



Experience attributes and service quality dimensions of peer-to-peer accommodation in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the empirical findings of experience attributes and service quality dimensions of peer-to-peer accommodation (P2P) in Malaysia. Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews, which involved 10 P2P accommodation hosts and 15 P2P accommodation guests. Thematic analysis of the data guided by the concepts of service experience and service quality, revealed that P2P accommodation has four experience dimensions (property/accommodation, hosts, local people/culture, and location) and seven service quality dimensions (home facilities, personal advice, helpfulness, feeling welcome, responsiveness, reliability, and caring). These dimensions differentiate P2P accommodation from other types of accommodation, such as hotels, and are different from those of the SERVQUAL model. Subsequently, a new model, P2PSERVQUAL, is proposed for peer-to-peer accommodation. The findings add to the tourism and hospitality literature on experience attributes and service quality, with implications for the marketing and management of P2P accommodation.

1. Introduction

Malaysia has been the fastest growing market for Airbnb in Southeast Asia in 2017 and 2018 consecutively. The Airbnb platform had a listing of 44,000 peer-to-peer accommodations (P2P), hosting over two million guests in 2017. Malaysia recorded an impressive 99% year-on-year growth in this regard [1]. Several cities in Malaysia such as Sibul in Sarawak and Sempurna, Sabah have recorded a growth of 290%, Alor Setar City in Kedah has shown an increase of 214%, and Tanjung Tokong in Pulau Pinang an increase of 177%. These cities saw the most rapid expansion of Airbnb in Malaysia during 2018 [2]. The success of Airbnb in Malaysia has opened a new door to research, specifically research into consumer behaviour, experiential attributes, and perceived service quality dimensions. Simply put, these areas have great influence on the success of P2P accommodation.

P2P accommodation possesses unique characteristics, involving more personal interactions between host and guest than other types of accommodation [3]. It is a new form, a new entrant to the hospitality marketplace, and there are no specific service standards for it [4]. Accordingly, it is largely driven by experiential and social motivations [5]. Thus, the success of P2P accommodation may rely heavily on the service experience and service quality provided to guests. P2P accommodation is very different from hotels in terms of experience [6], property types [7], and key attributes, e.g., cleanliness and security [8]. This implies that the service experience attributes of P2P accommodation may be different.

Service experience is the internal and subjective response of a consumer, including their subjective perception, emotion and overall

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reaction. Service quality is the objective performance of services, and the extent to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations. Thus, it can be defined as customers' overall judgment or attitude towards the quality of the service [9]. It is widely known that service experiences and service quality can have a direct impact on a host's brand reputation. Exceptional service experiences and high service quality lead to guest satisfaction and attract more guests. Satisfactory service can increase customer loyalty [10] and reduce marketing and operating costs, as well as advertise the business to other clients [11]. It also builds trust between hosts and guests, leading to positive reviews, repeat bookings and a strong reputation. As delineated by Oh [12], service quality is a significant factor in triggering repurchase intention in the hospitality context. Positive service experiences and quality of services drive guest satisfaction, leading to repeat bookings and better online reviews. Negative experiences or low-quality services, on the other hand, can harm a host's reputation and lead to a decrease in business.

Hence, service experience and service quality are deemed to be key factors in driving guest satisfaction and differentiating P2P accommodation from other accommodation types. In Malaysia, it is uncertain which experience attributes and service quality dimensions are important in P2P accommodation [13]. Furthermore, the way hosts manage P2P accommodation in Europe, the USA, and Asia might vary because of cultural differences [14].

Arguably, studies of consumer behaviour in the hotel industry might not be relevant for understanding consumer behaviour in P2P accommodation, especially the service experience and the service quality dimensions. Moreover, past studies of the P2P accommodation experience are mostly based on Western cultural scenarios [4]. Thus, research on the experiential attributes and service quality of P2P accommodation in Malaysia is needed.

Similarly, the service experience and quality dimensions of various types of accommodation, such as hotels, lodges, ecolodges, and historical houses, are well researched, the dimensions vary depending on accommodation type and context. Because of the different nature and context of hotels, it is uncertain whether their existing service quality dimensions are relevant to P2P accommodation [6–8, 15]. Indeed, information on how travellers evaluate P2P accommodation is still limited [12]. Besides intense competition among P2P accommodation hosts and from hotel giants, hosts have been facing a major challenge since the COVID-19 pandemic started worldwide [16,17].

