

# GENERATION Z'S PERCEPTION OF AIRBNB: UNIQUENESS AND CHOICES OF ACCOMMODATIONS IN THAILAND

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

**Received:** 31 July 2024

**Revised:** 14 August 2024

**Published:** 24 August 2024

## ABSTRACT

The current study examines the role of needs for uniqueness in the value-attitude-behavior framework for Generation Z, anticipated to become the most influential spenders as they enter the global workforce and become independent adults by 2024. Specifically, we investigated the moderating effect of Gen Z's needs for uniqueness on the relationship between perception of Airbnb's accommodations and attitude towards Airbnb, as well as intention to use the platform. A sample of 212 usable responses from Gen Z individuals with prior Airbnb experience was analyzed in SPSS using the PROCESS macro, employing a moderated mediation model to test the relationships. The findings indicate a significant interaction effect between perception of Airbnb's accommodations and the needs for uniqueness on attitude towards the platform, suggesting that the association between perception of and attitude toward Airbnb is moderated by the needs for uniqueness trait of Gen Z. Additionally, there is a significant relationship between attitude and intent to use Airbnb platform. Therefore, Gen Z who perceived Airbnb accommodations as "uniqueness" also exhibit a high need for uniqueness. These individuals tend to have a positive attitude toward Airbnb, leading to a higher likelihood of using the platform due to its unique accommodation features. The results provide valuable insights into Gen Z consumer behavior, suggesting that hospitality providers should design offerings with unique appeals to match Gen Z's personality traits. Despite Airbnb currently deemed illegal in Thailand, government need to manage this issue considering how innovative choices would benefit hospitality and tourism sectors in Thailand.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Sustainable Consumption, Airbnb, Innovative Accommodation; Hospitality and Tourism Management

**CITATION INFORMATION:** Chatvijit-Cook, S., Kasatri, C., & Cook, K. (2024). Generation Z's Perception of Airbnb: Uniqueness and Choices of Accommodations in Thailand. *Procedia of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(8), 90.

## INTRODUCTION

In light of peer-to-peer accommodation sharing platforms (e.g., Airbnb, Couch Surfing, HomeAway, Vrbo), one of the questions centers on what appeals of staying at one's personal house are that turn some travelers away from traditional choice of hotel renting. Peer-to-peer accommodation sharing occurs through members of the same network or community, such as Airbnb where the redistribution of property owned by members, not the company, is achieved within the online platform (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). As a result, consumption of peer-to-peer accommodations typically emphasizes care and respect of existing properties (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2016), while users of hotel rentals generally focus on utilizing at its full potential without much concern for energy waste (Durgee & O'Connor, 1995). This benefit alone can achieve many of SDGs including saving additional resources needed for consumption and new constructions. Additionally, the immersive experience yielded from living as a local may also attract tourists longing for different experiences such as freedom and uniqueness. This consumption choice is deemed innovative and sustainable because it enables individuals in the community to use technology in order to connect two parties and facilitates their transactions securely, while generating income for the community. Yet, operating Airbnb housing in Thailand is against Thai laws (Khotcharee & Fukushima, 2020). Thus, this study *aims to understand a group of Airbnb customers in Thailand* which may motivate discussions among Thai officials and related parties to leverage benefits of peer-to-peer accommodations rather than banning them.

