How did Airbnb guests experience the COVID-19 pandemic in Vienna?

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AFFIDAVIT

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism sector. In Vienna, overnight stays declined abruptly as of March 2020 due to various lockdowns and cross-border travel restrictions instigated by the Austrian government. At this point in time, the sharing economy platform Airbnb hosts more than 11,000 active accommodations in Vienna. How their guests experienced a stay in the present-day pandemic is the focal topic this thesis concerns itself with.

In order to obtain primary data in support of the research project, a corresponding number of online surveys were completed by travelers who stayed overnight between February 2020 and April 2022 in Vienna. The study discovered that the pandemic had a very significant impact on Airbnb experiences in Vienna.

However, it turned out that the pandemic was not the guests' primary motivation to opt for Airbnb in connection to their health and hygiene conditions. Although these elements played a fairly important role, the financial aspects presented to be the most vital. The pandemic even positively impacted guests' attitudes towards Airbnb, possibly due to people appreciating and enjoying the possibility of traveling again after not having had the opportunity to do so for some time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B&B	Bed & Breakfast
B2B	Business-to-business
C2C	Consumer-to-consumer
P2P	Peer-to-peer
SARS-Cov-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus type 2
SE	Sharing Economy
STR	Short-term rental
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
VAB	Value-Attitude-Behavior (Model)
VTB	Vienna Tourist Board
WHO	World Health Organization
WTP	Willingness to pay

1 INTRODUCTION

It all started with two art school graduates who rented out air mattresses on the floor of their apartment in order to afford their pricey rent in San Francisco (Gallagher, 2017). Today, Airbnb is considered one of the most successful (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017) as well as best-known sharing economy model in the world (Choi, 2015). The enterprise is considered not only a prime example of peer-to-peer business models (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017) but also, in general, one of the most thriving accommodation companies globally (Fudurich & MacKay, 2020, p. 1). As Varma et al. (2016) stated, Airbnb offers an appealing and innovative alternative to traditional hotel stays. And indeed: numerous travelers prefer to stay in an Airbnb rather than a hotel. The motivations of their guests are incredibly diverse and range from cost-saving intentions to social reasons (Heo, 2016).

In 2020, the whole world was overwhelmed by the coronavirus disease 2019. Researchers believe that the virus was first transmitted from animals to humans in Wuhan, China and that the epidemic originated on a local market. The spread of the virus was very rapid, and World Health Organization (WHO) classified it a pandemic on March 12, 2020 (WHO, 2020a). Needless to say, travel activities are vital for the tourism industry. Thus, the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have seriously affected the industry worldwide (Yeh, 2021, p. 188). In Austria, the travel industry came to a virtual standstill. In the first COVID wave, strict measures were introduced in the interest of containing the incidence of infection.

Accordingly, in addition to developing a testing strategy, there were strict entry and exit restrictions and quarantine regulations. However, cases then declined in many regions during the summer of 2020, leading to a relaxation of the protective measures. As a result, tourist activities were gradually resumed, and numerous hotels, sights, and attractions were able to restart operations. Unfortunately, this was only of limited duration, as tourism was threatened again relatively soon by a second COVID wave (Kreiner & Ram, 2020, p. 3). Airbnb was also not spared from the pandemic's impact. Similar to traditional accommodation providers, the company suffered significant financial losses at the beginning of the pandemic. (Walsh et al., 2020) The lack of revenue posed undoubtedly a challenge for the company, but the crisis soon became somewhat of an opportunity.

Based on the assumptions of Bigné et al. (2021), it can be stated that Airbnb indeed does have advantages in the context of the pandemic compared to traditional accommodations. Accordingly, numerous travelers selected to reside in private accommodations to minimize the risk of infection. Coronavirus also brought to Vienna a massive number of infections as well as a sharp decline in tourist activities. By February 15, 2022, there had been approximately half a million confirmed coronavirus cases in Vienna since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Stadt Wien, 2022).

With that in mind, it would be interesting to find out how Airbnb guests experienced their stays in Vienna and whether the pandemic significantly impacted their journeys. In this respect, it would be interesting to find out whether guests felt safe and their motivations for choosing Airbnb accommodation. Furthermore, it would be helpful to learn more about the guests' attitudes towards Airbnb or if these have changed due to COVID-19. This master thesis will try to find concrete explanations for all these matters.

1.1 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of a distinct literature review as well as an empirical part. The literature review includes an extensive research review, which reveals the current state of research regarding sharing economies, specifically Airbnb, and explains the coronavirus pandemic's events and its impact on the tourism industry. The literature review forms the basis for the second part, which consists of the empirical investigation. The empirical study refers to Airbnb guests who stayed in an accommodation in Vienna between February 1, 2020, and April 30, 2022. In the empirical part, the methodological approach is precisely explained. Furthermore, the research findings are described in chapter 4. Results and Discussion, followed by an interpretation, a conclusion, implications for relevant stakeholders, contribution to knowledge, limitations, and future research.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis aims to determine how Airbnb guests have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in Vienna. Hence, several aspects are being taken into consideration, such as the guests' perception of safety during their stay, the reason why guests prefer booking an Airbnb property instead of a traditional hotel room, or their attitudes towards renting an Airbnb property. In this context, the following research questions are going to be addressed:

<u>Research Question N°1</u>

RQ1 *How safe did Airbnb guests feel during their stays in Vienna?*

The first research question focuses on the guests' perceived safety, which refers to overall safety and specifically COVID-19-related prevention and hygiene measures. The matching hypotheses regarding this research question can be found in the following chapter, 1.3 Hypotheses, under Hypothesis N°1.

<u>Research Question N°2</u>

RQ2 *What has been the guests' main motivation to choose an Airbnb property instead of a classic accommodation?*

The second research question analyses the guests' motivations for choosing an Airbnb accommodation instead of a classic one like traditional hotel rooms. The matching hypotheses regarding this research question can be found in the following chapter, 1.3 Hypotheses, under Hypothesis N°2.

<u>Research Question N°3</u>

RQ3 *To what extent have guests' attitudes towards renting an Airbnb property changed since the beginning of the pandemic?*

The third research question explores whether the pandemic has impacted the guest's attitudes toward renting an Airbnb property. The matching hypotheses regarding this research question can be found in the following chapter, 1.3 Hypotheses, under Hypothesis N°3 and Hypothesis N°4.

1.3 Hypotheses

Based on the research questions listed in the previous chapter 1.2 Research Questions, several hypotheses were derived, which have to be verified or falsified within the scope of this thesis. In this subchapter 1.3 Hypotheses, the generated hypotheses are first presented in the form of a summary table. This table is intended to provide readers with a good overview of the hypotheses in advance:

Hypothesis N°1	
H^0	The guests' perception of safety has not changed since the beginning of the pandemic.
H^1	The guests' perception of safety has changed since the beginning of the pandemic.
Hypothesis N°2	
H^0	Guests did not choose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.
H^1	Guests chose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.
Hypothesis N°3	
H^0	The pandemic did not have an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.
H^1	The pandemic had an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.
Hypothesis N°4	
H^0	COVID-19 had no impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.
H^1	COVID-19 had an impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.

TABLE 1: HYPOTHESES OVERVIEW

At this point, however, it should be noted that the hypotheses are revisited in the literature review and placed in context at the appropriate points to better explain why these assumptions were deemed relevant. Hypothesis N°1 regarding the safety aspect can be found in chapter 2.2.9.1, The impact of COVID-19 on Airbnb. The other three hypotheses are put into context in chapter 2.2.2 Airbnb.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview

 A review of publications relevant to the topic of this thesis can be found in the section following. The aim is to provide a general picture of the existing knowledge about sharing economy platforms, Airbnb in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic, and these topic's interfaces. The first part of this chapter will examine the literature on sharing economies, followed by a specific body of research on Airbnb. Following that, information is provided about Vienna as a destination and local destination management organizations and related COVID-19 content and related research.

2.2 State of Knowledge

First, an overview of the terminology of the sharing economy will be provided, followed by relevant theoretical approaches and concepts.

2.2.1 The Sharing Economy

In order to understand the sharing economy concept, the idea of sharing itself must first be taken into consideration more closely. Belk (2014) states that sharing occurs in a variety of contexts and does not only refer to, for example, sharing food within a family but also to more complex issues such as intellectual property. In this sense, he emphasizes that intangibles such as ideas, values, and time may be shared, but he excludes aspects such as sharing a language or a place of birth, for instance, since these cannot be viewed as voluntary choices. He distinguishes between "sharing-in" and "sharing-out" in the concept of sharing. The former describes sharing within a family or with close friends, while the latter rather refers to sharing with strangers. This is also more often associated with one-off acts of sharing.

> "Sharing is a distinct, ancient, and increasingly vital consumer research topic that bears on a broad array of consumption issues ranging from sharing household resources versus atomized family possessions to file sharing versus intellectual property rights" (Belk, 2010, p. 715).

Moreover, Belk (2014) distinguishes between "demand sharing" and "open sharing." Demand sharing is sharing something that is explicitly desired by the corresponding counterpart. In this sense, he gives the example of a child asking his parents to be fed. On the other hand, open

sharing is, for instance, when a host tells their guests to use his or her house as it would be theirs. In this case, they no longer have to ask whether they can take food from the refrigerator or use the bathroom, for instance.

In 2015, the term *sharing economy* was added to the Oxford Dictionaries and is defined as an economic system "in which goods or services are shared between individuals, either for free or for a fee, typically over the Internet" (Heo, 2016, p. 167). The sharing economy (SE) refers to companies, business models, platforms, practices, and communities that enable the shared use of resources that are not used or, at least, not entirely used (Hawlitschek et al., 2018, p. 144-145). The sharing economy is often referred to as the consumer-to-consumer (C2C), peer-to-peer (P2P), or collaborative economy. However, it should be noted that the term "collaborative economy" is somewhat controversial, and that there is a debate with regard to the terminology in this concern (Polanco-Diges & Debasa, 2020, p. 217). Hossain (2020) examined the existing literature on SE concepts. The results of a total of 219 articles were summarized using a systematic literature review approach. Not only the definitional dilemma had been taken into consideration, but also the sharing economy as a phenomenon and the main theories used in literature. Furthermore, the different SE actors and their motivations were explored. Hossain (2020) concludes that "studies into SE started in 2014. Since then, the growth of publications has increased significantly, with the greatest number of publication in 2017" (p. 2). Hence, it can be concluded that the sharing economy is considered a relatively new field in research. In practice, the concept of sharing itself, however, is not entirely new and has been used quite a bit in business-to-business (B2B) transactions. For companies, the sharing economy can undoubtedly represent an interesting alternative to classic ownership models (Belk, 2014, p. 1599). One such example is the joint usage of agricultural machinery. Nevertheless, the sharing phenomenon could also be observed in the business-to-customer (B2C) sector, such as car rentals or video stores (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 93). In Western Europe and North America, the average drivers use their vehicles only 8% of the time. Similarly, electric drills are only used for six to thirteen minutes. Society tends to waste resources and burden the environment in these and other ways. Consumers and society can gain economic and practical benefits from the sharing economy in addition to environmental benefits (Belk, 2014, p. 1599). However, it must be stated that many different types of concepts can fall under the definition of sharing economies. In addition to well-known platforms such as Airbnb, these can also include online comparison services, for instance. These can be, for example, comparison portals for electricity and gas providers, Internet or telecommunications providers, or even car rental or insurance companies. These companies are also considered platform businesses because they connect buyers and sellers (Reinhold &

Dolnicar, 2017, p. 15). The following figure graphically depicts the relationship of this indispensable buyer-seller interaction in terms of peer-to-peer accommodation networks:
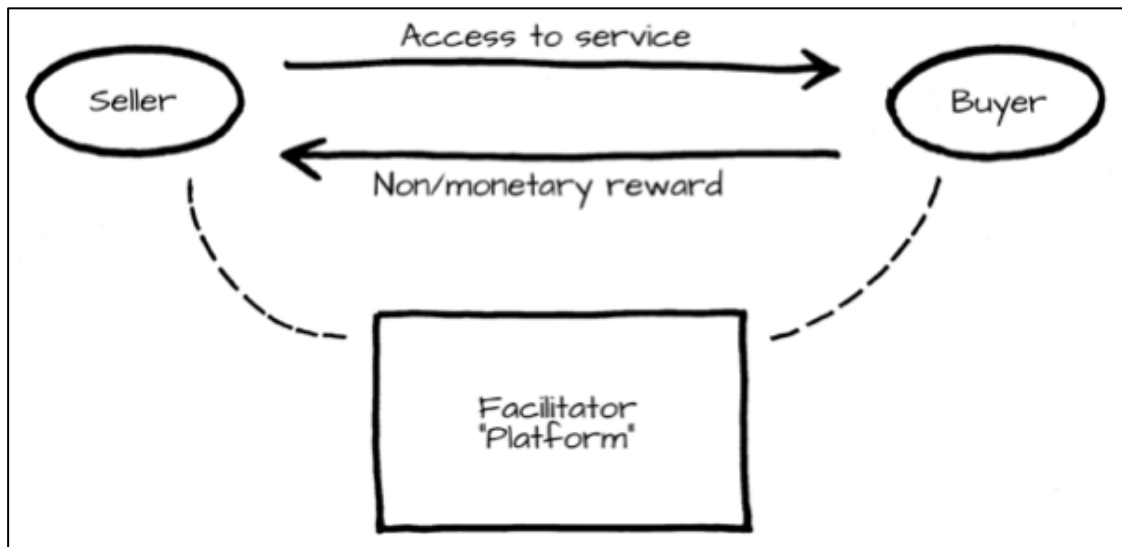
FIGURE 1: MULTI-SIDED PLATFORM (REINHOLD & DOLNICAR, 2017, P. 15)

Thus, the context of sharing is characterized by the type of actors participating and their connection. Actors can be both individuals and organizations independent of each other and assume the roles of buyers and sellers. Transactions in the context of sharing economies are relationships between buyers and sellers who come together to exchange access to resources for monetary or non-monetary counter-performance (Reinhold & Dolnicar, 2017, p. 15). Besides, it can be argued that sharing economy platforms may not be considered direct providers of the corresponding objects (for example, Airbnb may not be considered a direct provider of accommodations) but rather act simply as intermediaries between users and providers (Nath, 2021). Network hospitality allows travelers a forum for social and cultural exchange and is therefore considered a central component of the tourism industry (Wang et al., 2020, p. 699). Although a huge number of hosts rents out their accommodations through sharing economy platforms with the goal of earning extra money, many are also motivated by the desire to show other people the beauty of their home or of the region they live in (Hrobath et al., 2017, p. 138).

In addition, the use of sharing economy services has not only financial benefits for the providers, but also for the users, creating a so-called "win-win situation" for both parties (Jiang & Tian, 2016, p. 13). Indeed, it can be stated that for consumers, the temporary use of goods reduces expensive acquisition and maintenance costs. As already stated above, the sharing economy involves exchanging goods or reusing unused goods. However, this does not only lead to additional income for the respective owners. Using underutilized resources is definitely a sustainable

way to combat overconsumption or income inequality while counteracting environmental degradation (Muñoz & Cohen, 2017).

Furthermore, sharing economies provide tourists with even more accommodation options, as they are no longer tied to only traditional accommodations. (Wang et al., 2020, p. 699 In the context of travel, the sharing economy is often used as a lower-cost travel option, which may negatively impact traditional accommodations such as hotels (Lee et al., 2021). Hence, network hospitality is gaining more and more importance worldwide (Wang et al., 2020, p. 699). In general, the hospitality industry is considered to be very labor-intensive. A 2017 study by Forgacs & Dolnicar showed that the emergence of peer-to-peer accommodation networks such as Airbnb significantly impacted the hospitality industry. Less demand for traditional commercial lodging was recognized, which also constitutes a challenge for these businesses regarding employment opportunities (Forgacs & Dolnicar, 2017, p. 167). Indeed, it can be stated that the emergence of peer-to-peer short-term rental concepts represents a fundamental shift in the context of the sharing economy in tourism (Guttentag et al., 2018, p. 342). However, this does not only apply to the hospitality industry. According to the economist Jeremy Rifkin, services within the sharing economy will continue to gain in popularity in the future and may even lead to the decline of capitalism (Rifkin, 2014). An essential issue in this regard is consumer behavior, which has generally changed over the past few years. The trend is now more toward temporary use of goods rather than ownership. This applies to cars, for example, and is due to convenience and sustainability. The cost factor also plays an essential role in this sense (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 93).