Extensive research has been conducted on various areas of P2P accommodation. For example, Ali, Yee, Imm and Akhtar [18] focused on the impact of price and behavioural intentions; Aw and Ch'ng [19] and Tiamiyu, Quoquab and Mohammad [20] examined the cause-and-effect relationship between price; Nathan et al. [21] investigated the influences of price value and social influence on the intention to stay; Razli et al. [22] discussed emergence activities; Razli et al. [23] explored motives to stay; Thoo, Junaidia, Sulaiman, Mas'od, Zakuan, Adam and Tan [24] investigated the impact of perceived authenticity. Guests' key attributes of P2P accommodations and hotels were studied by Belarmino, Whalen, Koh and Bowen [7]. Although P2P accommodation is believed to be driven by service experience, research in this area still is scarce in Malaysia. There is little empirical evidence from both the guests and hosts' perspectives of the experience attributes and service quality dimensions that characterise P2P accommodation.

Research in these areas is paramount. The identification of experience attributes and service quality dimensions is essential in the P2P accommodation context to be able to specifically measure, control, and improve the perceived consumer service quality and to enhance consumer satisfaction. Thus, this study has both theoretical and practical implications for P2P accommodation. Theoretically, the findings add to the existing literature on experience attributes and service quality. Practically, the novel service quality framework has implications for the managing, positioning and marketing of P2P accommodation in Malaysia. P2P hosts can capitalise upon the identified service quality dimensions to develop marketing strategies. A relevant service quality model for P2P accommodation enables hosts to provide quality experiences and services and enhance economic benefits [25] in a sustainable manner. The research aims to explore the experience attributes and service quality dimensions of the P2P guest experience from both guest and host perspectives.

Hence, the research endeavours to address three research objectives. (i) To explore the experience attributes of peer-to-peer accommodation. (ii) To describe the service quality dimensions of peer-to-peer accommodation in Malaysia. (iii) To propose a service quality model for peer-to-peer accommodation in Malaysia.

1.1. Service experiences and service quality in peer-to-peer accommodation

Experience is 'the subjective mental state of the guest during a service encounter' [26]: p. 166]. Accordingly, service experiences are a complex combination of factors which shape guests' feelings and attitudes [27] towards their stay. Service experience and service quality are key to the hospitality business as consumer satisfaction and creating a positive service environment is significantly influenced by these two factors [28]. The nature of consumer experience is subjective, contextual and situational and influenced by an array of tangible and intangible elements [29]. Research has shown that physical utility, sensorial experience, core service, guest-host relationship, sense of security, social interaction, and local touch are dimensions that can describe customer experiences [4].

Service quality is an important factor in ensuring that a hospitality provider has repeat customers [10]; in creating appealing experiences, as in ecotourism [30]; in differentiating themselves from others in a profitable way [30]; and in ensuring that companies achieve a higher return on investment and asset turnover. Service quality measurement research has been extensively conducted across different tourism and hospitality sectors. It has become a critical factor of business success [31–33], emerging as a globally important strategic force [33] as well as a key tool in the armoury of management [34]. Customer retention through service quality and guest satisfaction has become vital in saturated and competitive global markets, such as the international hospitality and tourism industry [35].

Service quality is a multidimensional concept, and different people perceive the meaning of service quality differently [36]. Because of the intangible nature of services provided by firms, customers are always involved in creating the service itself [37]. Employees play an important role in how service quality is perceived by consumers, and employee service performance is extremely

difficult to standardise [9]. Moreover, service quality concepts are not well developed [38], and it is difficult to define perceived service quality [39] due to three unique features, namely intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability of production and consumption [9]. However, the most common explanation of perceived service quality [40] is ‘a form of attitude, related but not equivalent to satisfaction from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance’ [33: p. 15]. It is important to explore which features really matter for guests when evaluating P2P accommodation and the factors that differentiate it from other types.

There is not a universally accepted conceptual definition or model of service quality; nevertheless, most researchers agree that perceived service quality is the outcome of service quality expectation and the perception of the experienced service quality [41]. Parasuraman et al. [42] conducted in-depth interviews with top-level management and a total of 12 focus group interviews. The study unveiled a consistent pattern, identifying the dimensions of service quality as reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. These findings, named SERVQUAL, eventually had a significant impact on the hospitality industry. The SERVQUAL model appears to have significant support from researchers, particularly in the hotel industry [43–45] and P2P accommodation [25,46–50]. Parasuraman et al. [31] conclude that service quality can be categorised into the following five dimensions, as presented in Table 1 below.

Mersha and Adlakha [36] conducted their study in five service industries: physician services, retail banking, auto maintenance, colleges/universities, and fast-food restaurants. The results were partially in line with the SERVQUAL model, indicating the absence of some attributes influencing consumers’ perception of service quality. Researchers have sought to extensively identify the dimensions that consumers use to assess the quality of services and service experiences in tourism and hospitality businesses. The SERVQUAL model has been extended, and various other service quality models have emerged, such as LODSERV and LODQUAL for lodge services, DINSERVE for restaurant services, HOLSER for hotel services, and HISTOQUAL for historical houses, as presented in Table 2. The evidence might seem to suggest that tangibles are the most important dimension, but it is not yet certain to what extent this is applicable to P2P accommodation. Despite recognition of its operational and theoretical problems, the SERVQUAL model nonetheless contributes to the understanding of the types of indicators that consumers use to measure service quality across service sectors.