As Airbnb CEO's aims at creating unique travel experiences and the social well-being for Generation Z to muster competitive advantages over hotels that often prefer older tourists (Masson, 2023), *this study focuses on personal factors related to how Airbnb resonate with Gen Z* who are more comfortable with innovations compared to previous groups due to this cohort's predisposition and self-enhancement needs (D'Arpizio, Levato, & de Montgolfier, 2019). Therefore, *our objective is two-folded: (1) to identify the characteristics of Gen Z customers of Airbnb in Thailand; and (2) to investigate the effect of Gen Z's needs for uniqueness on the relationship between perception of Airbnb's accommodations and attitude towards Airbnb, as well as intention to use the platform.* It is important, for the academic purpose, to understand Gen Z consumers' characteristics, perception, and attitude towards peer-to-peer accommodation choices because this phenomenon could provide the literature insights for the consumer behavior area as well as the peer-to-peer consumption research as part of sharing-economy literature. For managerial purposes, it is crucial for the hospitality sector managers to understand their upcoming consumers' motivations and perceptions regarding the choice of hospitality even if the choice is not relevant to them as a direct competitor. As consumption choices increase to include new accommodation options, it weakens existing players in the hospitality sector. Understanding and satisfying Gen Z consumers' needs is particularly timely for the hospitality sector managers in the digital age because it could strengthen hospitality brands and their strategies in attracting new generations of consumers.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### The Characteristics of Gen Z Customers of Airbnb in Thailand

Generation Z, or Gen Z for short, refers to the cohort of individuals born between 1997 – 2005 (Meola, 2020). This generation is often characterized as being digital natives, diverse, and socially aware (Wise, 2023). Gen Z has been influenced by the latest digital technologies that separates them from other generations because they are the first generation grown up with the internet and social media. (Seymour, 2019). For their personality and interests, most Gen Z enjoy traveling, and they are more likely than the older generation to have purchased a domestic trip in the previous six months (Henderson, 2023). Therefore, there might be a relationship

between the personality of this generation and their consumption, notably in terms of travel-related activities and preferences.

Gen Z have grown into the major growth drivers because of their elevated interest in travel and tourism as they view traveling to be an integral experience and important to their well-being (Fan, Shin, Shi, & Wu, 2022; Polisetty & Kurian, 2021). Specifically, traveling choices and attributes of Airbnb including uniqueness in accommodation created by individual hosts and types (e.g., a yurt, a bamboo house) could be used to identify and develop Gen Z individuals' identity if their consumption behaviors and personal experiences align with products/services' values, ideas, or meanings and, in turn, it becomes a part of their identity (Belk, 1988; Chen, Quadri-Felitti, & Mattila, 2021; Fan et al., 2022). As the early stage of identifying and developing their own identity while they come of age, between 17 and 23 years (Debevec et al., 2013), the widely used technological advances such as Airbnb may be appealing due to its brand characteristics and consequently influence Gen Z's decision to use it and other features as a tool to enhance their identity according to how they want to be perceived (McKeever, Diffley, & O'Rourke, 2021). This attempt to develop their identity by using consumption can be described by previous literature related to relationship with possessions known as extended self (Belk, 1988), and this phenomenon has been broadened and globalized to embrace the current market of liquid society in which Western scholars argue that, whether a consumption is permanent, temporary, with or without-ownership, consumers can conceptualize one's self-concept and develop identity from the symbolic value and meanings attached and assigned to the consumption (Belk, 2010; 2014). However, the empirical research about Gen Z motivations to choose Airbnb are limited possibly because they are recently coming of age as a significant group of consumers with the decision power (McKeever et al., 2021; Polisetty & Kurian, 2021). Therefore, this study *identifies the characteristics of Gen Z customers of Airbnb in Thailand from the empirical data.*

### **The Relationships between Perception-Attitude-Behavior of Airbnb among Gen Z**

Towards investigating the relationship between perceived uniqueness and Gen Z's attitude towards the use of Airbnb platform, Homer and Kahle's (1988) value-attitude-behavior (VAB) framework will be employed as a conceptual framework. VAB framework offers a lens to understand consumer decision-making by examining the underlying factors that influence our choices. It proposes a hierarchical relationship: *values*, our core principles and beliefs, act as the foundation. These values then shape our attitudes, which are our evaluations of specific objects, ideas, or behaviors. Finally, our *attitudes* translate into our behaviors, the actions we take. For instance, a consumer who values uniqueness and innovation (values) might develop a positive attitude towards innovative and unique choices of consumption (attitude) and be more likely to choose them over conventional alternatives (behavior). As such, we believe that the needs for uniqueness may influence Gen Z choice and their perception because they would recognize the distinctive qualities and uniqueness exhibited in the products or service.