The sharing economy is often associated with Internet services and mobile technologies (Guttentag et al., 2018, p. 342). "In a broad sense, the Internet itself is a giant pool of shared content that can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection, a browser, and a government that allows access to most or all web content" (Belk, 2014, p. 1595). Thus, other crucial driving components of this development could be social networks and electronic markets as well as mobile devices and electronic services. Likewise, online media play a significant role in the development of sharing economies since they connect different users at little, if any, cost and also enable easy payment and valuation options (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 93). Hence, users can write reviews anonymously, which, for instance, enables hosts to receive feedback and suggestions for improvement. Modern technologies such as smartphones and tablets are also of great importance for sharing economy services. They enable uncomplicated management and imply that no physical objects are needed, such as car keys in the case of car-sharing companies. Accordingly, users only need an app with which they can unlock the vehicles (ibid., p. 94). Finally, it might be

important to mention that even though the sharing economy is an ever-growing concept of increasing importance, it is still improbable that it will ever replace the formal economy (Felländer et al., 2015, p. 65).

2.2.2 Airbnb

The previous chapter explained the concept and terminology of the sharing economy, and also, critical theoretical approaches in this regard have been disclosed. In the following chapter, more specific content concerning the online platform Airbnb, which is the focus of this master's thesis, is going to be outlined.

Airbnb is one of the best-known companies renting out travel accommodations online, thanks to the rise of the sharing economy and technological development. Since its founding in 2008, Airbnb has become a significant competitor for traditional accommodations. In 2015, Airbnb recorded an annual growth rate of 90%, and its enterprise value was even equal to that of most renowned hotel chains (Choi, 2015, p. 2). According to Airbnb's founding story, the company's concept emerged because of a design conference during which hotels all over San Francisco were fully booked. As reported by the founders, two young art school graduates, it all began with the idea of renting out air mattresses on the floor as places to sleep to raise the rent for their apartment. In the beginning, they did not have any management experience, and after their first weekend, they had to compromise this knowledge gap (Gallagher, 2017). Thus, when the first success became apparent, and the two roommates realized that this could be a real business idea, they involved another friend in their plans. Nathan Blecharczyk became their technology co-founder, and gradually, they developed a website, initially focusing on significant events in the area. Later, the network became a platform that asked travelers to use their premises as shared accommodation. Despite its unusual way, the start-up quickly grew into a successful and established company (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1192).

Today, more than 7 million accommodations are available in more than 200 countries on the platform. As a result, six people check into an Airbnb accommodation every second on average (Nath, 2021), which shows the remarkable success Airbnb has experienced over the years. "By emphasizing personal character of transactions and the use of underutilized assets, Airbnb marketed itself as providing more authentic, diverse, inclusive and sustainable tourist services than hotels" (Adamiak, 2019, p. 2-3). According to Guttentag & Smith (2017), Airbnb guests use the service as a substitute for hotels, mainly mid-range hotels. They also found that Airbnb guests have high service expectations, even when accounting for traditional hotel attributes. Finally,

they add that the discussion of Airbnb's competition with hotels only partially applies the concept of disruptive innovation. A study by Ilona Pezenka examined the motivations and personality profiles of Airbnb users. The study surveyed over 1400 people aged around 25 years. The research results recommended a description of the typical Airbnb guest as an extroverted person who is open to new experiences. Despite their openness, however, it was observed that these are not necessarily exceedingly spontaneous people but, on the contrary - instead, organized people who often have pretty individual expectations (Lau, 2017).
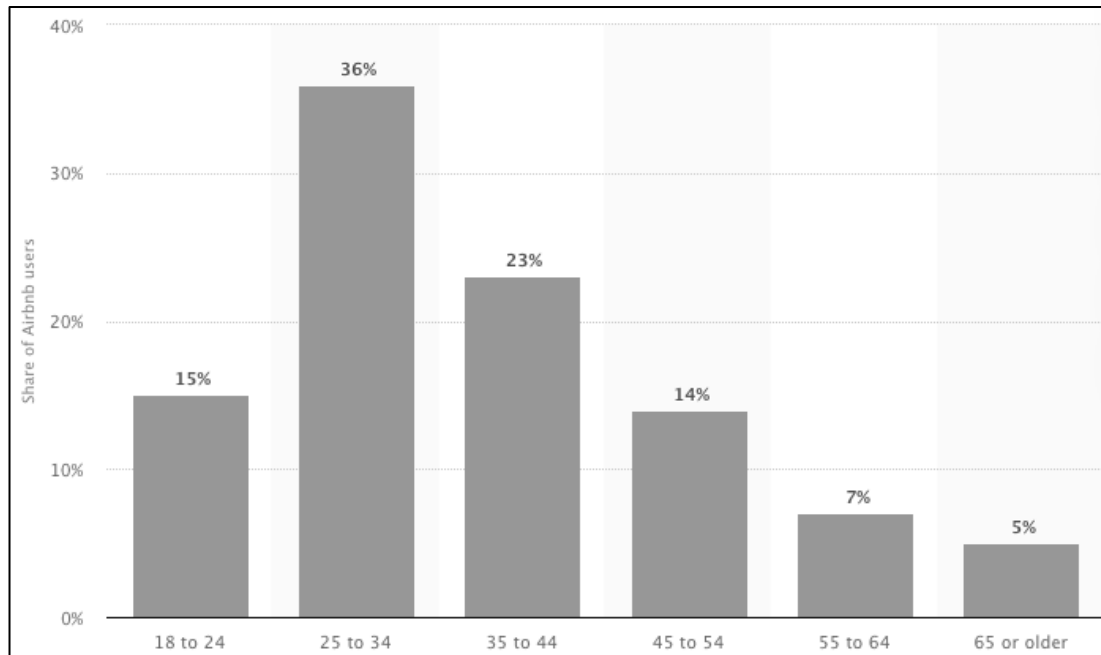
FIGURE 2: SHARE OF AIRBNB USERS BY AGE GROUP IN THE U.S. AND EUROPE 2017 (STATISTA, 2019)

As can be seen on the chart above, the majority of European and US Airbnb users were between 25 and 34 years old in 2017. According to the chart, older age groups generally represented a smaller portion of the Airbnb community: only about 5% of users were over 65 years old (Statista, 2019).

As already mentioned earlier, Airbnb is making part of the broader sharing economy, sometimes referred to as collaborative consumption. In this context, guests can live in properties without owning them. "People who have underused assets, in this case room or apartments, lend their assets and make extra money" (Choi et al., 2015, p. 2). Airbnb accommodations are usually private rooms in shared accommodations or entire properties. There are different types of accommodations, ranging from an extra bed in the host's living room to unique accommodations such as private islands (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1193) or even treehouses (Airbnb, 2022). Adamiak's

(2019) research provided a global picture of the geographic variation of Airbnb accommodations. He explains that the majority of Airbnb hosts have more than one accommodation. Further, he mentions that about half of the supply can be found in Europe, with the platform enjoying particular popularity as a P2P network in Northern and Western Europe. However, this is also the case in North and South America and Oceania, although the company seems more interesting to professional providers in other regions. "The total numbers of Airbnb listings in countries are dependent on the level of economic development and size of inbound tourism flow" (Adamiak, 2019, p. 15). Thus, it can be stated that regions with many tourist activities generally also see more Airbnb traffic, although this of course always depends on the respective local regulations. Furthermore, there is a particular concentration of Airbnb listings in metropolitan areas, and that about one-third of all accommodations are located in major cities. Another third of the offers is located in coastal regions, on the other hand (ibid, p. 16).

Airbnb generates revenue through the service fees which are charged for individual bookings. Both hosts and guests are charged these fees. In general, the fee for guests does not exceed 14.2% of the total amount, although this always varies according to the reservation type and size. Hosts are usually charged a 3% fee of the booking price. The number of users of the platform is constantly increasing, which allows the company to generate considerable revenues with reasonable individual fees. (Nath, 2021) Accommodation prices and the number of nights booked are factors that are strongly influenced by the location of the accommodation. Proximity to tourist attractions also often plays a decisive role, which means that the concentration of Airbnb accommodations in cities is often reflected in the structures of tourist attractions (Adamiak, 2019, p. 16).

Sharing economy platforms in the hospitality industry such as Airbnb have created apps for mobile devices. This allows users to access the sites on the go, which means they are not limited to desktop access. To make the experience as positive as possible and to ensure a certain level of trust and respect between hosts and guests, Airbnb has implemented an online reputation system. Guests are encouraged to post a review and rate the host or accommodation, with up to 5 stars available. In this context, the users should refer to aspects as the cleanliness and comfort of the accommodation. In return, hosts can also post a rating of their guests (Zervas et al., 2017, p. 7). Hence, trust is an essential keyword in the context of sharing economies. In a sharing economy-related activity, both sides have a certain amount of trust in the other party (Möhlmann, 2015). In this case, Airbnb guests value the safety or cleanliness of the accommodation, for instance. They count on the hosts to take care of these conditions. In return, the hosts let the

guests use their home, or at least a part of it, which also requires much confidence. They rely on the visitors to leave the accommodation in normal condition and not break anything or even steal from them. There have been numerous studies on the interpersonal trust of both hosts and guests in the past. A 2020 study by Wang et al. examined data from over 600 Airbnb hosts using structural equation modeling (Wang et al., 2020, p. 687). They found that the technical quality of the platform plays a significant role in terms of hosts' trust in Airbnb. (ibid., p. 699) Therefore, customers must create a profile to make a booking on the platform. Nevertheless, Airbnb has made its use relatively intuitive and straightforward. The traveler enters a destination, travel dates, and party size in the search fields (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1193). Recently, guests have also been able to insert a flexible travel date and destination. This tool is intended for travelers who are interested in a specific destination but flexible in their travel time. On the other hand, offering open destinations allows Airbnb to highlight the more special accommodations (Airbnb, 2021a). The available dates are displayed after entering the travel dates, including prices. Travelers can apply various filters to make the results more specific. If the travelers are interested in an accommodation, they can either instantly book it via the created profile booking or, if necessary, submit a booking request. In the latter case, the traveler must express his interest in a message; the host can then respond and accept or reject the request (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1193). The social aspects, such as social and cultural exchange, should also be considered vital to induce trust. Furthermore, the perceived effectiveness of privacy policies and the financial aspects are also considered essential benefits (Wang et al., 2020, p. 699). From the guest's perspective, it is not only a question of saving money that motivates travelers to choose Airbnb accommodation, but it also has a social background. Guests can gain authentic experiences through the platform and build relationships with their hosts while gaining real local and cultural experiences (Heo, 2016). The literature has not yet addressed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Airbnb guest experiences in Vienna. However, due to the numerous protective measures and the circumstances in the context of the pandemic, it can be hypothesized that

    H_1 *COVID-19 had an impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.*

In summary, it can thus be stated that travelers choose Airbnb accommodations especially for financial and social reasons. However, in times of COVID-19, the thought of physical proximity to other people is unimaginable for many for fear of contracting the coronavirus. Social distancing is a big issue in this sense, and as already outlined previously, some people want to isolate themselves because of this and no longer feel safe in classic hotels. Due to this fact, it can be hypothesized that:

H₁ *Guests chose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel because of the pandemic.*

Sthapit and Jiménez-Barreto (2018) also investigated guests' motivations for booking Airbnb accommodations and their perceptions of the sharing concept. They found that utilitarian factors indeed do contribute to travelers' motivations. However, the concept of sharing was also of great importance to the respondents, evidence was found for both the community and distributional dimensions of sharing in Airbnb hospitality experiences. As a further matter, a study by Fagerstrøm et al. (2017) examined how profile pictures of Airbnb hosts influence potential customers. In line with other studies, the accommodation price was found to be the most crucial influence on the approach and avoidance propensity to explore the site or make a booking. In second place followed the facial expressions of the hosts in their profile pictures. The absence of a facial image or an angry facial expression tended to lead to rejection and decreased the likelihood of a booking. Customer reviews also play an essential role in this sense. Another interesting finding is the fact that the physical appearance of the host triggers different effects among male and female users. Moreover, according to a huge number of researchers, Airbnb's significant and rapid growth makes it more appropriate to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of disruptive innovation. The theory suggests that a new product or service that challenges established business practices might have limited initial appeal but later grow to become an accepted, everyday product (Varma et al., 2016). The Disrupted Innovation Theory is explained in more detail in section 2.3 Theoretical framework. Furthermore, the Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) Model states that values play a central role in forming an individual's attitudes, which subsequently lead to specific behavior (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 645). A value is referred to as being an individual's ongoing belief that a specific behavior should be personally and morally preferred. In doing so, an individual bases certain behaviors on the perceived importance of values. The VAB model can be found in very different research areas (Tajeddini et al., 2021, p. 3). In the context of a study by Shim et al. (1999), career attitudes and expected choice behavior connected with retail management were investigated. In this sense, the survey data of more than 750 students were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The study suggested that personal values have an impact on career attitudes in retail management, which in turn influences expected choice behavior (Shim et al., 1999, p. 28). Another theory often associated with Airbnb is the Theory of Planned behavior (TPB), which has often been used in tourism research to investigate why people visit particular destinations or choose to stay at specific accommodations and defines

- attitude
- subjective norms, and
- perceived control

as the main factors determining behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991, p. 5). Icek Ajzen introduced the concept to enhance the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which he developed with Martin Fishbein. Tajeddini et al., (2021) explain that TPB plays a crucial role especially in terms of repurchase intentions. Repurchase intentions and loyalty in the Airbnb and hotel contexts are impacted by various factors. However, behavioral intention is thought to be the most important indicator of a person's actual behavior. Customers' behavioral intentions are also considered a key antecedent and powerful predictor of loyalty in the literature. Consumption experiences influence customers' attitudes and perceptions, which ultimately influence their behavior. In this context, it can be emphasized again that a central point of this thesis consists of Airbnb guests' attitudes. Since there are no recent works in the literature that have addressed this aspect in relation to the current COVID-19 situation in Austria, in the following empirical study, this aspect will be examined in more detail. However, as explained above, many people opted for an Airbnb instead of a traditional hotel during the pandemic. Thus, it can be hypothesized that

H₁ *The pandemic had an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.*

Furthermore, customers who perceive a high value through their consumption experiences are more likely to rebuy the product in the future or, in this case, to reuse the service in the future and thus become loyal and faithful customers. Since it is unclear how many of the Airbnb guests who visited Vienna during the pandemic had already booked an Airbnb at an earlier point in time, representing precisely this repurchase situation, the theoretical focus of this thesis is on other approaches, which will be explained at a later stage. Thus, it can be stated that the TPB is rather unsuitable as a theoretical lens for this master thesis due to first-time Airbnb users' lack of repurchase intention in this specific situation. The goal of this master thesis is, as outlined above, to determine the motives of Airbnb use during the pandemic and its impact on Airbnb experiences, and due to the circumstances, it is assumed that there were more first-time users as usual (Tajeddini et al., 2021). Consequently, a focus has been set on other theories, like motivation theories, for instance, which are all going to be explicitly outlined under 2.3 Theoretical framework.

2.2.3 Critical Views Towards Airbnb

In addition to the positive features of short-term rental (STR) platforms like Airbnb, it is also essential to take a critical look at the concept. The growth of Airbnb presents a challenge to many destinations. A huge number of Airbnb rentals, for example, are technically illegal because they lack the proper permits or are unofficial. Thus, the affected areas need to find a way to combat these illegal activities (Guttenberg, 2013, p. 1193). Critics draw on the fact that the emergence of the platform generated a tourist housing black market and, especially in larger cities, caused losses of tax revenues and significant increases in local rents (Lau, 2017). In addition, increased conflicts were observed between residents and tourists. The constant rolling of suitcases and the noise, pollution, and garbage often caused tensions in houses with Airbnb apartments. Another problem might be the environment of the accommodations. Short-term rentals have already fundamentally changed consumer zones and infrastructures in some cities. Critics emphasize that this is increasingly more about meeting the consumption needs of tourists than the basic needs of locals (Beirer, 2021). Consequently, according to critics, the advent of millions of accommodations in more than 200,000 cities worldwide leads to gentrification, displacement of residents, and even racial discrimination (Nath, 2021).

Despite Airbnb's self-promotion as an open and welcoming network, the reality is that discrimination cases continue to occur on the platform. In New York, hosts who are people of colour have a demonstrably lower income than white hosts. Guests with African American-sounding names are less likely to be hosted than those with white-sounding names (Zhang et al., 2022). This shows how strong discrimination and racism are in our society and are also present in digital spaces. Digital discrimination might be an essential keyword in this sense. "The term digital discrimination is used to define a range of circumstances in which a person or group is treated less favorably than another person or group based on their background and/or certain personal characteristics with regards to Internet" (Cheng & Foley, 2018, p. 95). In this context, schools are utilized as an example, where some children with socioeconomically weaker backgrounds might not have computers and consequently have no access to the Internet. As it applies to Airbnb and other sharing economy platforms, digital discrimination refers to situations where users are discriminated against through the internet because of their race, religion, or sexual orientation. On Airbnb, as already described above in section 2.2.2 Airbnb, hosts can handle bookings via a request system and direct bookings (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1193).