Similarly, service quality can be interpreted as a quality signifier in the context of peer-to-peer accommodation [48]. This was evidenced in the findings of Lalicic and Weismayer [49], which confirmed that responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and reliability from the SERVQUAL model act as the factors of travellers’ loyalty to the accommodation in the case of Airbnb. On the other hand, Akbaba [43] found that tangibles, understanding, caring, adequacy in service supply, assurance, and convenience are significant factors in predicting business travellers’ overall service quality evaluation.

Elsewhere, Zhang, Cui, Cheng, Zhang and Li [50] reported a wide variety of attributes that distinguish Airbnb from hotels. These are the opportunity to encounter hosts, atmosphere, flexibility, value for money and quality assurance. Aside from this, the key motivators for guests to stay at P2P accommodation include location (proximity to places of interest and conveniences), hosts’ friendliness and hospitality, and the facilities and atmosphere of the property. These, along with cleanliness, accuracy, and good communication, are frequently mentioned in high-scoring online reviews, and can be considered vital service attributes [5]. A study by Belarmino, Whalen, Koh and Bowen [7] stated that relationships with hosts/owners were the most significant factor in P2P reviews, underlining the importance of interaction with guests. Social and cultural features play a vital role in attracting guests to P2P accommodations. Tussyadiah [59] found that social interaction was crucial, while Heo [60] discussed how P2P guests enjoy being involved in the local community as active partners in value creation.

The research’s conceptual framework posited that P2P accommodation experiences consist of ‘bundles’ of tangible and intangible components and that these components help consumers to clearly differentiate the service components from one another. Hence, authenticity [61], the relationship with the host [7], location [62], and the uniqueness and variety of the accommodation [63] can be regarded as experiences, whereas tangibles, assurance, empathy, reliability, and responsiveness of the SERVQUAL model [42] are used as service quality dimensions.

2. Research method

The paper uses an exploratory qualitative research method to explore experience attributes and service quality dimensions guided by a structural framework adopted from the SERVQUAL model, but including the host’s and guest’s perspectives. The inductive, qualitative research method is employed because of the nature of the research objectives, which are individualistic and subjective. Identifying service experiences and quality dimensions requires gathering in-depth opinions and inputs from peer-to-peer accommodation hosts and guests to generate a deeper understanding of their complex behaviour [64]. In simple terms, the opinions and experiences of P2P accommodation hosts may be different from those of guests, hence the need for a more practical and theoretical

Table 1
Five dimensions of SERVQUAL.

Dimension	Description
Tangibles	Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Assurance	Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire and provide confidence
Empathy	Caring, individualized attention the firm provides to its customers

Source: Adapted from Parasuraman et al. [42].

Table 2
Service quality dimensions and models by researchers.

Author/year	Service quality dimensions
Grönroos [51]	Technical, functional dimensions
Johns & Lee-Ross [52,53]	Tangibles and intangibles, satisfiers and dissatisfiers
Parasuraman et al. [42]	SERVQUAL scale: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles
Knutson, Steven, Wullaert & Yokoyama [54,55]	LOGSERV: reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles, empathy
Getty & Thompson [56]	LODGQUAL: tangibles, reliability, contact
Steven, Knutson & Patton [57]	DINESERV: reliability, tangibles, assurance, responsiveness, empathy
Dean & White [58]	HOLSER: employees, tangibles, reliability
Frochot & Hughes [46]	HISTOQUAL: responsiveness, tangibles, communication, consumables, empathy
Khan [47]	ECOSERV: eco-tangibles, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles

approach to data collection which included both guest and host as respondents. Subsequently, more holistic and well-rounded findings from the multi sources led to valuable insights into consumer behaviour with regard to their experiences of P2P accommodation. Peer debriefing was implemented to ensure transparency in the research process [65]. It played a pivotal role in maintaining the trustworthiness of the research by diminishing the impact of reactivity and bias [66].

A purposive sampling technique was adopted, and the selection of respondents was based on the following criteria. The hosts must be active on the peer-to-peer accommodation platform Airbnb, and their accommodation must be located in Malaysia. The guests must be Malaysian and have used peer-to-peer accommodation in Malaysia. The data were collected through in-depth video interviews from October 2020 to May 2021. In total, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interviewing, including 10 peer-to-peer accommodation hosts and 15 peer-to-peer accommodation guests. The data were considered to reach data saturation when no more new insights were provided by the respondents.