As we aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived uniqueness and Gen Z's attitude towards the use of Airbnb platform using Homer and Kahle's (1988) value-attitude-behavior (VAB) framework, previous literature suggests the following key findings. Studies have explored the core values that drive people to choose Airbnb over traditional hotels. These values can include economic benefits (value), a desire for unique experiences (authenticity), social connection (community), and environmental consciousness (sustainability). For instance, Kim et al. (2018) found that millennials' value for authenticity and community significantly influenced their preference for Airbnb. In addition, research has examined how these values translate into attitudes towards Airbnb. Positive attitudes might focus on perceived benefits like affordability, unique accommodations, and local interactions. Conversely, negative attitudes might stem from concerns about safety, security, and lack of standardization. Chen et al. (2020) identified that perceived value and trust in the Airbnb platform positively influenced attitudes towards using Airbnb. Ultimately, the VAB framework helps predict booking behavior. Studies have shown that positive values and attitudes towards Airbnb lead to a higher likelihood of using

the platform. For instance, Litvin et al. (2018) found a positive correlation between perceived value and intention to use Airbnb.

In the case of Airbnb, the differences in perceived uniqueness of Airbnb features in the first set of hypotheses may be due to differences in values perceived by consumers. For example, the uniqueness of Airbnb's innovative culture and unique accommodations may represent the value of uniqueness which is favorable to a Gen Z consumer. As the consumer perceives a positive value of the brand, the consumer would most likely have positive attitudes towards Airbnb and would, therefore, most likely use Airbnb in the future. According to Airbnb's key attributes such as personally decorated rooms, local location, unique property, and innovative platform that facilitates the rental services (Guttentag, 2016; Rasamimala, 2019), the following four hypotheses derived for this study:

H1: Perceived uniqueness positively influenced their use intention of Airbnb;

H2: Gen Z's Attitude towards Airbnb positively influenced their use intention of Airbnb; and

H3: Perceived uniqueness positively influenced their use intention of Airbnb through their attitude.

### **Needs for Uniqueness on their Perception, Attitude, and Intent**

From the perspective of the reactance theory, the need for uniqueness trait is the extent to which individuals react to social norms threatening their freedom and become motivated to restore their sense of autonomy (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009). This body of knowledge can be applied to hospitality consumption in terms of how an individual's needs for uniqueness manifests in the form of their desire for unique consumption and features. Lynn and Harris (1997) posited that seeking unusual consumer products, in terms of different design and rarity, is one means of being unique and fulfilling the need to differentiate. Taking into account individuals' needs for differentiation, Tian, Bearden, and Hunter (2001) developed the concept of consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU), defined as the trait of pursuing differences relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self- image and social image.

