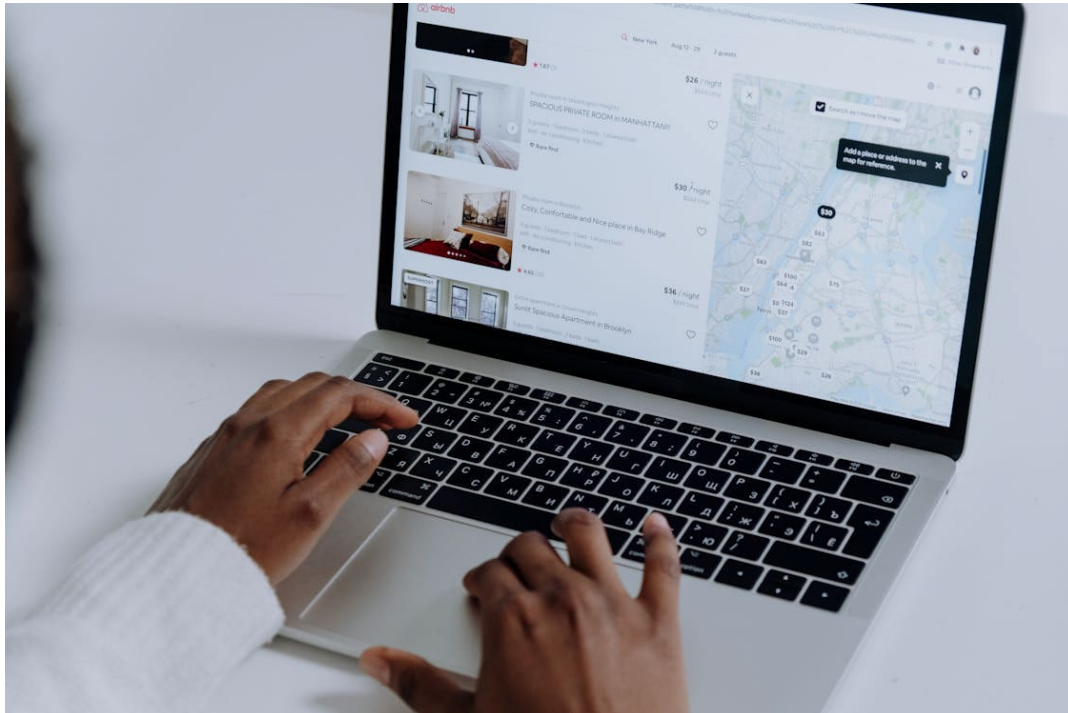


Safeguarding Customer Properties: The Case of Airbnb



Source: Pexels (2020)

Background

Founded in 2007, Airbnb has grown from a small niche business to a global accommodation sharing platform with more than 8 million active listings in over 220 countries world-wide (Airbnb, n.d.). While continuing to offer convenient and affordable accommodation options and improving guest experiences, the group has recently placed a lot of emphasis on safety and security for both guests and hosts in the past few years.

To ensure safety and property security for both guests and hosts, Airbnb rolled out the AirCover policy in 2021 (Airbnb, 2021). AirCover for guests provides support for serious issues with bookings, such as cancellation by host within 30 days of check-in, unable to check-in upon arrival, or listing is significantly different than advertised (Airbnb, n.d.). When these situations occur, guests will be offered to stay in a similar listing within the area, or they will receive a full or partial refund depending on the circumstances (Airbnb, n.d.). There is also a 24-hour safety hotline for guests to call and seek help from specially trained safety agents when they feel unsafe (Airbnb, n.d.).

On the other hand, AirCover offers top-to-bottom protection for hosts and their property. AirCover for hosts reimburses the host when there is damage done to their house and belongings by the guest (Airbnb, n.d.). In addition, all costs will be covered if any extra cleaning service is required to remove stains left by guests (Airbnb, n.d.). Furthermore, hosts are provided with host liability insurance to protect themselves from legal responsibility in the event that a guest is injured or their belongings are stolen or damaged during their stay (Airbnb, n.d.).

In order to protect hosts' properties and the neighbourhood around, Airbnb has also implemented reservation screening system to prevent disruptive gatherings. Based on the guest's booking history, ratings, and comments from previous hosts, the system can automatically reject the guest's booking request and redirect them to alternatives such as hotels or licensed party-houses (Airbnb, n.d.). For some cases, reservations with potential risk of disruptive gatherings will be flagged and the right to accept or deny the reservation will be given to the host (Airbnb, n.d.). As a result, the chance of damaging properties or causing disturbance to the neighbourhood can be greatly minimized.

Challenges

Despite these initiatives, Airbnb's approach has sparked some controversy and debate. Some may argue that the reservation screening system may be too stringent, which is somewhat equivalent to permanently banning users with a history of disruptive behavior from using the platform altogether, regardless of intent to reform. This raises questions about fairness, transparency, and data ethics.

Another point of contention involves Airbnb's 2024 decision to ban indoor security cameras in all listings worldwide (NPR, 2024). While intended to protect guest privacy, the policy has created concern among hosts who previously relied on cameras (in common areas) to monitor property condition and discourage inappropriate behavior. With video surveillance no longer permitted, hosts face difficulties proving guest-caused damage, while Airbnb must develop reliable methods to distinguish between genuine claims and potential fraud.

Discussion Questions

1. How effective is the AirCover policy in promoting safety and security for both guests and hosts?
2. What alternative methods could Airbnb use to prevent disruptive gatherings without outright rejecting booking requests?
3. How can Airbnb balance the privacy rights of guests with the security concerns of hosts?
4. What additional measures could Airbnb implement to further strengthen trust, accountability, and safety on the platform?

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Keywords

- Accommodation
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- Reservation
- Host
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