In this sense, interested travelers can make an accommodation request in a personal message to the host. In this way, hosts can decide whom they want to accommodate and whom they do

not. Because of this approach, there seems to be some discrimination between hosts and guests. The reason for this might be that hosts and guests can rate each other's digital profiles and forward, accept or reject accommodation requests. Most cases of discrimination seem to be related to race and sexual orientation (Cheng & Foley, 2018, p. 96). Another critical point are fake listings or so-called scams. There have been repeated cases of guests being ripped off in the past. Again and again, supposed hosts have advertised photos of another accommodation, or the accommodation did not exist at all. However, users can protect themselves from fraud with Airbnb's various safeguards. Airbnb takes several steps to prevent scams, such as using machine learning to detect fake listings and removing contact information until a booking is confirmed. In this way, the likelihood of fraud occurring is very low, as long as the users communicate or interact through the platform (Walsh et al., 2020, p. 129). Nevertheless, as indicated at the beginning of this subchapter, the critical issues regarding sharing economies and especially Airbnb include not only social and moral concerns but also economical and tax issues. Economic or fiscal concerns have clearly increased in the last years and many cities have implemented strict regulations that Airbnb hosts must adhere to (Monahan, 2021, p. 3). In places where there is a high concentration of Airbnb accommodation, residents are often disturbed by the noise of guests, for instance. They often feel their privacy is restricted and consequently no longer feel comfortable. As a result, people consider moving out of the inner-city centers and into the suburbs. Some critics say that the sharing economy is fundamentally more about self-interest than about the sharing aspect. Furthermore, critics often describe it as predatory and exploitative. Indeed, after Uber entered the market in New York City, the cost of cab medallions, which permit drivers to operate, dropped by about a quarter. In Texas, the entry of Airbnb led to a clear drop in hotel revenues (Quattrone et al., 2016, p. 1385).

Scholz (2016) views the illegal actions of sharing economy actors not as a mistake but as a method or a tool. He emphasizes that the government has not intervened and is negligent in this regard, which has resulted in more and more sharing economy companies not paying taxes and violating several federal laws. "Airbnb spent over $8 million to lobby in San Francisco when residents voted on regulating their operations" (Scholz, 2016, p. 7). Nevertheless, it should be noted that regulations justified on the basis of consumer protection do not automatically mean that they will achieve their objectives or that they are absolutely necessary. Measures have to be judged in the context of the actual situation. However, many traditional consumer protection regulations tend to be detrimental to consumer welfare. In many cases, markets, competition, reputation systems, and constant innovation can sometimes solve problems better than regulation (Koopman et al., 2014). In a study published by Hassanli et al. (2019), data from *Inside*

Airbnb and Sydney newspapers have been analyzed in order to examine how Airbnb was portrayed in the media. News media has a significant impact on the way how people perceive the world around them. Text analysis revealed effective messaging related to the cost of government regulation, as well as issues related to community involvement. In Reykjavik, Iceland, the so-called "Airbnb syndrome" led to changes in some of the local areas. These movements strongly resemble the characteristics of gentrification, and significant differences between rents for short-term and long-term properties could be observed. This has motivated even more residents to invest in apartments so that they can then rent them out through Airbnb. In addition, many residents are moving away or leaving the neighborhood during peak seasons due to the changing environment. An additional challenge in the local rental housing market is the fact that both tourists and locals want to reside in the same neighborhoods (Mermet, 2017). In larger cities, private apartments are increasingly being used as vacation homes permanently. P2P platforms play a key role as intermediaries between main tenants and possible vacationers as subtenants in this context. A growing number of German states have responded to the imminent housing shortage, including Bavaria, which has prohibited the misappropriation of residential space since 2007. Specifically, it is prohibited to allow a third party to occupy an apartment for more than eight weeks per year without official permission. Munich's city administration issued a notice on August 1, 2018, requesting Airbnb to submit the relevant personal data on its registered hosts from July 2017 to September 2018. In order to detect crimes in Munich, the city of Munich issued a notice requesting the transmission of relevant data on Airbnb's registered hosts from July 2017 to September 2018. In the city area, advertisements were recorded for all hosts who rented their properties beyond the legal maximum of eight weeks (Pfeiffer, 2019).

2.2.4   The Destination of Vienna, Austria

This chapter examines Vienna as a tourist destination in more detail. In this context, information on the destination's demographics, geography, and culture is provided, as well as content regarding destination management, tourist incentives, and guest arrivals over the years.

Vienna is the capital city of Austria and is located in the east of the country. On January 1, 2021, Vienna had a population of over 1.9 million (Bauer et al., 2021, p. 2). The Vienna metropolitan area even had a total population of more than 2.8 million on January 1, 2020 (Eurostat, 2021). According to experts' forecasts, Vienna will soon increase the population of up to 2 million inhabitants in the coming years, almost reaching the all-time high of 1910 (Hatz, 2008, p. 321). Vienna is a popular student city and offers a total of 23 institutions of higher education. After Berlin, Vienna is considered the second largest student city in the German-speaking area. Vienna

has an area of almost 415 km^2, with almost half of it consisting of green spaces and bodies of water (Bauer et al., 2021, p. 6). The strong growth of the city and its surrounding area poses a significant challenge for the infrastructure since an ever-increasing population also means an increase in traffic activities (Prenner, 2015, p. 31). Even though the perceived performance of public transportation generally has a relatively low impact on visitors' satisfaction with their destination (Thompson & Schofield, 2007, p. 143), public transportation is an essential component of the infrastructure of a large city like Vienna. The city is so popular with international guests due to the city's cultural heritage and the fact that Vienna is a remarkably safe city (Hatz, 2008, p. 321). In fact, "tourism plays a vital role in the Austrian economy." (Wöber, 2002, p. 81) The country is particularly attractive to U.S. and Asian travelers, with an intense concentration of tourism on urban travel. Vienna and Salzburg, in particular, are considered top-rated destinations, due in no small part to various rankings as well as their unique cultural heritage (Jiricka-Pürrer et al., 2020, p. 1). In 2019, Vienna was named the world's most livable city for the tenth year in a row (Mercer, 2019). However, due to the COVID-19 crisis, Vienna lost its perennial first place in the ranking. Major European cities were hit particularly hard by the lockdowns and strains on the healthcare system. In this sense, the lower cultural offerings would also have had a significant impact on the results of these rankings (ORF, 2021). Vienna's history and culture are undoubtedly essential tourist incentives attracting numerous national and international tourists every year. In fact, Vienna's city walls were demolished in the 19th century. Only a few remains of the medieval structures can still be admired by tourists in the Inner City, such as the *Burgtor* between *Heldenplatz* and the ring road. The latter connects all the city's tourist sites inside and outside the ring (Kádár, 2013, p. 109). Vienna is a very diverse city and especially popular with music and art lovers. Vienna has set itself apart from other European destinations with its huge panel of arts and music offerings. Austria is known for its world-renowned composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Johann Strauss, Joseph Haydn, and many more notable individuals who have left their mark on the music world. The *Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra* is also world famous and attracts numerous guests from all over the world to Vienna every year with their *New Year's Concert* (Bui & Trupp, 2014). There are about 100 museums in Vienna, which are dedicated to very different topics. In addition to art and music institutions, there are also historical or technical museums and much more. (Wien Tourismus, 2022) A substantial sight of Vienna is the *Schönbrunn* Palace. In 2019, more than 4.35 million guests visited *Schönbrunn Palace* in Vienna (Bauer et al., 2021, p. 9). *Schönbrunn Palace* was considered the residence of the Habsburgs until 1918. It looks back on an important historical past that is of great significance for the development of the Republic of Austria (Hassmann, 2004). Since 1996, the site has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site. (UNESCO World Heritage, n.d.) Between 1991 and 1998,

though, the quality of tourist accommodations in Austria even significantly improved due to two primary factors: Firstly, the federal government supported the transformation or improvement of accommodations. Also, shorter vacations with shorter stays but higher-quality service, especially for city trips, have become more prevalent in recent years (Wöber, 2002, p. 82). Using SWOT analysis and expert interviews, Latzenhofer (2015) examined the branding of Vienna as a destination in the context of luxury tourism. The case study revealed that Vienna is considered a luxury destination in the long run (Latzenhofer, 2015, p. 311). The tourism-related activities of a region are the focal point of a destination management organization (DMO). DMOs have to cope with an enormous spectrum of tasks. First and foremost, these include professional tourism management of a region and related marketing activities. The role of a DMO is to act as an interface between all the key stakeholders in a destination. The goal is to make the destination interesting for both national and international guests and to attract them to the region (Steinecke & Herntrei, 2017, p. 61). Vienna Tourist Board (VTB) is considered Vienna's official destination management organization. The DMO takes care of the structural goals of the destination and has a strong interest in constantly increasing visitor numbers (Bui & Trupp, 2014, p. 7). Vienna is becoming increasingly popular among tourists all over the world, especially among Asian tourists (ibid., p. 2). In 2016, Vienna ranked 18th internationally and even 8th on the European level among the most visited cities in the world (Hrobath et al., 2017, p. 140). Indeed, as can be seen from the following figures, there has been a strong upward trend when it comes to overnight stays in Austria's capital city. While the number of overnight stays in 2016 was still around 15.8 million, this rose to 16.4 million in 2017. In 2018, it was 17.4 million, and in 2019 even 18.6. In 2020, this number dropped by a whopping 73.5% to only 4.9 million due to travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. 2021, on the other hand, showed a slight upward trend again; 5.4 million overnight stays were registered in Vienna last year (TourMIS, 2022).

2.2.5   Airbnb in Vienna

In total, there are 11,429 Airbnb listings in Vienna. Out of these, 75.2% are entire homes, 23.6% are private rooms in shared accommodations, and only 0.7% are shared rooms. 0.6% of the listings are hotels. The average Airbnb accommodation in Vienna is rented out for 32 nights and costs 83€ per night, generating an annual income of 2,363€ for its host. 94.8% of the bookings are short-term stays, and only 5.2% are longer-term stays. However, it should be noted that these figures are strongly influenced by outliers, as over 600 accommodations do not record any bookings and can therefore be considered inactive (Inside Airbnb, 2021). In August 2017, about 12% of Airbnb listings in Vienna were inactive. This means that they were neither bookable

within the following year nor received a rating within the previous year. Vice versa, the active listings are either available for booking in the following year or were rated in the previous year, or both (Seidl et al., 2017). 56.1% of Vienna Airbnb listings are multi-listings, meaning that the hosts have more than one accommodation listed. Many of the multi-listing hosts are commercial providers. The host with the most listings has reported 243 accommodations. The 2nd district, Leopoldstadt, is the district with the most Airbnb accommodations. 1,229 listings can be found here, which represents 10.8% of all Vienna Airbnb listings (Inside Airbnb, 2021). In terms of accommodation types, offers for houses and apartments are dominated by offers for 4 or more persons. Thus, the majority of offers are not small. The average apartment or house in Vienna has 3.9 beds (Seidl et al., 2017).

The demand for Airbnb accommodation in Vienna is significantly positively influenced by the number of pictures, the size of the offer, as well as the host's responsiveness, among other factors. The offer price, the distance to the city center, and the responsiveness of the Airbnb host are among the factors that have a significantly negative impact on the demand (Gunter & Önder, 2017, p. 289). As many other cities, also Vienna now has strict regulations regarding STR and sharing economy platforms. The Vienna Commercial Court recently ruled that municipal social housing ("Wiener Wohnen") apartments may no longer be rented out via Airbnb. Despite having already prohibited it, some people didn't comply, which is why this is now being more closely monitored (ORF, 2021b). As mentioned in 2.2.3 Critical views towards Airbnb, critics rely on the fact that the emergence of Airbnb has led to significant increases in local rents in many cities (Lau, 2017). In order to counteract the housing shortage and speculation in real estate in Vienna, the Green Party demands a so-called emptiness tax. Accordingly, the levy is aimed at speculative vacancy, which has mainly three reasons: the construction of apartments as a purely financial investment, speculation with old buildings, or a tourist misuse, for example, via platforms such as Airbnb. With these taxes, the Greens hope that Vienna's rental housing market will somewhat recover, and that more rental apartments will come onto the market (Kurier, 2022). In this sense, it can be summarized that the state considers apartments rented through Airbnb as basically vacant. Due to the considerable amount of levies, some Airbnb hosts would possibly withdraw from the STR if this bill were to be voted.

2.2.6 SARS Cov-2 & The COVID-19 Pandemic

The *severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus type 2* (SARS-Cov-2) is a novel strain of coronavirus that has not been detected in humans prior to the current pandemic. Scientists believe that the virus initially came from animals and has now jumped to humans (Chan et al., 2020, p.

515). Coronavirus disease is an infection of the respiratory tract and is transmitted by droplet infection or aerosols (Prather et al., 2020, p. 1). Droplet infections are the most frequent form of virus transmission. Even though smear infections are less likely, these are also considered a possible transmission route. For this reason, disinfecting hands and surfaces is particularly important (Weckbecker & Just, 2020, p. 13). Measures to cease the spread of the virus aim to reduce transmission through droplets produced when infected persons sneeze and cough (Prather et al., 2020, p. 1). Once humans were infected with the virus, human-to-human transmission could not be averted, which is why the number of infected consistently increased (Chan et al., 2020, p. 515). Depending on its severity, a coronavirus infection can cause either a severe illness or only mild symptoms. An asymptomatic infection is also possible (Ciotti et al., 2020, p. 366). Air pollution is a critical factor in mortality associated with COVID-19 infection, and this is likely due to the chronic respiratory impairment of individuals who are constantly exposed to poor air quality (Hutter et al., 2020, p. 9). As a result of the outbreak of the novel SARS Cov-2 coronavirus in China, several countries in Europe became the next hotspots in March 2020 (Gyódi, 2021, p. 3).

When an epidemic becomes a worldwide or at least very large-scale threat that crosses national borders and affects a large number of people, it is referred to as a pandemic (Kelly, 2011, p. 540). The extremely rapid spread of the virus quite soon occurred across countries and even across continents, eventually becoming a global threat which was hence officially classified as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12, 2020 (WHO, 2020a). Between January 3, 2020, and February 11, 2022, a total of more than 2.2 million COVID-19 cases were reported to the WHO in Austria. Approximately 14,000 people have died from or with the virus (WHO, 2022). In addition to the devastating health consequences and the accompanying measures, however, the economic impact of the pandemic should not be underestimated. In many countries, the health crisis also became an economic crisis. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 200,000 people lost their jobs. The number of unemployed increased dramatically in March 2020 and peaked at 522,253 in April. The Austrian economy has been slowly recovering since then, and unemployment decreases. Almost one-third of all unemployed in Austria live in Vienna, which is the province with the highest number of unemployed (Bocksch, 2020).

Borio (2020) sees the current crisis as an accelerated trend that even began before the pandemic. He considers the higher debt and lower interest rates associated with it as a problem. A study by Qiu et al. (2020) shows that many Hong Kong, Wuhan, and Guangzhou residents are

even willing to pay for risk reduction and measures to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that people would voluntarily pay for this risk reduction shows how much the pandemic intruded into everyone's lives and how much people want a return to normalcy. The willingness to pay (WPT) shows no significant difference among the three cities, but there were differences in terms of demographic factors. The study found that younger people are willing to pay more for risk reduction than older people. (Qiu et al., 2020, p. 11). One reason for this could be the fact that young people are more comfortable with digital media and are therefore more quickly informed about pandemic events.

2.2.7 Crises as a Phenomenon

As stated by Alas & Gao (2012, p.1), crises are a type of organizational phenomenon. The existence of the organizational unit in human society implies that it is closely related to society in one direction. A crisis management orientation assumes the organization manages and resolves the crisis.

> *"An organizational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly"* (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 3).

Thus, organizational crises are characterized by highly ambiguous conditions where the causes and effects are unknown yet pose a significant threat to the survival of the affected organization as well as its stakeholders. This is due, in part, to the fact that members have little time to respond to surprising events. Making quick decisions can ultimately help improve or worsen the situation. Due to the diversity of existing crisis types, different reactions to the respective crises are also needed. Crises can range from natural disasters to bribery, extortion, sexual harassment, or even terrorist attacks, to only name a few (ibid., p. 2). In an economic context, business cycles or fluctuations in economic activity are the so-called ups and downs of the general state of the economy that are distinctive to the specific industrial age and whose most striking phase is the crisis. This represents the turning point at which an excessive economic boom turns into a depression that usually lasts for an extended period (Schmölders, 2017). While today the term crisis management can be considered as a general term that encompasses several aspects of a crisis, there is debate in the literature that "crisis management" sees itself as merely responding to an already existing crisis. Preparation or prevention is not considered in this respect. The

Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 is often cited as the origin of the term crisis management (Krystek & Moldenhauer, 2007, p. 137).

Asadzadeh et al. (2020) addressed the use of IT in crisis management concerning the current COVID-19 pandemic. They found that IT can help in risk mitigation regarding the dangerous effects of the outbreak and that the damage of the pandemic could be minimized as a result. A critical component of this view is education or raising awareness. The society could be better informed about such issues with various IT applications and would know better how to deal with them in case. This is not only true for infectious disease outbreaks but also in terms of predicting such outbreaks. They conclude that appropriate strategic planning could improve the public health response to disease outbreaks and thus, mitigate economic losses and save lives (Asadzadeh et al., 2020, p. 8).