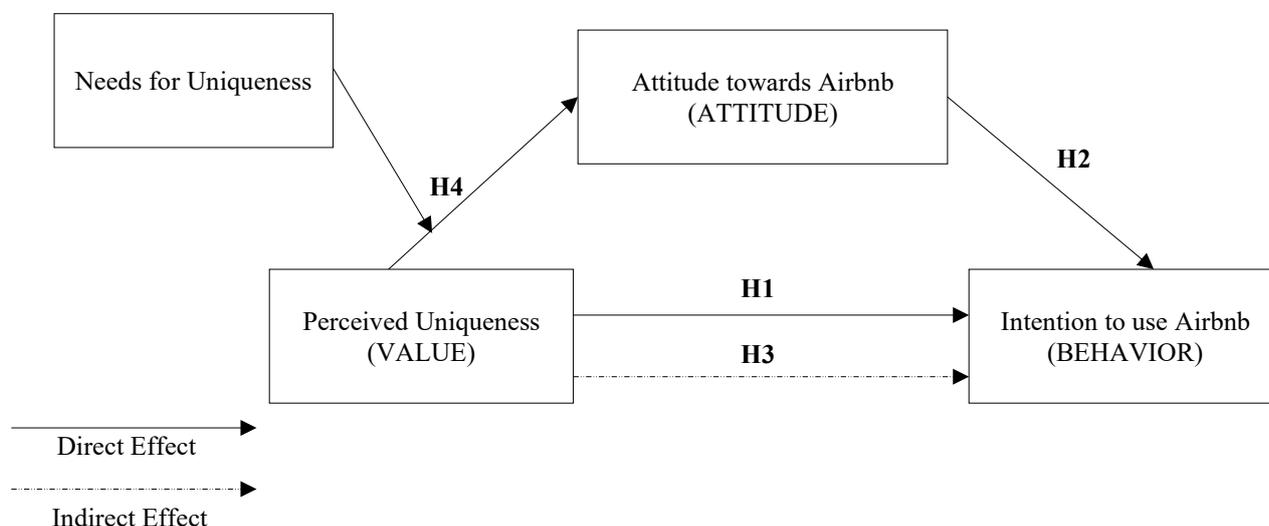
Further, Tian et al (2001) identified CNFU motivated behaviors that can vary from creative-choice counter-conformity, denoting the socially different choice perceived as creatively unique by others, to unpopular-choice counter-conformity, reflected in one's selection being perceived as unusually different from the group norm in order to establish difference from others, and to avoidance similarity, where one devalues and avoids product or brand selections adopted by others. Taken together, the pursuit of uniqueness and the propensity to differentiate from others will likely promulgate consumers' image and satisfy their needs for uniqueness.

Although previous research has been heavily focusing on studies on older generations (e.g., Gen X, Gen Y or Millennials) as they are mature consumers, we believe that Gen Z's individuality is crucial in making decisions of their own as well as influencing others such as their parents' decision (McKeever et al., 2021). For example, family vacation decisions may include a Gen Z family member's opinions and decisions especially when they can manage to search for destinations and activities that interest them on the websites by themselves. The needs for uniqueness is the trait of interest in this research because many studies suggested that the distinct attributes and values provided by peer-to-peer accommodation like Airbnb tend to attract Gen Z who have a strong demand for self-improvement (McKeever et al., 2021; Polisetty and Kurian, 2021). Hence, Gen Z with a personality of, or wishing to be perceived as, uniqueness may prefer consumptions that symbolize unique values. However, only a few studies have investigated personality and consumption choices in services and peer-to-peer accommodation which may challenge the traditional form of relationship with possessions we own. Such an innovative choice of Airbnb accommodations may have an impact on Gen Z's identity as this brand carries meanings similarly to other consumptions. As they improve their social image, any consumption choices with symbolic value or qualities that align with their personality will be recognized and positively perceived (Lissitsa & Kol, 2019). As such, we believe that the needs for uniqueness may influence Gen Z choice and their perception because

they would recognize the distinctive qualities and uniqueness exhibited in the products or service.

H4: The personality trait of needs for uniqueness positively influenced the relationship between perceived uniqueness and intention via attitude towards Airbnb.

From the literature review, the conceptual framework can be drawn as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In response to identifying the characteristics of Gen Z customers and the effect of their needs for uniqueness on perception, attitude, and intent to use Airbnb in Thailand within the framework of value-attitude-behavior, we adopted a quantitative research approach. In Thailand, Gen Z is estimated as 20% of the population (National Statistics Office, 2024). Due to the studied sample size calculation by Cochran (1977), 384 customers of Airbnb that were born between 1997 – 2005 and residing in Thailand during the data collection period were set at a confidence level of 95%. A sampling method focused on using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The 5-part questionnaire, with 6-point Likert Scale which 6="very disagreeable" to 6="very agreeable", was developed and composed of (1) 2 screening questions about the year of birth and their prior experiences with Airbnb, (2) 7 questions about perceived uniqueness of Airbnb accommodations, (3) 10 questions about attitude and intent to use Airbnb, (4) 6 questions about the needs for uniqueness trait, and (5) 5 demographic questions for characteristics of Gen Z. Prior to data collection, the item-objective congruence (IOC) and a pre-test on 40 respondents were conducted until consensus and acceptable reliability was obtained. The questionnaire was developed in English and Thai languages because Gen Z residing in Thailand and have used Airbnb could be non-Thai speakers as well. The data collection was administered through google form. Regarding data analysis, the descriptive statistics and moderated mediation model using Hayes' PROCESS macro in SPSS statistics 26 was employed.

