who are currently not interested. There is a potential trade-off, though, to steering away from its current brand personalities: 1) participants may see this change as inauthentic and 2) it could lessen attachment to current users.

Besides sharing economy economies, these responses have value for the traditional economy companies. These participants believed that a significant factor in Airbnb and Uber’s brand personality is the excitement or competence related to its type of services. To compete with these sharing economy companies then, hotels and taxis might invest into developing features that positively differentiate its brands and creating a new brand personality that conveys this relevancy to users. It might be more trouble than it is worth to change consumers’ perceptions of industries as established as hotels and taxis; however, the growth of sharing economy companies in these sectors demonstrates a need to remain competitive.

The discussion of this research can only advance so far due to certain limitations. First, running only two focus groups was not ideal. In theory, additional focus groups could have revealed far different views on Airbnb or Uber’s brand personality. After running two focus groups, however, it became near impossible to find times that worked for a necessary number of
people within the remaining participant sample. Next, these focus groups only involved college students between the ages of 18 to 22. While college students in this age range are major users of Airbnb and Uber, it would have been beneficial to gain perspectives from individuals of similar ages that are not in college. In 2012, 41% of individuals between the ages of 18 to 24 were enrolled in 2-year or 4-year degrees, so around 60% of the population between the ages of 18 to 22 was not represented in this study (NCES 2012). Gaining insights from these groups of people, who either are in some kind of employment or in technical school, might reveal drastically different insights. Additionally, future research could acquire perspectives from older generations. By studying these groups, there can be a better consideration of the desired brand personalities and features for sharing economy companies. Lastly, this research is subjective and not quantified, which means that the insights are not statistically representative. For these reasons, the study has flaws that have weakened the significance of the results.

With this initial exploratory research completed, there are ample directions for future research to build on these results. First, a survey looking at these two companies could quantify the responses of these focus group participants. This survey could also research whether flexibility is a dimension relevant for brand personality models. Next, it is crucial to gather insights from a more diverse pool of participants. By looking at older demographics, it may reveal different perspectives about the brand personality of these sharing economy companies. Furthermore, research could get participants to engage with Uber or Airbnb’s marketing materials (ads, social media content, etc.). This research would engage participants with the visual elements of the brand and could provide a stronger understanding on how ads convey brand personality. Overall, this future research could help both academics and corporations learn more about the intersection of brand personality and sharing economy companies.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

Focus group implied consent form

Consent for Exempt Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: “Consumer perceptions of Airbnb and Uber”

Principal Investigator: Kevin Kelley
Telephone Number: 1-215-534-2591

Advisor: Dr. George Anghelcev
Advisor Telephone Number: 814-865-4354

You are being invited to volunteer to participate in a research study. This summary explains information about this research:

The main goal of this study is to investigate consumer perceptions of sharing economy companies, particularly for Airbnb and Uber. The focus group procedure will be casual. I will ask questions about these companies and will want you to answer them. The focus group should take between 60-75 minutes to complete. This focus group will be recorded using an audio capture device. Your responses will remain confidential, as there will be no reference to your names or your identities within this study.

If you have questions or concerns, you should contact Kevin Kelley at 1-215-534-2591. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject or concerns regarding your privacy, you may contact the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775.

Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

Your participation implies your voluntary consent to participate in the research.
Kevin Kelley  
kevinkelley1994@gmail.com

**Education:**  
Penn State University, B.A. Degrees in Advertising and English  
College of Communications and College of Liberal Arts  
Honors in Advertising  
Class of 2017

**Thesis:**  
Title: Brand personality of sharing economy companies: A Study of Airbnb and Uber  
Thesis Supervisor: George Anghelcev  
Honors Advisor: Susan Strohm

**Scholarships:**  
Schreyer Honors College Academic Scholarship

**Awards:**  
Deans List: Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015, Spring 2016, Fall 2016

**Professional Memberships:**  
2017 Kappa Tau Alpha inductee

**International Education:**  
IES Direct Enrollment at University College London, Spring 2016

**Related Professional Experience:**  
**Account Associate**, HVC, State College, PA, September 2015 – present  
**Photographer**, The Daily Collegian, State College, PA, August 2013 – present  
**Research Assistant**, PSU College of Communication, State College, PA, August – December 2015  
**Social Media Intern**, Malini Foundation, State College, PA, August 2014 – August 2015

**Volunteer Experience:**  
**Distribution Development Captain**, Penn State Homecoming, State College, PA, February 2015 – October 2015  
**THON PR member**, THON, State College, PA, October 2014 – February 2015