2.2.8   The COVID-19 Situation in Vienna

COVID-19 was first discovered in Austria on January 24, 2020. A person staying in Kühtai, Tyrol, got infected by a Chinese instructor in Starnberg, Germany. The case nevertheless fell under German numbers since the diagnosis was made in Munich, Germany, on January 28. Two cases imported from Italy were diagnosed in Innsbruck on February 25. Two days later, on February 27, the first three infections were detected in Austrian residents in the capital. More and more clusters emerged in Europe, including a rather large cluster in Italy, and eventually, the number of infected people in Austria also increased dramatically. The first death associated with COVID-19 reported in Austria occurred on March 12, 2020, in a hospital in Vienna. The person in question was a 69-year-old man who got infected with the virus during a cruise in Italy (Kreidl et al., 2020). The deceased had concomitant diseases and additional organ failures. Due to lung failure, the patient was transferred from the normal sick department to the intensive care unit within a short time (ORF, 2020b). To prevent the importation of Coronavirus into Austria or to minimize the risk, strict controls were implemented at border crossings that restricted entry into the country. Upon arrival in Austria, 14-day quarantines and strict isolation measures were imposed in some cases (Kreidl et al., 2020, p. 648). A nationwide lockdown was imposed on March 16, 2020, to contain the spread of the virus and reduce the burden on the health care system. Carlin et al. (2021) highlight that mental health and psychological well-being play a significant role in the pandemic. The study group for their analysis was constituted of all adults who entered the trauma resuscitation room of the Medical University of Vienna after a suicide attempt. It was found that during this initial lockdown, the number of suicide attempts was significantly higher than in other years, which shows the severe psychological stress that this whole situation brings.

The incidence of infections gradually reduced over the summer of 2020. Thus, many of the prior measures were lifted or relaxed. From November 2020 to January 2021, a second threatening COVID-19 wave followed, due to which a second lockdown was also imposed from November 17 to December 6, 2020 (ORF, 2020a). A vaccination campaign against COVID began in early 2021. Subsequently, the numbers of new infections began to rise again in March and April due to the emergence of new, even more, aggressive or contagious variants. In November, the government announced that there would be mandatory vaccination against the virus starting February 1 (ORF, 2021a). From November 22 to December 11, 2021, a general lockdown again took effect in Austria, which was lifted on December 12 only for vaccinated and recovered people. People to whom these characteristics did not apply still had to accept the exit restrictions until January 2022. On March 9, 2022, enforcement of the vaccination requirement was suspended until May 31, 2022 (Scherndl, 2022). As of February 15, 2022, approximately half a million infections have been confirmed in Vienna since the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 400,000 people are considered recovered, and almost 3000 people have died with or from the coronavirus in Vienna (Stadt Wien, 2022). Finally, as mentioned above, air pollution counts as an essential aspect of mortality associated with a COVID-19 infection. Since Vienna is generally considered a city with limited air pollution, this correlation suggests a relatively significant impact of air pollution on respiratory infections (Hutter et al., 2020, p. 9).

2.2.9 The Pandemic's Impact on the Tourism Industry

As stated by Zhong et al. (2019), "the tourism industry is readily affected by its external environment ranging from infectious diseases to social incidents" (p. 1). Tourism destinations are very image-dependent, mainly since no tangible products are sold in this context. Instead, prospective customers judge the quality of a destination based on its reputation. Tourism crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic generally harm the image of a destination. Vice versa, a poorer image reduces a prospective customer's intention to choose a destination (Zhong et al., 2019, p. 3).

Even though COVID-19 is not the first crisis the tourism industry has faced (Kreiner & Ram, 2020, p. 2), the shock triggered by COVID-19 differs in three crucial ways:

1. *"The economic shock and the resulting decline in travel occurred globally and led to a drop in international tourist arrivals of up to 30%.*
2. *The shock is much more dramatic, with economic growth falling twice as much as regular shocks.*

3. *The shock could trigger structural changes in specific industry segments."*

(Dolnicar & Zare, 2020, p. 1) Thus, it can be stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has social and economical impacts around the world that should not be underestimated (Gyódi, 2021, p. 3). First, it must be considered that coronavirus is a global issue that has caused a decline in travel around the world. Also, the pandemic's economic impact was more remarkable, primarily because of the lockdowns that brought economies to a virtual standstill. Moreover, the crisis shows a continuing potential to cause significant changes in the tourism industry even after the pandemic (Kreiner & Ram, 2020, p. 2). According to Zhong et al. (2019), the development of hotel products and the change in hotel types are the two most important future directions from the hotel industry's perspective. Travel agencies tend to be more concerned with the emergence of new products in the tourism industry. While tourism experts see the recovery of tourist attractions as a positive development, tourist attraction operators are not optimistic about the future. In terms of STR, Dolnicar & Zare (2020) think that Airbnb will gradually return to its original ethos of sharing housing with ordinary citizens as the number of capitalist hosts decreases and that of so-called befrienders, who value the social aspect of accommodation, and ethical hosts increases. Further, they predict that the upper limit of supply will be reached as some capitalist hosts will shift to the long-term rental market to avoid the risks associated with super shocks.

Using data on the supply of real estate in four large Austrian cities (Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, and Salzburg), Kadi et al. (2020) examined the impact of COVID-19 on the rental housing market of the concerned cities. According to their analysis, the supply of rental housing has declined. While growth varies across cities and platforms, they observed a fairly straightforward upward trend in both aspects, especially in Vienna and Salzburg. Several property owners have rethought the idea of renting out their properties for tourist purposes. In three out of four cities, rental levels have remained the same or even increased despite declining tourist demand. The combination of pandemic-related regulations limiting the number of tourist accommodations, on the one hand, and shrinking demand, on the other, makes vacation property rentals less profitable for owners than before the crisis (Kadi et al., 2020).

The pandemic's significant impact on the hospitality industry is not least due to general travel restrictions but also to hygiene measures. Marriott International is an interesting example of a classic hospitality company that improved its cleanliness and hygiene standards due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The chain established a cleanliness council which addressed higher standards of cleanliness in surface areas, safer contact with guests, as well as better food safety (Marriott International, 2020). In general, it can be said that people have been more concerned about

safety and hygiene since the pandemic, and this is also reflected in people's travel behavior. Hygiene and health play a vital role in travel-related activities (Rahman et al., 2021). The outbreak of SARS in 2003 significantly heightened society's awareness of the importance of hygiene and cleanliness in hotel operations. In this context, it can also be noted that customers are very much influenced by hygiene and cleanliness factors in the course of purchasing decisions in a service environment such as the hotel industry. During the pandemic, poor hygiene and cleanliness were identified as significant causes of illness. The pandemic severely impacted guests' safety expectations have significantly increased (Jiang & Wen, 2020).

2.2.9.1 The Impact of COVID-19 on Airbnb

Nevertheless, not only the classic hotel businesses feel the pandemic and the measures that come with it very strongly, but also peer-to-peer accommodation services like Airbnb are intensely touched by COVID – albeit partly in a slightly different way:

> "*The new scenario of the COVID-19 has forced governments to enforce travel restrictions, and some hotel chains have closed their properties. In such a context, Airbnb has become an alternative in the accommodation or just a preferred option for those who wish to keep away from social interaction*" (Bigné et al., 2021, p. 104).

Indeed, according to Airbnb, bookings increased in the U.S. between mid-May and early June 2020 compared with the same period in the previous year. Airbnb noticed the same trend globally and assumed that it could benefit from this situation since many people view Airbnb accommodations as less risky than hotel accommodations regarding the spread of viruses (Lee & Deale, 2021). Travelers who wanted to isolate themselves socially and avoid social contact or proximity to other people thus tended to prefer Airbnb accommodations to classic hotels during the pandemic. In fact, Bigné et al. (2021) found in their study that Airbnb became significantly more critical in travelers' accommodation choices. Airbnb has seen a strong increase in acceptance and popularity as a result of the pandemic. Based on that, one could theorize that the perception of safety among travelers may well have changed due to the crisis. Since there are no new findings regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in Vienna in particular, the following hypothesis has been developed:

> **H₁** *The guests' perception of safety has changed since the beginning of the pandemic.*

However, Airbnb's financial situation did not turn out to be good right from the beginning of the pandemic since the company had to deal with a massive drop in revenues in the first weeks. As of April 2020, Airbnb's valuation has dropped by nearly $13 billion. On May 5, 2020, the company told the public that it was laying off about 25% of its workforce. The company had about 1,900 employees and was initially scheduled to go public in 2020 (Walsh et al., 2020, p. 130-131). Before the crisis, Airbnb showed a strong growth trend with an increasing number of accommodations. Gyódi (2021) compared the impact of COVID-19 on the traditional hotel industry and Airbnb. The study focused on 9 European cities. While there were still more accommodations in the cities (except for Milan and Venice) in March 2020 than in the previous years, a general downward trend became apparent in April, which continued until August 2020 and resulted in an average of 17% of the accommodations being withdrawn. Only Paris saw little change in the number of active listings, while Lisbon, London, and Amsterdam felt the most declines (p. 17). A study by Lee & Deale (2021) noted that people perceived the risks associated with staying in Airbnb accommodations increased during the pandemic. They suggest that sharing economy businesses ensure that they are flexible and provide consistent and thoughtful service. In addition to providing online information, direct communication with potential customers and clients should also be a part of this strategy. As a result, customers could continue to be loyal to sharing services even after the pandemic.

In May 2021, Airbnb CEO Bryan Chesky presented a new report which included announcements regarding a COVID-19 guide for guests. According to the report, in order to counteract the pandemic, guests should receive all important COVID-19-related information prior to travel. (Airbnb, 2021a) Unlike shared concepts, hotels face high costs in terms of acquiring and maintaining a property and ongoing staff costs. On the other hand, Airbnb is about existing apartments that can be offered by their owners, if necessary. Another advantage of Airbnb is that hotels have a fixed capacity that cannot be expanded when demand is high, for example. Only the price of the individual rooms can be adjusted. On the other hand, Airbnb offers are more flexible and can better respond to fluctuations in demand (Gyódi, 2021, p. 3). A study by Jang & Kim (2022) addressed the spatially heterogeneous COVID-19 disruptions in the Airbnb business (p. 529). The study found that Airbnb offerings need to leverage two types of local situations in their districts to cope with COVID-19's harmful effects on revenue and bookings: tourism clusters and community resilience. Hosts are recommended to conduct a detailed analysis of these two components that generate agglomeration economies and crisis management capacity, respectively, and consider these aspects in their marketing activities during or after COVID-19 (p. 539).

Finally, Dolnicar & Zolnar (2020) addressed the impact of the pandemic on short-term rental platforms like Airbnb and assumed that the share of capitalist hosts would decrease again due to the pandemic, which they call a disruptor of the disruptor. In the same way, they think that the share of hosts who rent out their apartments for more than just financial reasons will increase again in the long run, which would again be more in line with Airbnb's actual intentions. Dolnicar & Zolnar also believe that the industry may now need less regulation, as incentives have naturally emerged and the housing trade is now even more intensively conducted online.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

In the extensive chapter 2.2, the current state of knowledge about all essential components of the present master thesis was disclosed. Chapter 2.3 now focuses on the theoretical approaches used in this sense. First, the disruptive innovation theory is highlighted, followed by the social exchange theory.

2.3.1 Disruptive Innovation Theory

The disruptive innovation theory focuses on disruptive technologies, innovations that replace existing technology, services, or products or completely wipe them out of the market. In many cases, the phenomenon is described as resource-poor and often refers to new firms which are overtaking and displacing established or successful firms (Yu & Hang, 2010). The U.S. economist and Harvard professor Clayton M. Christensen is considered the founder of the theory and was the first one to use the term "disruptive technology" in this context in the literature (Christensen, 2016). His compelling book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, published in 1997, made his mark on the study of technological innovation in business enterprises. The book got a bestseller at that time and provided a comprehensive and detailed analysis of disruptive technology (Yu & Hang, 2008, p. 436). As disruptive products gain acceptance in the broader market, they are becoming more and more common. Thus, a disruption product initially enjoys limited popularity but becomes increasingly important as it gains popularity. Since this is precisely accurate of Airbnb's business story, the rise of Airbnb can be viewed through the lens of disruptive innovation theory (Guttentag et al., 2015).

> "*According to Christensen, disruptive technologies are technologies that provide different values from mainstream technologies and are initially inferior to mainstream technologies along the dimensions of performance that are most important to mainstream customers. He introduces the important aspects of changing performance with time, plots the trajectories of product performance provided by firms and demanded by customers for different technologies and market segments, and shows that technology disruptions occur when these trajectories intersect*" (Yu & Hang, 2008, p. 436).

According to Christensen (2016), disruptive innovations are mainly found in new markets. The latter usually emerge rather unexpectedly for the already established companies in the corresponding industry and initially appear uninteresting to them. They cover a somewhat small

customer segment in the initial period and often generate lower sales. Furthermore, Govindara-jan and Kopalle (2006) distinguish between so-called high-end and low-end disruptions, estab-lishing a relevant measure of innovation in the literature. They associate high-end disruptions with high prices, and their idea is based on the assumption that lower prices, in this sense, are also related to lower performance.

Yu and Hang (2008) use the example of cell phones to illustrate this point. At the time of its initial introduction, this disruptive product was still considered less reliable and more expensive than traditional landline phones, which hence were still widely preferred. The range was also an issue because of which people had more confidence in traditional landline phones. Initially, cell phones were adopted by corporate executives who appreciated their convenience and portabil-ity despite their relatively high price and recognized their benefits. Over the years, however, technological development enabled an improvement of the points mentioned above even among the masses. This eventually led to the acceptance and widespread use of the product in society.
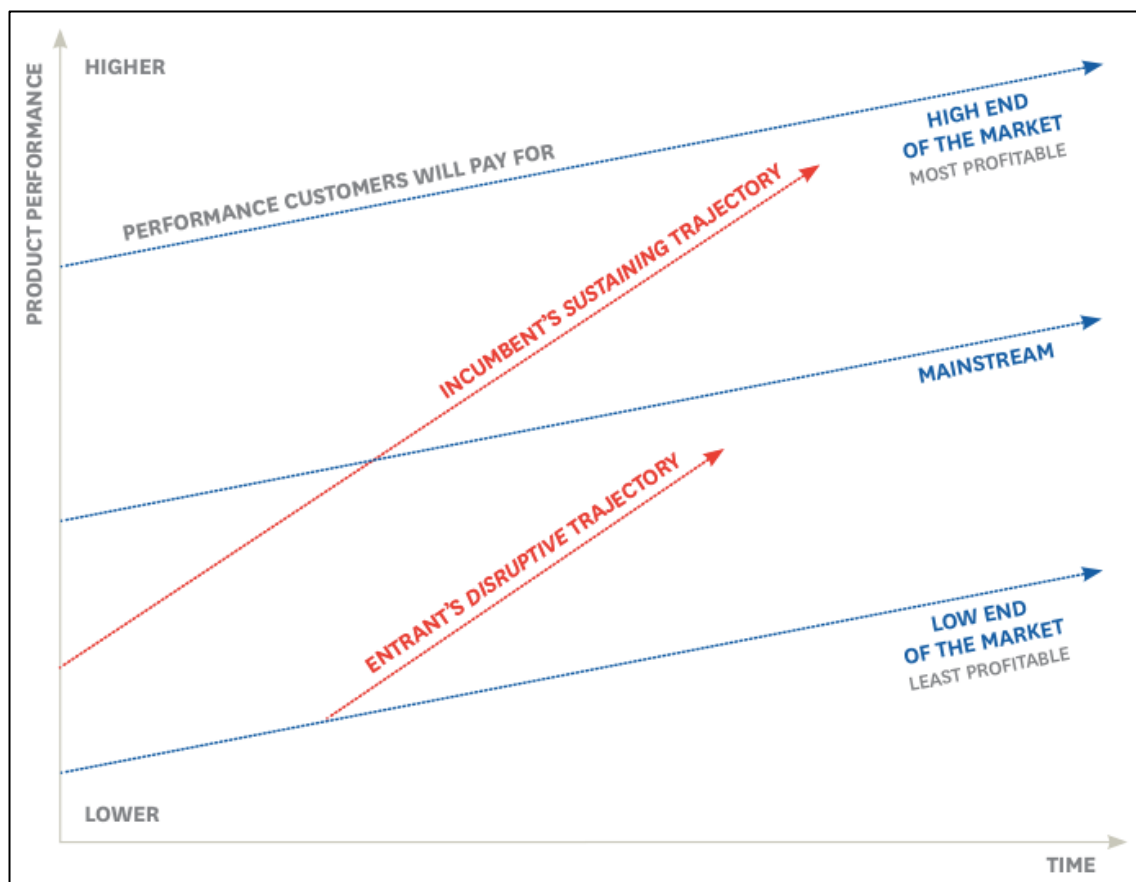

FIGURE 3: THE DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION MODEL (CHRISTENSEN ET AL., 2013, P. 6)

The above-shown FIGURE 3: THE DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION MODEL shows the development of product performance concerning customer demand. The red lines show how products improve over time, while the blue lines represent customers' willingness to pay (WTP) for performance. The top red line represents the case where incumbent companies introduce higher-value products or services to meet the market. In this situation, profitability is highest. The lower red line represents market entrants on a disruptive path and have a considerably high profitability (Christensen et al., 2013).