## RESULTS

### Characteristics of Gen Z Respondents

The usable responses of 218 were descriptively analyzed and results showed that most of the respondents were female (59%) compared to male (38%). Considering the respondents' age, the result indicated that the average age is 21 years old, with the majority of college-age between 18-21 years old (62%), followed by the ages between 22-27 years old (38%). In terms of educational level, the highest level was a bachelor's degree (78.8%), followed by high school (15%) and above bachelor's degrees (5%). Interestingly, our Gen Z respondents reported that

they were from another country (32.2%), such as Japan, Singapore, and Philippines, although the majority of respondents are Thai (67.8%).

### The Relationships between Perception-Attitude-Behavior of Airbnb among Gen Z

The hypothesized moderated mediation model (see Figure 1) was tested in a single model using Model 7 and a bootstrapping approach, with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals, to assess the significance of the indirect effects at differing levels of the moderator (Hayes, 2013). For hypothesis 1 through 3, perceived uniqueness was the predictor, with attitude as the mediator. The outcome variable was intention to use Airbnb and needs for uniqueness was the proposed moderator. The overall moderated mediation model was supported with the index of moderated mediation = 0.37 (95% CI = 0.34; 0.40). As zero is not within the CI this indicates a significant moderating effect of needs for uniqueness on perceived uniqueness on the indirect effect via attitude (Hayes, 2015).

In testing H1, stating that perceived uniqueness positively influenced their use intention of Airbnb, the test results showed no significant direct effects ( $t = -7.05$ ,  $p = .48$ ; 95% CI =  $-.21$ ,  $.10$ ). Thus, perceived uniqueness of Airbnb accommodations had no effect on intention to use Airbnb.

H2 stated that attitude towards Airbnb had positively influenced their use intention of Airbnb. The results showed that attitude towards Airbnb had a significant influence on intention to use Airbnb ( $B = .925$ ,  $Bse = .50$ ,  $t = 18.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In testing H3, stating that perceived uniqueness positively influenced their use intention of Airbnb through their attitude, results showed that perceived uniqueness significantly influenced intention to use Airbnb via positive attitude ( $B = .70$ ,  $Bse = .07$ ,  $t = 10.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Tests of Conditional Indirect Effects of the Moderated Mediation Model.

H4 stated that needs for uniqueness positively influenced the relationship between perceived uniqueness and intention via attitude towards Airbnb. Results showed a significant association, but weaker, between perceived uniqueness and attitude for those low in needs for uniqueness ( $B = 2.57$ ,  $Bse = 1.0$ ,  $t = 2.57$ ,  $p = .01$ ) relative to those high in needs for uniqueness ( $B = 6.10$ ,  $Bse = 1.0$ ,  $t = 6.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results also showed 13.4% variances of attitude explained by the interaction between perceived uniqueness and needs for uniqueness. Based on the results, participants with higher needs for uniqueness and recognized uniqueness of Airbnb accommodation had higher positive attitude towards Airbnb than those low in needs for uniqueness. The results were summarized in Figure 2.

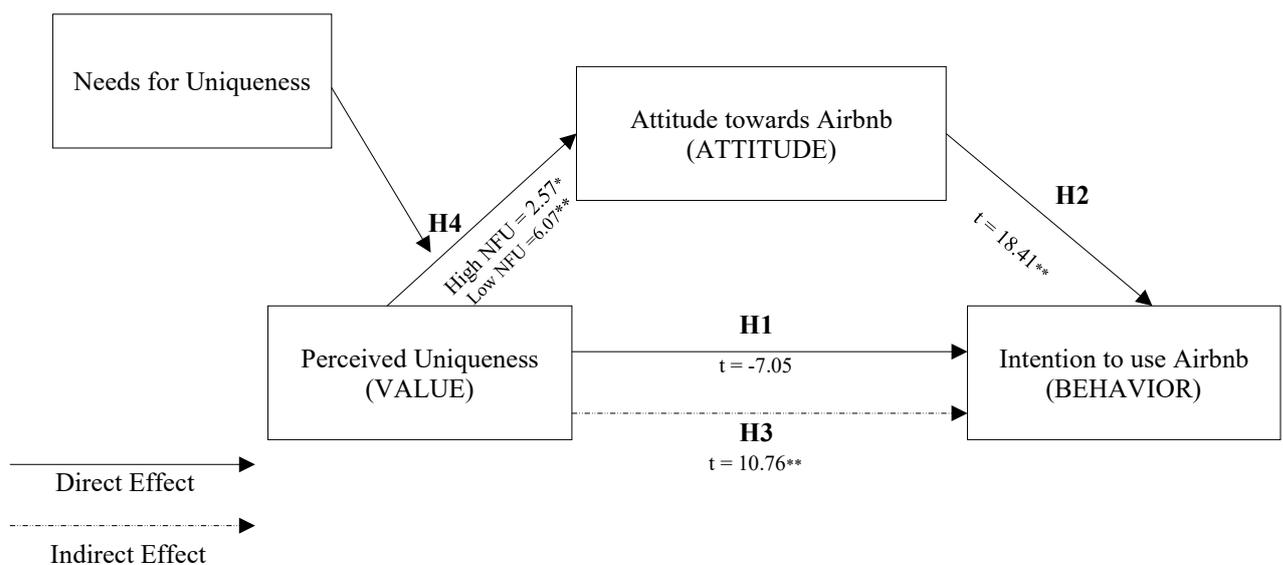


Figure 2. Conditional indirect effects of perceived uniqueness and intention via attitude, at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD) Needs for Uniqueness. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Gen Z characteristics based on results from the respondents revealed that Thai Gen Z have known with prior experiences with Airbnb despite the officials in Thailand banning any Airbnb operations. Based on the average age of the respondents of 21 years old, it suggests that the college age students would be a viable segment of consumers for hospitality and tourism businesses because they are seeking traveling and lodging experiences as early adults. The results also suggested that our respondents exhibit “needs for uniqueness” which plays an important role in their decisions. By investigating Gen Z behavior in the context of Airbnb, this study was among the first to apply the value-attitude-behavior hierarchy to examine consumer behavior within the hospitality and tourism environments. The value of perceived uniqueness had a positive influence on Gen Z’s intention to use Airbnb via positive attitude toward Airbnb, The particular finding can be implied that Gen Z travelers do recognize unique attributes of accommodations or destinations as an important part of their positive perception and attitude development towards their choices. As revealed by the results, needs for uniqueness was an underlying reason that prompted Gen Z to develop perceived uniqueness of attributes including brand identity, decorations, and other qualities. Attitude was also found to play an important role in Gen Z’s intention to use Airbnb directly. Thereby, both personal factors and perception of markets’ offering should align in order to build positive attitude and favorable decisions. From academic perspectives, the results contribute to the knowledge and learning process in sustainable tourism field about how Gen Z consumers’ personal factors and relevant components may support the continuing growth of peer-to-peer accommodations in the sharing economy that can be discussed among other educators and institutions globally. The research results can be extended to advance future research endeavors in consumer behavior, sustainable consumption, and academic achievements. Additionally, findings from the current study can be utilized as guidelines for strategic planning and legal considerations for relevant sectors about how Airbnb business as an example of hospitality and sustainable utilization of resources and consumption in Thailand.

This research was funded by the International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, contract no. 427/2567. The authors would like to express their gratitude to the institution for their support and resources that contributed to the completion of this study. It received certification from the Research Ethics Review Committee at Srinakharinwirot University, as indicated by the certificate of approval no. SWUEC2024-672426. The authors express their gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback. They significantly enhance the overall quality of this research article.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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