Hang et al. (2011) consider the theory of disruptive innovation as a tool for evaluating different business strategies. Furthermore, they think that the concept should be able to be used in order to predict future disruptive innovators. Also, Hang et al. assume that a systematic assessment of disruptive innovation potential will play an increasingly important role in the formulation of technology policy in the future, not only for large companies but also in the context of research institutes.

As mentioned in 2.2.9.1 The Impact of COVID-19 on Airbnb, Dolnicar & Zolnar (2020) addressed the potential long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb, describing the pandemic as the so-called disruptor of the disruptor due to the novelty of the coronavirus and the way it changed everyone's daily lives in relation to Airbnb. These and other studies show how important disruptive innovation theory is in the Airbnb context and how the COVID-19 pandemic also plays an essential role in this regard.

2.3.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social interaction consists of individuals exchanging one or more resources, which are readily available or defined to them during this specific interaction. This type of resource does not have a neutral evaluation but rather acquires its meaning through subjective interpretations made by participants during the interaction process (Foa & Foa, 2012). George G. Homans can be considered one of the key originators of the Social Exchange Theory. He states that "social behavior is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige" (Homans, 1958, p. 606). Thus, he does not only limits exchanges to material goods but also includes symbolic values. The social exchange involves actions that depend on rewarding responses from others, enabling mutually rewarding relationships over time. While theorists disagree on the details, the fundamental aspects of SET say that it involves actions that depend on others' rewarding responses (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 890).

Homans also mentions that "persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure to give much to them" (Homans, 1958, p. 606). Foa & Foa (2012) define resources as "anything that can be transmitted from one person to another. This definition is broad enough to include things as different as a smile, a check, a haircut, a newspaper, a reproachful glance, and a loaf of bread" (p. 16). These resources can be divided into six different classes: Love, Services, Goods, Money, Information, and Status, with love being considered the most particularistic resource. Money, on the other hand, is considered the least particularistic resource (Foa & Foa, 2012).

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), human social behavior has been considered an exchange process involving the maximization of benefits and minimization of costs. Usually, people are motivated to act voluntarily whenever they expect others to reciprocate. As stated under 2.2.2 Airbnb, trust is vital in the sharing economy context, and the key to social exchange is hence when the expected return exceeds the input. Lampinen and Cheshire (2016) examined the types of activities Airbnb facilitates in peer exchanges, taking into account the principles of Social Exchange Theory. They also clarified how accepting payments creates a sense of security that facilitates other social exchanges. The study showed that financial benefits do not overshadow interactions between hosts and guests. Additionally, the study shows that Airbnb's centralized control provides security to hosts and facilitates social interactions with them. Only a centralized system that provides security and enables the development of trust between peers could give centralized control attractive to people interested in participating in a hospitality network.

In the literature, as with most theoretical approaches, some authors take critical views of Social Exchange Theory. Cropanzano et al. (2017) have identified four critical issues that, in their opinion, have limited the theoretical utility of SET:

(1) considerable overlapping as well as vague distinctions among the multiple social exchange-associated constructs

(2) lacking differentiation between the positive and negative hedonic values of these different constructs

(3) an inference of bipolarity failing to distinguish the existence of negative constructs like abuse, for example, from the absence of positive constructs like support, for instance

(4) theoretically imprecise behavioral forecasts (Cropanzano et al., 2017, p. 29).

Regarding Social Exchange Theory, Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005) also addressed the relationship between the nature of a transaction, i.e., whether it is a social or economic exchange, and the nature of a relationship (social or economic).

FIGURE 4: TRANSACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN SOCIAL EXCHANGES (CROPANZANO & MITCHELL, 2005, P. 887)

The figure above represents transactions and relationships in the context of social exchange. Cell 1 represents a social transaction in a social relationship, while cell 4 represents an economic transaction in an economic relationship. Both situations can be considered as matching because the type of transaction matches the type of relationship. Cell 2 and cell 3, on the other hand, show a social transaction in an economic relationship and an economic transaction in a social relationship, respectively. These are mismatches because the relationship types and transaction types do not match. Cell 3 represents a situation in which the parties are in an economic relationship, but it is a social exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 887). The circumstances of Cells 2 and 4 possibly entail both advantages and disadvantages. Failure to fulfill economic obligations, for example, could be seen as a betrayal that can cause psychological injury and permanent damage to the relationship. However, social exchange relationships also have advantages,

such as greater trust. (ibid., p. 888) As explained several times above, trust plays a particularly important role in the context of sharing economies.

Also, it can be assumed that trust plays an even more critical function especially in times of a pandemic. Understanding trust references and the general phenomenon of trust is essential in that it allows researchers to understand the nuances of trust that employees have in relation to their coworkers, managers, and organizations. Several positive effects are associated with trust, including job satisfaction, citizenship behavior, effort, as well as performance. The reference to an individual can be considered as an interpersonal relationship. In this sense, for example, the relationship between a worker and his supervisor or a colleague may be considered. On the other hand, team trust refers to a sense of trust in a collaborative environment, which may occur, for example, in a group of people working toward a common goal (Cropanzano et al., 2017, p. 12).

3 EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT

3.1 Introduction and Methodology Overview

In section 2. Literature Review, the state of research on the topic was explained in detail. In this sense, an in-depth overview of all related topics was illustrated. First, the current state of knowledge about the sharing economy concept was presented, including the different views and definitions. The second subsection included content about Airbnb. Under 2.2.3, critical views towards Airbnb were also presented. Finally, content about Vienna as a tourist destination, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the tourism industry, as well as the specific impact on Airbnb was elaborated.

Furthermore, under 2.3 Theoretical Framework, two relevant theories were presented that kept coming up during the topic-related literature search and were therefore assessed as relevant for the present work. The first theoretical approach is the Disruptive Innovation Theory, which was integrated into the context of the sharing economy platform Airbnb. The second is Social Exchange Theory, which focuses on the costs and benefits of social exchange and transactions and relationships in social exchange. This detailed literature review is now followed by the empirical part of this thesis.

Due to the novelty of the situation, the research questions of this thesis are answered through an empirical part involving online surveys answered by Airbnb guests who stayed in Vienna during the COVID-19 pandemic. For practical reasons, the time frame was February 1, 2020, to April 30, 2022. Surveys are making part of the quantitative research methods. These "techniques are powerful at studying large groups of people and making generalizations from the sample being studied to broader groups beyond that sample." (Holton & Burnett, 2005, p. 30) Thus, since the research subject in this concept is a relatively large group consisting of all those who stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna during the above-mentioned period, it can be stated that this might represent one essential characteristic of quantitative research. Since it is impossible to interview all these people individually - for example utilizing qualitative in-depth interviews, the investigator has chosen this variant. In this sense, an attempt was made to obtain a sample large enough to represent the absolute survey scope. This quantitative approach grants access to more cases to be studied than would be possible using a qualitative method, such as interviews. In addition, experiences can be examined and compared in greater detail.

3.2 Research instrument

Surveys are used when original empirical information, such as opinions from a group of people, has to be collected (Smith, 2017, p. 76). Questionnaires collect statistically helpful information about a specific topic by asking individuals a series of questions. A questionnaire becomes a valuable tool when constructed and administered correctly to make reliable statements about specific groups, individuals, or even entire populations (Roopa & Rani, 2012).

> "*Questionnaires normally do not ask the respondents to provide extensive, detailed data. Instead, they pose questions the respondents can answer without having to consult personal records. Some surveys, though, such as business surveys conducted by national statistical organizations, may require the respondent to consult detailed business records. General population surveys, though, should be answerable just from the respondent's recall or opinions*" (Smith, 2017, p. 77).

Hence, it is vital that the questions are mainly aimed at the opinions and views of the participants and do not refer to complex issues where the respondents have to think a lot. The questions should be clearly structured and include not only topic-related questions but also demographic aspects such as age, origin, or occupation, among others.

3.3 Survey design

Respondents generally favor closed-ended questions because they are relatively easy to complete and do not require any writing (Smith, 2017, p. 77). Therefore, most of the survey questions, namely 30, are closed-ended questions. Only one of the questions is an open question and out of the closed-ended questions, 3 are multiple-choice questions, 15 are single-choice questions and 12 are Likert scaled questions. The Likert scale is an equally spaced scale used to capture the attitudes and opinions of respondents. The original Likert concept states that the distances between the different scale points should always be equal, and that there should also be a neutral point. (Harpe, 2015) In this case, there are 7 options that participants can choose. The answer possibilities are structured in such a way that option 4 always represents the neutral point and the distances between the answer options are always the same. For survey question 8 "*How safe did you feel during your stay in terms of Coronavirus infection risk?*" this would look like the following, as a reference:

(1) Very unsafe

(2) Unsafe

(3) Rather unsafe

(4) Neutral

(5) Rather safe

(6) Safe

(7) Very safe

All questions were compiled according to this concept and adapted to the respective context or variables. The survey questions refer to the travelers' stays in Vienna, their accommodations, as well as to the perceived quality (e.g., cleanliness, hygiene measures concerning COVID-19, the sympathy of the host), followed by a few demographic questions. The demographic questions refer to the participants' age, income, education, and home country. The questions were formulated concisely and in simple language. In order to make the evaluation as straightforward and the completion of the questionnaires as pleasant as possible, participants had the option to select multiple periods if, for example, they had stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna more than once during the pandemic.

In section 1.3 Hypotheses, an overview of the conceived hypotheses is presented. In the following, research question-specific tables show which hypothesis relates to which research question. Moreover, it shows which dependent and independent variables were formed from them and which survey questions were composed in this context:

Research question	
RQ1	*How safe did Airbnb guests feel during their stays in Vienna?*
Hypothesis	
H^0	The guests' perception of safety has not changed since the beginning of the pandemic.
H^1	The guests' perception of safety has changed since the beginning of the pandemic.
Variables	
dependent	guest's perception of safety
independent	the beginning of the pandemic
Development of survey questions	
a	*How would you rate the Covid-19 related hygiene measures (disinfection etc.) of your Airbnb accommodation?*

b	*How would you rate the overall cleanliness of your Airbnb accommodation?*

TABLE 2: DEVELOPMENT OF SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR RQ1

The first table shows the two hypotheses which refer to RQ1 '*How safe did Airbnb guests feel during their stays in Vienna?*' and both the dependent and independent variables that have been formed in this context. Hence, it can be stated that the survey questions can answer RQ1 '*How would you rate the COVID-19-related hygiene measures (e.g., disinfection) of your Airbnb accommodation?*' and '*How would you rate the overall cleanliness of your Airbnb accommodation?*'.

Research question	
RQ2	*What has been the guests' main motivation to choose an Airbnb property instead of a classic accommodation?*
Hypothesis	
H^0	Guests did not choose to stay in an Airbnb accommodation instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.
H^1	Guests chose to stay in an Airbnb accommodation instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.
Variables	
dependent	choice of accommodation
independent	existence of COVID-19
Development of survey question	
Why did you stay in an Airbnb accommodation instead of a classic accommodation?	

TABLE 3: DEVELOPMENT OF SURVEY QUESTION FOR RQ2

The second table shows the two hypotheses, H^0 and H^1, referring to RQ2 '*What have been the guests' main motivations to choose an Airbnb property instead of a classic accommodation?*' as well as the dependent and independent variables that have been formed in this context. Consequently, the survey question '*Why did you stay in an Airbnb accommodation instead of a classic accommodation?*' has been conceived.

Research question

RQ3	To what extent have guests' attitudes towards renting an Airbnb property changed since the beginning of the pandemic?	
Hypothesis		
H^0	COVID-19 had no impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.	The pandemic did not have an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.
H^1	COVID-19 had an impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.	The pandemic had an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.
Variables		
depend-ent	Airbnb guests' experience	guests' attitudes towards Airbnb
inde-pendent	existence of COVID-19	existence of COVID-19
Development of survey questions		
	To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic have an impact on your travel experience?	To what extent has your attitude towards Airbnb changed since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic?

TABLE 4: DEVELOPMENT OF SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR RQ3

The last table shows RQ3 '*To what extent have guests' attitudes towards renting an Airbnb property changed since the beginning of the pandemic?*' as well as the four associated hypotheses and variables. In order to be able to find an answer to RQ3, the following two survey questions have been developed: '*To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic have an impact on your travel experience?*' and '*To what extent has your attitude towards Airbnb changed since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic?*'.

3.4 Selection of study site

In respect of the data collection location, the participants should be able to complete the surveys not only on PCs but also on mobile devices. In order to reach as many participants as possible, the handling should be made as simple and uncomplicated as possible. For this reason, it was decided to distribute the questionnaires via Google Forms.

A potential limitation of this master thesis could be that the respondents are mainly from the personal environment of the investigator. The reason for this assumption is that the survey link

is mainly shared via the author's social media channels. In order to counteract this and to minimize the risk of compromising reliability or validity, the survey was also shared in specific online spaces that match the theme of Airbnb and travel. In this sense, for example, the survey link was shared in different Facebook groups explicitly for Airbnb users or Vienna travel-related groups.

3.5 Selection of test subjects

The target population is the group of items the researcher wishes to conclude using sampling statistics. These target populations are limited in size, which means that the participants in the study can be counted. In addition, they are observable and limited in time (Groves et al., 2011, p. 69). In the present work, the time constraints are on the time frame in which the stays took place, as this is explicitly the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since data collection for this master's thesis also involves time constraints, the last recorded stays are in April 2022. Thus, journeys between February 2020 and April 2022 form the time frame for the sampling, resulting in a period of 2 years. Hence, the target population includes all people who stayed in Vienna between February 2020 and April 2022 and spent at least one night in an Airbnb accommodation there. The target population includes adults from all age groups (over 18) and all countries of origin.

3.6 Sampling procedures

Since, in practice, it is mostly not possible to survey the entire sampling population, a sample large enough to be representative for the entire population is studied (Acharya et al., 2013, p. 330). Hence, only a particular part of people that stayed in an Airbnb accommodation during the period as mentioned above will be surveyed. An appropriate sampling method in the context of this work is snowball sampling. The snowball sampling method is a nonprobability-based technique for selecting survey samples and works well in identifying hidden populations.

The method relies on referrals from original respondents to others who are assumed to have the character in question. Limitations of this approach are nonrandom selection procedures and correlations between network size and selection probability, reliance on informants' subjective judgments, and confidentiality concerns. On the other hand, advantages include low cost and high efficiency (Johnson, 2014). The fact that it is pretty time-consuming would be another weakness of this sampling method.

First, the link to the study was shared on private social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) along with a few directions regarding the study. It was also pointed out that people who did not fit the target group should please forward the link to friends and acquaintances to whom this might apply. Further, the link was shared via the business network LinkedIn. The supervisor of this master thesis, Prof. Ulrich Gunter, also kindly posted the survey via his LinkedIn channel.

However, since the number of respondents was not sufficient to represent a representative result, the survey was additionally posted in several Facebook groups that deal specifically with the topic of Airbnb or traveling in Austria. Finally, 183 people were reached who stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna between February 2020 and April 2022, which can be considered an adequate sampling for this thesis.

3.7   Data analysis

After 183 respondents had answered the questionnaire, the Google Forms output was exported to Microsoft Excel to organize the data to be transferred to the data analysis program SPSS. In order to find answers to the research questions and verify the hypotheses outlined under 1.3 Hypotheses, a regression analysis and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed as part of the data analysis. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the model summary allow checking the fit of the regression model (Field, 2009, p. 237). In 4.2 Hypothesis Testing, the respective hypotheses are reconsidered, and the respective variance analyses are presented in tabular form.

In addition to the statistical analyses with SPSS, the output of the questionnaires from Google Forms was also taken into consideration since a comprehensive overview of certain tendencies could already be created in this context. No further tests were needed, especially regarding the socio-demographic aspects like age and income. Based on frequency analysis, some aspects are examined in more detail.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results of the surveys are presented and then interpreted. First, general, and demographic approaches are presented. Finally, the results of the data analysis are shown, and the research questions are brought into relation to the respective research questions and variables.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

As can be seen in TABLE 5: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF LIKERT-SCALE VARIABLES, a total of 183 people completed the questionnaire (*N=183*). The questionnaires were completed between April 27 and May 8, 2022. 125 of the 183 participants stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna between February and April 2020, corresponding to 68.3% of the respondents. The second most relevant group is formed by guests who stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna precisely two years later, between February and April 2022, making up 29.5% of the participants. The number of responses to the question "*During which period did you stay in an Airbnb accommodation in Vienna?*" is higher than the number of actual respondents (>N). This indicates that some of the participants stayed in Airbnbs in Vienna several times during the pandemic or that some of the participants stayed in Airbnb for a longer time (long-term stays). However, this point will be discussed later. Only 13 of the respondents said they had stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna between November 2021 and January 2022. Thus, this can be considered as the period with the fewest visitors.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
How safe did you feel during your stay in terms of Coronavirus infection risk?	183	1	7	4.73	1.895
How would you rate the overall cleanliness of your Airbnb accommodation?	183	2	7	5.26	1.226

How would you rate the Covid-19 related hygiene measures (disinfection etc.) of your Airbnb accommodation?	183	1	7	5.30	1.196
How would you rate the comfort in your Airbnb accommodation?	183	1	7	5.34	1.212
How would you rate the kindness of your host?	183	2	7	5.31	1.180
Did you have physical contact with your host?	183	1	7	4.33	1.925
To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic have an impact on your travel experience?	176	1	7	4.59	1.597
To what extent had you been involved in the selection of the accommodation?	183	1	7	5.45	1.421
Please rate your overall satisfaction with this Airbnb accommodation.	183	1	7	4.91	1.261
To what extent has your attitude towards Airbnb changed since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic?	183	1	7	4.87	1.364
Please indicate the likeliness of you booking another Airbnb accommodation in the future.	183	1	7	5.29	1.342

Please indicate the likeliness of you visiting Vienna again in the future.	183	1	7	5.43	1.238

TABLE 5: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF LIKERT-SCALE VARIABLES

The above table offers a summary of descriptive statistics and provides brief explanations of the sample and the data measures. The mean is a measure of the average between a group of data or samples from a population. In statistics, the lowest is the minimum value, and the highest is called the maximum value. The standard deviation describes the variability between the different data points (Field, 2009).

Half (50.3%) of the respondents reported staying at an Airbnb in the inner-city districts, i.e., 1st-9th. 41.5% of the respondents have stayed in the outer city districts, i.e., 10th - 23rd. The remaining 8.2% stayed in the Vienna Surrounding Area, i.e., in the suburbs such as *Mödling* or *Baden bei Wien*.

Moreover, the majority of the respondents (41,5%) indicated that they visited Vienna because they wanted to have a vacation or city trip, while 27,3% of the participants indicated that the purpose of their stay was to visit friends and relatives (VFR). Similarly, 26,2% went on a business trip. 8 respondents replied with "Other".

On the issue of the type of the specific Airbnb accommodation, three quarter (74,9%) of the participants indicated that they rented an entire place, while 23,0% stayed in a private room in a shared accommodation. Only 4 respondents stayed in a shared room, which represents 2,2% of the participants.

Another question of the survey was "*Which of the following best describes your Airbnb accommodation?*". Most of the guests rented apartments (37,2%), followed by houses (25,7%) and B&B (bed & breakfast) (10,4%). Only 27 out of the 183 subjects indicated that their accommodation did not offer outdoor spaces. Thus, 85,2% of the rented properties offered either a balcony (38,3%), a terrace (37,7%), a patio (32,2%), a garden (31,1%), or a sundeck (29,0%). Since the corresponding question was a multiple-choice question, it can be stated that a huge number of the properties in question offered more than only one type of outdoor spaces.

Another question included in the survey was the following: "*Is there anything special you would like to mention about the property? (Was there maybe a pool area or a rooftop terrace with a nice view?) If not, please write 'No.'*" Indeed, many respondents answered with "No" or did not reply to the question at all. However, some participants (6) also mentioned that their accommodation was clean. On the other hand, one person highlighted that their house was not sanitized properly. Also, some of the participants mentioned that their accommodation offered a nice view (5), had an extraordinarily good location (2), or had some special amenities like a hot tub or a rooftop terrace (2).

As regards of the length of the stays, almost half of the surveyed people (49,2%) stayed for three or four nights. About a quarter (25,7%) stayed for one or two nights. 29 respondents indicated having stayed for 5-7 nights, which corresponds to 15,8% of the participants. 6 guests (3,3%) stayed for more than 7 nights and 6% of the journeys can be considered as long-term stays. Regarding motivations for booking Airbnb accommodation, 95 respondents indicated that a hotel would have been more expensive. 86 of the respondents indicated that they preferred to rent an entire accommodation due to the pandemic. 64 people opted for an Airbnb because they "*prefer staying with locals*", and 65 guests stated that they are "*always curious about trying something new.*" On the other hand, only 17 participants indicated that they like meeting new people.

Only 20.8% of the guests visited Vienna for the first time. 44.3% said they had already visited the city several times, 20.2% many times, and 14.8% once. The repurchase intentions concerning Airbnb are quite similar: The majority of guests have stayed in Airbnb accommodation before. Only about a quarter of the respondents (25.1%) stated that this was their first stay in an Airbnb.

Another survey question focused on the constellation of travel parties: "Which of the following best describes your travel situation?". 78 of the respondents (42.6%) defined their travel situation as traveling with (a few) friends, 55 (30.1%) traveled alone, and 22 of the guests (12%) described their stay as a family stay. In addition, 16 people (8.7%) said they took a couple's trip, and 12 respondents (6.6%) defined their stay as a group trip with larger groups.

In the matter of overnight prices, 41,2% of the respondents indicated that their host charged between 100€ and 150€ per night and 36,1% between 150€ and 250€ per night. 10,4% of the participants were charged 250€ and 500€ per night, and 6,6% between 50€ and 100€. Only 4,9% stated that they had to pay less than 50€ per night. No guest paid more than 500€ per night. The following pie chart shows the prices of Airbnb accommodations again graphically.

How much did the host charge per night?
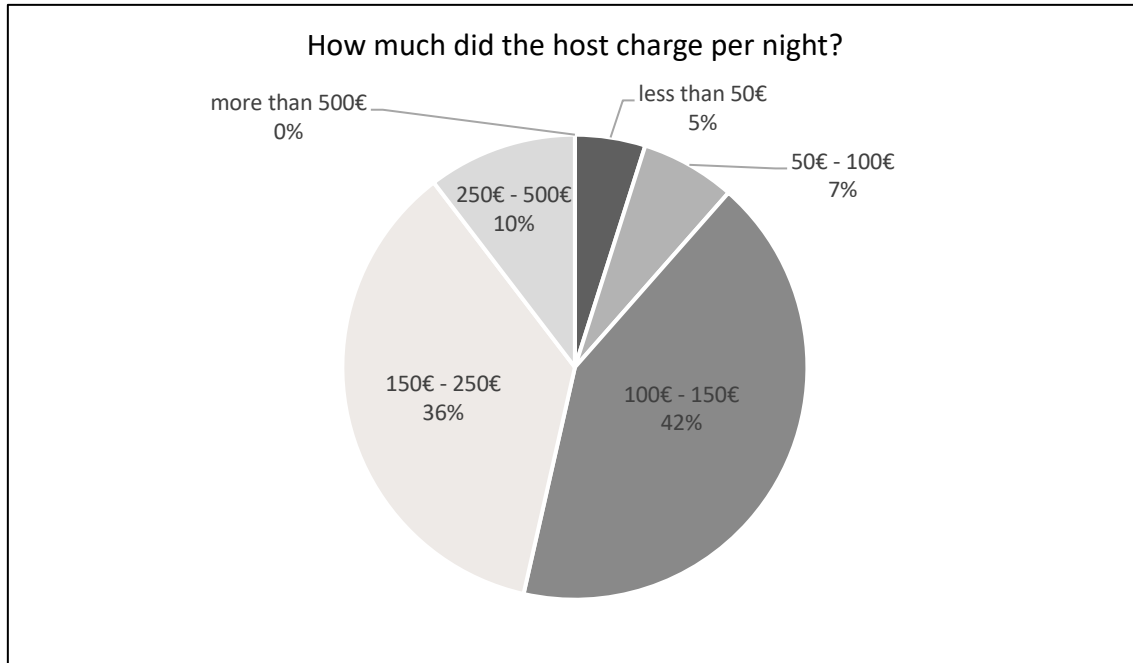
TABLE 6: AIRBNB ACCOMMODATION PRICES PER NIGHT

With reference to the demographic data, there was a rather colorful breakdown in terms of age, origin, and household income. The gender ratio of the sample can be considered as rather balanced, since 50,8% of the respondents identify with the male, and 48,6% with the female gender. Only one person replied with "*Prefer not to say*". The participants aged between 30 and 39 years represent the most relevant age group (28,4%), followed by 25 – 29 years (26,8%) and 40 – 49 years (19,7%). 20 respondents were aged between 50 and 59 years, representing 10,9% of the sample, and 15 between 18 and 24 years, accounting for 8,2%. 7 people (3,8%) were between 60 and 69 years old and 2 people were older than 70 years (1,1%). A large proportion of participants stated that they came from Austria (27.3%). France and Belgium each accounted for 12% of the respondents, Luxembourg for 7.7%, and Denmark for 7.1%. 70,9% of the respondents indicated that their highest level of education is an undergraduate university degree (Bachelor's), 16,8% mentioned having completed a post-graduate university degree (Master's). 8,9% have completed a high school degree and 1.1% each indicated having a PhD or higher or indicated "*Other*" or "*Prefer not to say.*" Nearly half (47.5%) of the respondents also reported having full-time employment, just under a quarter (24.9%) reported being part-time employed, 14.1% self-employed, and 10.2% reported being a student.

4.2.   Hypothesis Testing

In empirical data analysis, hypothesis testing can be considered one of the most critical processes. Statistical tests can be used to determine the probabilities of observing a particular value in an aggregate. Low probabilities (p-values) generally indicate that the observed value is not characteristic of the population. However, it is also possible that it is representative of the population and depicts only a rather infrequent subject (Baggio & Klobas, 2017, p. 19).

4.2.1.   Hypothesis N°1: COVID-19 Impact on Airbnb Guests' Perception of Safety

The first hypothesis tests if the pandemic carries a significant effect on guests' perception of safety. The dependent variable "*guests' perception of safety*" was regressed on independent variable "*existence of COVID-19*" to test the alternative hypothesis H_1.

Null Hypothesis H_0:

   The guests' perception of safety has not changed since the beginning of the pandemic.

Alternative Hypothesis H_1:

   The guests' perception of safety has changed since the beginning of the pandemic.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.198	.039	.034	1.035

TABLE 7: MODEL SUMMARY FOR HYPOTHESIS N°1

This model summary shows an R-square of 0.198 and represents the correlation between COVID-19 and Airbnb guests' perception of safety. R-squared is the coefficient of determination that determines how close the data are to each other on the fitted regression line. The R-squared value should be between 0 and 1 (Field, 2009). A higher R-squared value represents smaller differences between the observed value and the fitted value. In this case, R-squared is 0.039, which shows that the data points are not closer to the regression line. This R-squared states that 3.9% of the change in guests' perception of safety can be attributed to the presence of COVID-19. The following analysis of variance shows whether this influence is significant or not.

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.882	1	7.882	7.358	.007
	Residual	193.875	181	1.071		
	Total	201.757	182			

TABLE 8: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR HYPOTHESIS N°1

As can be seen in the ANOVA table, the p-value is 0.007 and thus lower than the significance level of 0.05. If the p-value is lower than the significance level, this means that the null hypothesis H^0 can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis H^1 is accepted. Thus, it can be stated that

The guests' perception of safety has changed since the beginning of the pandemic.

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.762	.206		23.088	.000
	How safe did you feel during your stay in terms of Coronavirus infection risk?	.110	.040	.198	2.713	.007

TABLE 9: COEFFICIENTS FOR HYPOTHESIS N°1

As can be recognized in TABLE 9: COEFFICIENTS FOR HYPOTHESIS N°1, standardized Beta value is equal to the R-Value which is 0.198. Now, the t-value is 2.713 and the p-value according to the significance level (0.05) is 1.96.

Hypothesis	Beta coefficient	R^2	F	P-value	Hypothesis supported
H_1	0.198	0.039	7.358	0.007	No

TABLE 10: SUMMARY FOR HYPOTHESIS N°1

The following graphical representation assesses whether the data set is normally distributed or not. If the data points form a straight line, then they are approximately normally distributed. In this case, it can be claimed that it is a normal distribution.
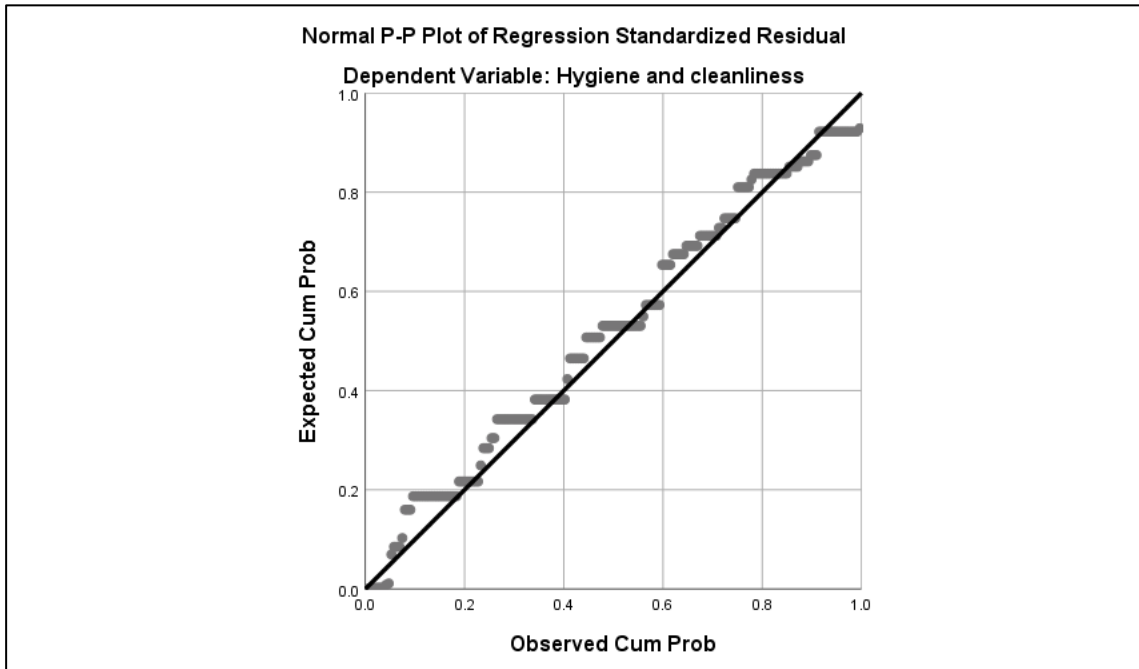
FIGURE 5: P-P PLOT FOR HYPOTHESIS N°1

4.2.2. Hypothesis N°2: The guests' main motivation to choose an Airbnb property instead of a classic accommodation during the Pandemic

This hypothesis explores guests' main motivations to choose an Airbnb property in Vienna instead of a traditional accommodation during the pandemic. Thanks to frequency analysis, the null hypothesis H_0 and the alternative hypothesis H_1 could be compared:

Null Hypothesis H_0:

Guests did not choose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.

Alternative Hypothesis H_1:

Guests chose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.

The following bar chart shows the responses to the survey question "*Why did you stay in an Airbnb accommodation instead of a classic accommodation?*". The y-axis on the bar chart shows the number of respondents, while the x-axis depicts the different response options:
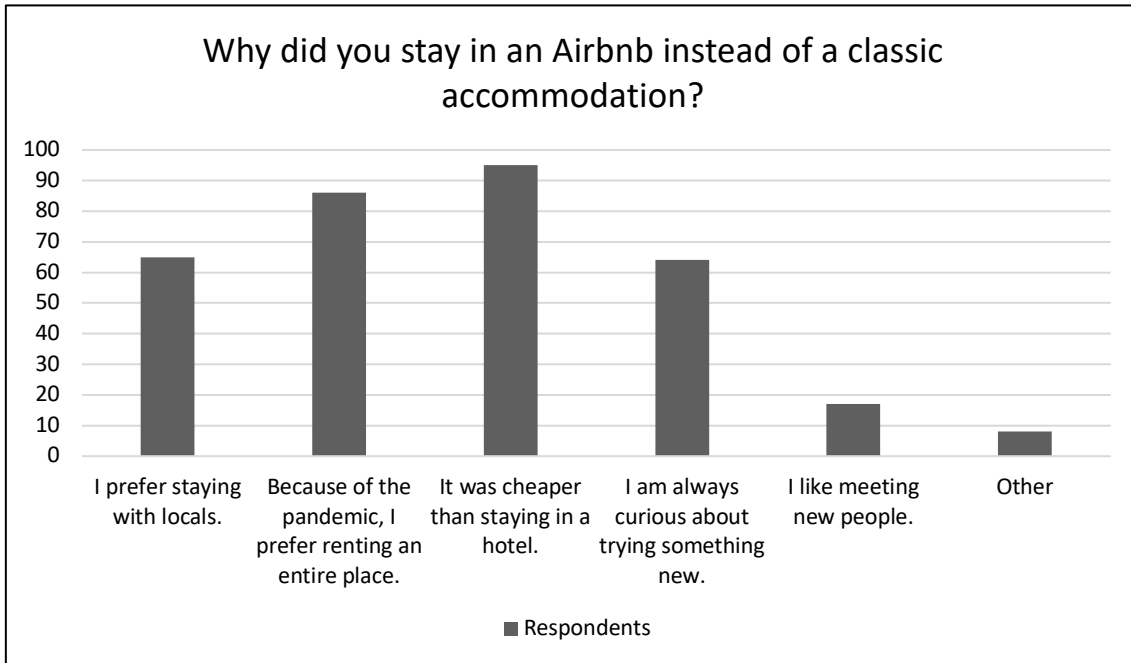
FIGURE 6: FREQUENCY ANALYSIS FOR HYPOTHESIS N°2

As can be seen in the chart above and as already outlined under 4.1 Descriptive Statistics, the most frequently selected answer was "It was cheaper than staying in a hotel". Accordingly, a total of 95 people cited financial reasons as the main reason for choosing Airbnb over traditional accommodations. Pandemic was only the second most frequently cited reason, with 86 participants choosing this option. Based on this finding, H_0 can be not rejected, and H_1 rejected. Accordingly, it can be concluded that:

Guests did not choose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.

4.2.3. Hypothesis N°3: The Pandemic's Impact on Guest's Attitudes Towards Airbnb

This hypothesis tests whether or not COVID-19 significantly impacts Vienna Airbnb guests' attitudes towards Airbnb. The dependent variable "*Guest's attitudes towards Airbnb*" was

regressed on the independent variable "*existence of COVID-19*" in order to test the alternative hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis H_0:

The pandemic did not have an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.

Alternative Hypothesis H_1:

The pandemic had an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.250	.062	.057	1.325

TABLE 11: MODEL SUMMARY FOR HYPOTHESIS N°3

In the above table, R-square describes the correlation between the existence of COVID-19 and guests' attitudes towards Airbnb. R-squared is the square of the coefficient of determination. The R-squared value should be between 0 and 1 (Field, 2009). In this case, the R-squared is 0.062, which shows that the data points are not closer to the regression line. This R-squared states that 6.2% of the impact on guest attitudes toward Airbnb is due to the presence of COVID-19. To verify whether this impact is significant or not, the following ANOVA table needs to be checked.

ANOVA					
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.141	1	21.141	12.044	.001
	Residual	317.712	181	1.755		
	Total	338.852	182			

TABLE 12: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR HYPOTHESIS N°3

In the TABLE 13: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR HYPOTHESIS N°3, it can be recognized that the p-value (Sig.) is 0.01 which is less than the significance level (<0.05). If the p-value is lower than the significance

level, the data provide enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis H^0. Thus, in this case, the alternative hypothesis H_1 is accepted, and it can be concluded that

The pandemic had an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	4.018	.264		15.218	.000
How safe did you feel during your stay in terms of Coronavirus infection risk?	.180	.052	.250	3.470	.001

TABLE 13: COEFFICIENTS FOR HYPOTHESIS N°3

As can be seen in TABLE 14: COEFFICIENTS FOR HYPOTHESIS N°3, the standardized Beta value equals the R-value which is 0.250. It should be noted that there is only one independent variable. The T-value is 3.470 and the p-value according to the significance level is 1.96. Thus, the T-value is higher than p-value (>0.05) which confirms that there is a correlation between the existence of the pandemic and the guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.

Hypothesis	Beta coefficient	R^2	F	P-value	Hypothesis supported
H_1	0.250	0.062	12.044	0.001	Yes

TABLE 14: SUMMARY FOR HYPOTHESIS N°3

The following scatterplot shows a regressive plot showing the relationship between the residuals on the x-axis and the predicted values on the y-axis. This is to allow specific patterns to be identified. In some places, more values are shown, and as you get to the larger predicted values, the ratio fans out. Fewer points are seen in the center of the graph. At the outer edges, the variability of the standardized residuals is more significant.
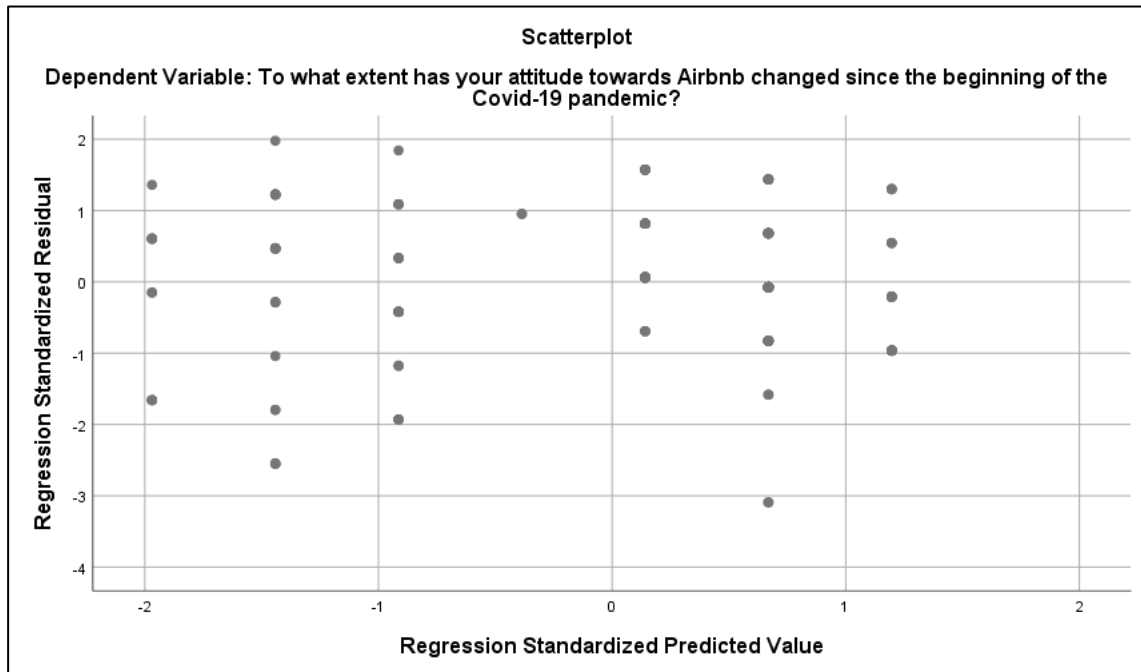
FIGURE 7: SCATTERPLOT FOR HYPOTHESIS N°3

4.2.4. Hypothesis N°4: COVID-19 Impact on Airbnb Guests' Experiences in Vienna

This hypothesis tests whether or not COVID-19 significantly impacts Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna. The dependent variable "*Airbnb guest experiences*" was regressed on the independent variable "*existence of COVID-19*" in order to test the alternative hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis H_0:

COVID-19 had no impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.

Alternative Hypothesis H_1:

COVID-19 had an impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.295	.087	.082	1.531

TABLE 15: MODEL SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS N°4

The model summary shows the R-value, which correlates the existence of COVID-19 and the Airbnb guests' experiences. R-square is the square of the correlation value, also known as the coefficient of determination, a statistical measure used to determine how close the data is to the fitted regression line (Field, 2009). The R-squared value should be between 0 and 1. A higher R-squared value represents more minor differences between the observed and fitted values. In this case, R-square is 0.087, which shows that the data points are not closer to the regression line. Having a look at R-square, it can be stated that the existence of COVID-19 can account for 8.7% impact on Airbnb guest experiences. To check whether this impact is significant or not, the following ANOVA table has to be taken into consideration:

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	38.867	1	38.867	16.589	.000
	Residual	407.679	174	2.343		
	Total	446.545	175			

TABLE 16: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR HYPOTHESIS N°4

In TABLE 17: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR HYPOTHESIS N°4, the Sig. value (p-value) is 0.00, which is less than the significance level (<0.05). If the p-value is less than the significance level, the data provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis H_0. Thus, in this case, the alternative hypothesis H_1 is accepted.

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.387	.317		10.675	.000
	How safe did you feel during your stay in terms of Coronavirus infection risk?	.252	.062	.295	4.073	.000

TABLE 17: COEFFICIENTS FOR HYPOTHESIS N°4

In this case, it is only one independent variable. The standardized Beta value is equal to the R-Value, which is 0.295. The T-value is 4.073 and the p-value according to the significance level

(0.05) equals 0.000. Hence the T-value is greater than the p-value. Accordingly, it can be clearly stated that

COVID-19 had a significant impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.

Hypothesis	Beta coeffi-cient	R^2	F	P-value	Hypothesis supported
H_1	0.295	0.087	16.589	0.000	Yes

TABLE 18: SUMMARY HYPOTHESIS N°4

The following histogram refers to the question "*To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic have an impact on your travel experience?*" and describes the distribution of the sample data. A bell-shaped curve can be seen in the graph, indicating that it is a normal distribution.
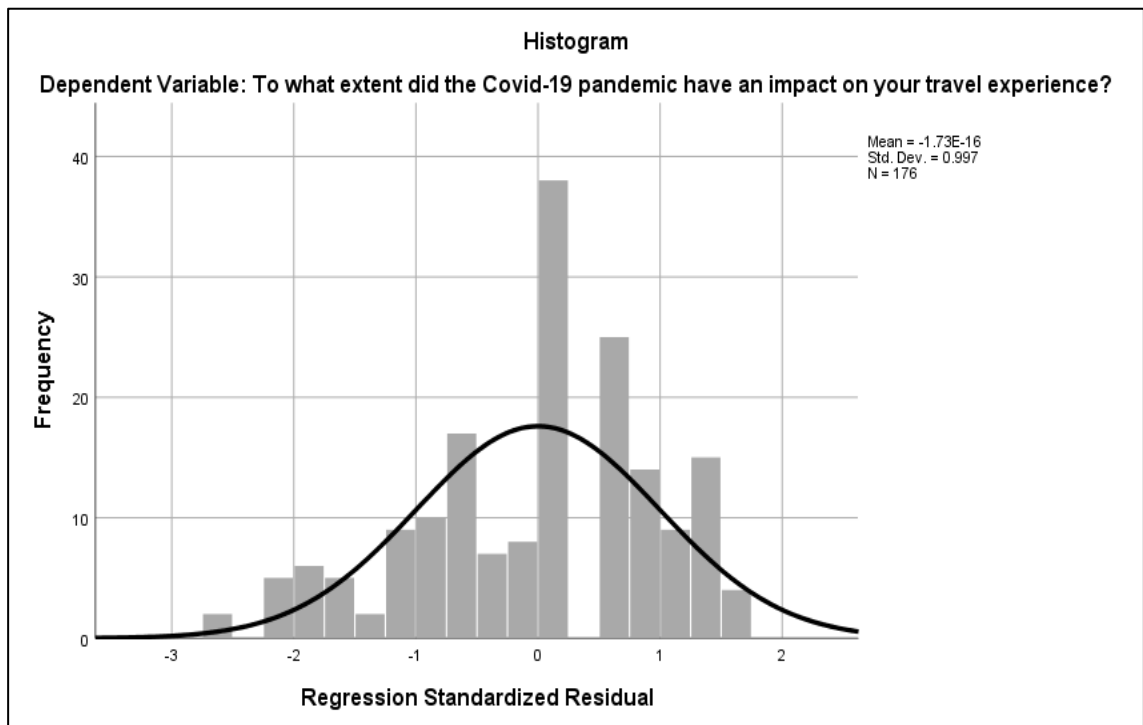

FIGURE 8: HISTOGRAM HYPOTHESIS N°4

4.2.5. Overview of Verified and Renounced Hypotheses

In the previous section, the statistical analysis results were demonstrated in detail. This sub-chapter gives an overview of the output regarding the respective hypotheses and presents which hypotheses were verified and which were renounced. The hypotheses marked in bold represent the accepted hypotheses, while the rejected hypotheses have been crossed out:

Research Question N°1	
How safe did Airbnb guests feel during their stays in Vienna?	
Hypothesis N°1	
H^0	~~The guests' perception of safety has not changed since the beginning of the pandemic.~~
H^1	**The guests' perception of safety has changed since the beginning of the pandemic.**
Research Question N°2	
What has been the guests' main motivation to choose an Airbnb property instead of a classic accommodation?	
Hypothesis N°2	
H^0	**Guests did not choose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.**
H^1	~~Guests chose to stay in an Airbnb instead of a regular hotel due to the pandemic.~~
Research Question N°3	
To what extent have guests' attitudes towards renting an Airbnb property changed since the beginning of the pandemic?	
Hypothesis N°3	
H^0	~~The pandemic did not have an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.~~
H^1	**The pandemic had an effect on guests' attitudes towards Airbnb.**
Hypothesis N°4	
H^0	~~COVID-19 had no impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.~~
H^1	**COVID-19 had an impact on Airbnb guests' experiences in Vienna.**

TABLE 19: OVERVIEW OF VERIFIED AND RENOUNCED HYPOTHESES

5. CONCLUSION

The present work analyzed the attitudes and experiences of Airbnb guests who stayed in Vienna, Austria, between February 1, 2020, and April 30, 2022. This thesis aimed to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Airbnb stays in Vienna and potential changes in attitudes towards this sharing economy concept. Another aim was to explore guests' motivations for choosing Airbnb accommodation during the pandemic. In the previous chapter, 4. Results and the outcomes of the questionnaires were analyzed in detail, and the empirical investigation's output was presented. Section 5.1 summarizes and interprets these results, relates them to the respective hypotheses and research questions, and links them to the corresponding literature discussed in 2. Literature Review. The conclusion is thus intended to provide a broad overview of the research findings and encourage a profound reflection in this regard. Finally, in the following subchapters 5.2 - 5.4, implications for relevant stakeholders, contribution to knowledge, as well as possible limitations and future research, will be discussed.

5.1. Summary and Interpretation

The most significant proportion of respondents indicated they had stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna at the beginning of the pandemic, between February and April 2020. After this period, there was a significant decline, which could be explained by the local lockdowns and travel restrictions. The second most relevant group in this regard consists of those participants who stayed in an Airbnb in Vienna precisely two years later, between February and April 2022. This behavior goes hand in hand with a general slight recovery of the tourism sector and perfectly reflects the motivation of society to travel again.

It was also found that three-quarters of Airbnb guests reserved entire places, and that less than a quarter opted for a private room in shared accommodation. Accordingly, only a fraction of respondents stayed in a shared room. These findings are also perfectly reflected in the Airbnb offer in the city of Vienna, as about 75% of the accommodations in Vienna are registered as entire homes (Inside Airbnb, 2021). This also explains why a large proportion of respondents stated they had chosen an Airbnb instead of a classic accommodation because of the pandemic, conceivably because they wanted to book an entire property. However, it must be considered that contrary to the investigator's initial expectations, it was found that the pandemic was not the main reason for the guests' preference, but the fact that Airbnb accommodation was cheaper than a hotel room.

Most of the accommodations visited by the survey participants were described as apartments. Furthermore, many of the participants also rented a house. For good measure, only a tiny proportion (under 15%) reported having no outdoor space at the accommodation. Most guests had either a terrace, a garden, or a balcony at their accommodation. This trend shows that open spaces have become extremely important to many people during the coronavirus pandemic - not only in the private housing context but also when traveling. Moreover, half of the accommodations were located in Vienna's inner districts, i.e., in a central or very central location, while about 40% of the properties were located in the outer city districts. Only a small proportion of respondents said they had resided outside the city limits, in the suburbs.

Another central question of this work was about the guest's views and attitudes in the course of their stay in Vienna during the pandemic. In the context of RQ3, it was found that the pandemic affected guests' attitudes towards Airbnb and their experiences in Vienna. The majority of respondents stated that the pandemic had a positive effect on their travel experience, and this could be due to the fact that people now enjoy or value travel more since the start of the pandemic than before COVID-19. Nearly 70% of respondents indicated that their attitudes toward Airbnb have changed positively, very positively, or exceptionally positively since the pandemic. This may be because of the guests' generally high satisfaction with the accommodations and the hosts, but also explicitly to the overall cleanliness and the Covid-19-related hygiene measures, which were also rated very positively. Indeed, nearly 68% reported feeling safe, very safe, or extremely safe regarding coronavirus infection risk during their journey.

The purposes of the guests' travels are rather heterogeneous, with the majority of respondents indicating that the trip was a vacation or a city trip. This is also reflected in the length of stays. Just under a quarter of respondents indicated they had stayed in the accommodation for 1 to 2 nights, around half of the respondents for 3 to 4 nights, which is about the typical length of a city trip. Among the respondents, a few described their journey as a long-term stay, lasting several weeks or months. This also explains why there are a few outliers in the lower price segment regarding overnight prices. Airbnb accommodations, which are rented out on a monthly basis, are usually cheaper per night than the classic Airbnb apartments, which can be booked for 2 to 3 nights. However, most guests have paid between 100€ and 250€ per night.

Moreover, the clear majority of the travelers has visited Vienna before and also stayed in an Airbnb accommodation before. Only 20% and 25%, respectively, said they had never been to Vienna or stayed in an Airbnb before. For both aspects, the majority of respondents indicated that they had been to Vienna many times or had stayed in Airbnbs many times.

Most stays were described as a trip with some friends, and most respondents said they had been very involved in the accommodation selection process. Three-quarters of respondents indicated that it is likely, very likely, or highly likely that they will book another Airbnb accommodation in the future. This is also reflected in the overall satisfaction with the accommodation, which was also very positive. The respondents were also very optimistic about Vienna as a destination. Only a few respondents stated that they were unlikely to revisit Vienna in the future.

In conclusion, it can be said that this study provided interesting new insights and that the research questions could all be answered. Of course, there were also some limitations in this research project, which are explained in the chapter 5.4 Limitations and Future Research. First, however, the implications for relevant stakeholders and the contribution to knowledge are explained.

5.2.   Implications for relevant stakeholders

This master thesis investigated the impact of COVID-19 on Airbnb experiences in Vienna. This research's focus was on aspects such as the perception of the safety of the guests, as well as the motivation or the reason why they explicitly chose an Airbnb instead of a classic accommodation during the pandemic. Another question aimed at seeing in how far the Airbnb guest's attitude towards the platform changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and how satisfied they were with the hygiene measures of the respective hosts.

The findings obtained through this investigation help to identify which aspects are fundamental to guests during times of crisis - explicitly during health crises like the ongoing pandemic. As a result, hospitality stakeholders can better prepare for these circumstances, especially Airbnb hosts who can learn what is essential and what preparations or adjustments they need to make in order to improve their guests' satisfaction.

5.3.   Contribution to knowledge

The findings of this paper are relevant not only for crisis or pandemic-related research but also for Airbnb research in general. Some critical aspects have been studied in the Airbnb literature so far, and many works aimed to find out the motivations of travelers to choose an Airbnb. Furthermore, in the past two years, scholars have focused on the impact of the pandemic on city tourism (see Jiricka-Pürrer et al., 2020) and recovery strategies in the context of the pandemic (Kreiner & Ram, 2020 & Yeh, 2021). Lee & Deale (2021) have addressed the perceived risks

associated with using Airbnb before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Qiu et al. (2020) focused on the social costs of tourism during the pandemic.

Although there are already several studies dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism and explicitly the impact on the sharing economy platform Airbnb, there was no study analyzing the effects of COVID-19 on Airbnb experiences in Vienna during the period of systematic literature search. Therefore, a previously unexplored topic could be investigated, and incentives for future research could be assembled, which will be elaborated in more detail in the following subsection 5.4 Limitations and future research.

5.4. Limitations and Future research

This research project has focused exclusively on Airbnb experiences in Vienna. Thus, this could be considered a geographical limitation of this thesis. It would certainly be interesting to conduct the same or a similar study in other cities or national levels. Furthermore, future research should also focus on other platforms that rent out vacation homes to compare these providers and Airbnb directly. Examples of this could be *Booking.com*, *HomeAway*, or *Expedia*.

Another important point would be the view of the hosts. Therefore, one limitation of the present research is clearly the one-sided investigation that only focused on the guests' perspectives. In peer-to-peer economies, however, it is essential to focus on the counterpart's perspective – in this case, the host side. Initially, the idea was to integrate both points into this master's thesis and ask a few Airbnb hosts for their views using in-depth interviews. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to time constraints. Therefore, the time limits can be considered another significant limitation.

Furthermore, since the study was conducted during the Corona pandemic and the study period was limited to just under two years, it would also be interesting to see how the results of this analysis differ from those outside of this study period. One could therefore ask Airbnb guests in Vienna about their experiences at a later time and compare these results with those of this thesis.

Another limitation of this work is the survey sample. More than two-thirds of the respondents reported having a college degree, and the salary ranges of the participants were also relatively high. The high-income brackets, as well as the education of the participants, might not represent a realistic picture of the population, which might be due to the researcher's private environment

and the chosen sampling method. The link to the survey was sent to friends and acquaintances with the request to forward it to people having stayed in an Airbnb during the pandemic.

Finally, the last limitation of this research project would be that no questions about the personal COVID-19 recovery or vaccination status have been asked of the survey respondents. For ethical and privacy reasons, such questions were not included in the survey. However, this could possibly have influenced the experience of the guests in that a person who did not meet the so-called 2G or 3G criteria, i.e., was not PCR tested, recovered (or vaccinated), might have been refused entry to an establishment or structure, which could reasonably have a negative impact on the traveler's experience.

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APPENDICES

This appendix discloses all content that is too large to be integrated into the text or that would disrupt the flow of the text in some way. Explicitly, this is the questionnaire or, more precisely, screenshots from the Google Forms survey.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation!

Dear participant,

My name is Tommy Manes, and I am a graduate student at Modul Private University in Vienna, Austria.

As part of my master's thesis, I am investigating how Airbnb guests experienced the Covid-19 pandemic in Vienna. This questionnaire includes 31 questions, most of which are multiple or single-choice questions.

Thank you very much for your participation! Please feel free to contact me via email (11709782@modul.ac.at) with any questions.

* Erforderlich

1. During which period did you stay in an Airbnb accommodation in Vienna? *

   Wählen Sie alle zutreffenden Antworten aus.

   - [ ] February 2020 – April 2020
   - [ ] May 2020 - July 2020
   - [ ] August 2020 - October 2020
   - [ ] November 2020 - January 2021
   - [ ] February 2021 - April 2021
   - [ ] May 2021 - July 2021
   - [ ] August 2021 - October 2021
   - [ ] November 2021 - January 2022
   - [ ] February 2022 - April 2022

Thank you for your participation!   01.05.22, 20:41

2. In which part of Vienna was your accommodation located? *

    Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

    ( ) Inner city districts (1010 - 1090)

    ( ) Outer city districts (1100 - 1230)

    ( ) Vienna Surrounding Area (e.g., Baden bei Wien; Mödling etc.)

3. What was the purpose of your stay? *

    Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

    ( ) Vacation / city trip

    ( ) VFR (visiting friends and relatives)

    ( ) Business trip

    ( ) Other

    ( ) Prefer not to say

4. What type of accommodation did you book? *

    Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

    ( ) Entire place

    ( ) Private room in shared property

    ( ) Shared room

5. Which of the following best describes your Airbnb accommodation? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

⬭ House

⬭ Apartment

⬭ Bed and breakfast (B&B)

⬭ Boutique hotel

⬭ Bungalow

⬭ Chalet

⬭ Condominium

⬭ Cottage

⬭ Guest suite

⬭ Serviced apartment

⬭ Townhouse

⬭ Villa

How did airbnb guests experience the covid-19 pandemic in vienna?

75

6. Did your accommodation offer outdoor spaces? *

Wählen Sie alle zutreffenden Antworten aus.

- [ ] Terrace
- [ ] Garden
- [ ] Balcony
- [ ] Patio
- [ ] Sundeck
- [ ] Other
- [ ] No outdoor spaces

7. Is there anything special you would like to mention about the property? (Was there maybe a pool area or a rooftop terrace with a nice view?) If not, please write "No."

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8.   How safe did you feel during your stay in terms of Coronavirus infection risk? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was extremely scared about getting infected.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	I was not worried about this at all.

9.   How would you rate the overall cleanliness of your Airbnb accommodation? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very unclean	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very clean

10.   How would you rate the Covid-19 related hygiene measures (disinfection etc.) of your Airbnb accommodation? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very unhygienic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very hygienic

11.   How would you rate the comfort in your Airbnb accommodation? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very comfortable

12.   How would you rate the kindness of your host? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very unkind	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very kind

13. Did you have physical contact with your host? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I did not meet him/her physically	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	I often met him/her physically

14. To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic have an impact on your travel experience?

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely negative impact	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely positive impact

15. How long did you stay? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

◯ 1 - 2 nights

◯ 3 - 4 nights

◯ 5 - 7 nights

◯ more than 7 nights

◯ several weeks or months (long term stay)

16. Why did you stay in an Airbnb instead of a classic accommodation? *

Wählen Sie alle zutreffenden Antworten aus.

☐ I prefer staying with locals.

☐ Because of the pandemic, I prefer renting an entire place.

☐ It was cheaper than staying in a hotel.

☐ I am always curious about trying something new.

☐ I like meeting new people.

☐ Other

17. Have you been to Vienna before? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

◯ Yes, once.

◯ Yes, several times.

◯ Yes, many times.

◯ No, it was my first stay in Vienna.

Thank you for your participation!   01.05.22, 20:41

18.   Have you made Airbnb experiences before? *

      Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

      ⬭ Yes, I have stayed in an Airbnb accommodation once before.

      ⬭ Yes, I have stayed in Airbnb accommodations several times.

      ⬭ Yes, I have often stayed in Airbnb accommodations before.

      ⬭ No, it was my first stay in an Airbnb accommodation.

19.   Which of the following would best describe your travel situation? *

      Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

      ⬭ I was traveling alone

      ⬭ Trip with some friends

      ⬭ Group travel (larger groups)

      ⬭ Family stay

      ⬭ Couple trip

      ⬭ Other

20.   To what extent had you been involved in the selection of the accommodation? *

      Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not involved at all	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	I selected it by myself

21.   Please rate your overall satisfaction with this Airbnb accommodation. *

      Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely unsatisfied	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Extremely satisfied

22.   To what extent has your attitude towards Airbnb changed since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic? *

      Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely negative impact	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Extremely positive impact

HOW DID AIRBNB GUESTS EXPERIENCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN VIENNA?

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23.   Please indicate the likeliness of you booking another Airbnb accommodation in the future. *

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely unlikely	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely likely

24.   Please indicate the likeliness of you visiting Vienna again in the future. *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely unlikely	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely likely

25.   How much did the host charge per night? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

◯ less than 50€

◯ 50€ - 100€

◯ 100€ - 150€

◯ 150€ - 250€

◯ 250€ - 500€

◯ more than 500€

26.   How old are you? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

◯ 18 - 24 years

◯ 25 - 29 years

◯ 30 - 39 years

◯ 40 - 49 years

◯ 50 - 59 years

◯ 60 - 69 years

◯ more than 70 years

◯ Prefer not to say

27.   Where are you from? *

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

◯ Afghanistan

- Akrotiri
- Albania
- Algeria
- American Samoa
- Andorra
- Angola
- Anguilla
- Antarctica
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Argentina
- Armenia
- Aruba
- Ashmore and Cartier Islands
- Australia
- Austria
- Azerbaijan
- Bahamas, The
- Bahrain
- Bangladesh
- Barbados
- Bassas da India
- Belarus
- Belgium
- Belize
- Benin
- Bermuda
- Bhutan
- Bolivia
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Botswana
- Bouvet Island
- Brazil
- British Indian Ocean Territory
- British Virgin Islands
- Brunei
- Bulgaria
- Burkina Faso
- Burma
- Burundi
- Cambodia
- Cameroon

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○ Canada
○ Cape Verde
○ Cayman Islands
○ Central African Republic
○ Chad
○ Chile
○ China
○ Christmas Island
○ Clipperton Island
○ Cocos (Keeling) Islands
○ Colombia
○ Comoros
○ Congo, Democratic Republic of the
○ Congo, Republic of the
○ Cook Islands
○ Coral Sea Islands
○ Costa Rica
○ Cote d'Ivoire
○ Croatia
○ Cuba
○ Cyprus
○ Czech Republic
○ Denmark
○ Dhekelia
○ Djibouti
○ Dominica
○ Dominican Republic
○ Ecuador
○ Egypt
○ El Salvador
○ Equatorial Guinea
○ Eritrea
○ Estonia
○ Ethiopia
○ Europa Island
○ Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)
○ Faroe Islands
○ Fiji
○ Finland
○ France
○ French Guiana

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- French Polynesia
- French Southern and Antarctic Lands
- Gabon
- Gambia, The
- Gaza Strip
- Georgia
- Germany
- Ghana
- Gibraltar
- Glorioso Islands
- Greece
- Greenland
- Grenada
- Guadeloupe
- Guam
- Guatemala
- Guernsey
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Guyana
- Haiti
- Heard Island and McDonald Islands
- Holy See (Vatican City)
- Honduras
- Hong Kong
- Hungary
- Iceland
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Ireland
- Isle of Man
- Israel
- Italy
- Jamaica
- Jan Mayen
- Japan
- Jersey
- Jordan
- Juan de Nova Island

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- Kazakhstan
- Kenya
- Kiribati
- Korea, North
- Korea, South
- Kuwait
- Kyrgyzstan
- Laos
- Latvia
- Lebanon
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Libya
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Macau
- Macedonia
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Malaysia
- Maldives
- Mali
- Malta
- Marshall Islands
- Martinique
- Mauritania
- Mauritius
- Mayotte
- Mexico
- Micronesia, Federated States of
- Moldova
- Monaco
- Mongolia
- Montenegro
- Montserrat
- Morocco
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Nauru
- Navassa Island

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- ( ) Nepal
- ( ) Netherlands
- ( ) Netherlands Antilles
- ( ) New Caledonia
- ( ) New Zealand
- ( ) Nicaragua
- ( ) Niger
- ( ) Nigeria
- ( ) Niue
- ( ) Norfolk Island
- ( ) Northern Mariana Islands
- ( ) Norway
- ( ) Oman
- ( ) Pakistan
- ( ) Palau
- ( ) Panama
- ( ) Papua New Guinea
- ( ) Paracel Islands
- ( ) Paraguay
- ( ) Peru
- ( ) Philippines
- ( ) Pitcairn Islands
- ( ) Poland
- ( ) Portugal
- ( ) Puerto Rico
- ( ) Qatar
- ( ) Reunion
- ( ) Romania
- ( ) Russia
- ( ) Rwanda
- ( ) Saint Helena
- ( ) Saint Kitts and Nevis
- ( ) Saint Lucia
- ( ) Saint Pierre and Miquelon
- ( ) Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- ( ) Samoa
- ( ) San Marino
- ( ) Sao Tome and Principe
- ( ) Saudi Arabia
- ( ) Senegal
- ( ) Serbia

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- ◯ Seychelles
- ◯ Sierra Leone
- ◯ Singapore
- ◯ Slovakia
- ◯ Slovenia
- ◯ Solomon Islands
- ◯ Somalia
- ◯ South Africa
- ◯ South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands
- ◯ Spain
- ◯ Spratly Islands
- ◯ Sri Lanka
- ◯ Sudan
- ◯ Suriname
- ◯ Svalbard
- ◯ Swaziland
- ◯ Sweden
- ◯ Switzerland
- ◯ Syria
- ◯ Taiwan
- ◯ Tajikistan
- ◯ Tanzania
- ◯ Thailand
- ◯ Timor-Leste
- ◯ Togo
- ◯ Tokelau
- ◯ Tonga
- ◯ Trinidad and Tobago
- ◯ Tromelin Island
- ◯ Tunisia
- ◯ Turkey
- ◯ Turkmenistan
- ◯ Turks and Caicos Islands
- ◯ Tuvalu
- ◯ Uganda
- ◯ Ukraine
- ◯ United Arab Emirates
- ◯ United Kingdom
- ◯ United States
- ◯ Uruguay
- ◯ Uzbekistan

( ) Vanuatu

( ) Venezuela

( ) Vietnam

( ) Virgin Islands

( ) Wake Island

( ) Wallis and Futuna

( ) West Bank

( ) Western Sahara

( ) Yemen

( ) Zambia

( ) Zimbabwe

28.   What gender do you identify with?

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

( ) Male

( ) Female

( ) Other

( ) Prefer not to say

29.   What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

( ) High School

( ) Undergraduate university degree (Bachelor's)

( ) Post-graduate university degree (Master's)

( ) PhD or higher

( ) Other

( ) Prefer not to say

30. What is your current occupation?

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

- ( ) Full-time employed
- ( ) Part-time employed
- ( ) Self-employed
- ( ) Student
- ( ) Retired
- ( ) Job-Seeking
- ( ) Other
- ( ) Prefer not to say

31. What is your annual household income?

Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.

- ( ) less than EUR 25.000
- ( ) EUR 25.000 - 50.000
- ( ) EUR 50.000 - 75.000
- ( ) EUR 75.000 - 100.000
- ( ) EUR 100.000 - 200.000
- ( ) more than EUR 200.000
- ( ) Prefer not to say

Google Formulare

Thank you for your participation!

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Thank you for your participation!

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