P2P accommodation hosts were selected purposively from the HostAStay Gold Ticket membership WhatsApp group, which consisted of 116 respondents. The shortlisted hosts fulfilled two important criteria, which were that they were active hosts and that their accommodation was located in Malaysia, while the P2P accommodation guests were selected purposively from the researcher's contact list. Both the selection process of the P2P accommodation hosts and the selection process of the guests were in line with the purposive sampling technique [67]. Prior to the interviews, the respondents were informed about the purpose of this research by an interview cover letter, which also included non-disclosure terms. Permission to interview the participants and record their voices was requested in the letter. The respondents signed at the bottom of the letter if they agreed. All participants were successfully interviewed via Zoom video meetings, which lasted 35–50 min. Physical interviews were prohibited by the government due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data analysis involved transcribing, reading, and coding the responses, followed by thematic analysis. The themes that emerged were then categorised according to the service experience and service quality dimensions of SERVQUAL. The research extends the conceptual framework of Parasuraman et al.'s [42] SERVQUAL model into a new service quality model, one specifically designed for P2P accommodation. The themes from the empirical data and the categorisation are presented in Table 4 and Table 5, respectively. The coding process consisted of two stages. In the initial phase, transcripts were created and codes were allotted to corresponding matrices. Next, in the second phase, the transcripts were analyzed to identify meaningful categories derived from the codes. Subsequently, the categories were defined and labelled as themes, capturing the essence of the content and determining the particular aspects of the data [68].

Table 3
Participant profiles.

No. of participants (host)	10
No. of participants (guest)	15
TOTAL	25
Gender (host)	Male – 6 Female – 4
Gender (guest)	Male – 7 Female – 8
Location of peer-to-peer accommodation (host)	Sabah – 4 Kuala Lumpur – 3 Johor – 2 Selangor – 1
Location of peer-to-peer accommodation (guest)	Sabah – 5 Kuala Lumpur – 5 Pulau Pinang – 3 Selangor – 1 Pahang – 1

Table 4
Experience attributes that emerged from the interview responses.

Themes	Responses and respondents: H (host), G (guest)
Experience attributes	–
Property/accommodation	Cosy home (H1, H2), Complete home (H1), Make them feel like they are at home (H10)
It looks homey (G3), For a whole family (G4), Good experience for a whole family (G5), Home-like feel (G6), To have a party with family (G10), More space for a family gathering (G11), Dining area for the family to sit and gather (G14), Feels like staying at your own home (G15)	
Host	I treated my guests as my friends (H1)
The host is a friendly person (G1); and a great interaction with host (G3).	
Local people/culture	Engage with the culture of the local people (H1), Learn from our culture (H1), Mix with the local people (H1)
Meet the local people and neighbours (G1), Go to the local market (G1), The real local feel (G1), It has a local vibe (G6)	
Location	Nice quiet town area (G1), The sea view was good (G3), It was close to food shops (G3), First factor would be the location (G4), It is very close to the train station (G5), Experience the local food and access to public transport (G7)

Table 5
Service quality dimension themes that emerged from the interview responses.

Service quality dimensions	Interview responses/respondent: H (host), G (guest)
Responsiveness	Attend to them immediately (H2), Reply promptly (H4), Fast response is important (H3). Always be on standby (G8), Fast response (G12), Quick response (G15).
Reliability	Provide what was promised (H2)
Caring	All items are provided as booked (G1), No misrepresentation (G3), No differences from the photos (G9). A caring host (H1), Put yourself in the shoes of the customer (H5).
Home facilities	Always understanding (G1), I feel taken care of (G1), Sensitive to the needs of others (G3), Someone is taking care of us (G7). Dining area, TV and washing area (H5), Basic facilities and equipment are important (H10). Cooking facilities (G1), Kitchen is prioritised (G2), Kitchen with necessities (G3), Tea, coffee, and espresso machine (G4), You can do your cooking (G5), Amenities (G6).
Personal advice	Give them my own opinion (H1), Give them tips on where to go and where to eat (H2), Give recommendations (H3), Knowledgeable host (H4), Tell them about the best place for dinner (H5), Offer advice, maps, and information (H7).
Feeling welcome	Everyone loves a warm welcome from the host (H7), A warm greeting (G1), Make me feel welcome (G2), A friendly feel (G12).
Helpfulness	I will always be there when they need my help (H1), Helpfulness (H2), Get ready when the guests need help (H4), We are always contactable (H7)
	Available in case of an emergency (G3), We can help them when there is a problem (G5), Helpful host (G11).

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Respondent profiles

In total, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted, which consisted of 10 peer-to-peer accommodation hosts and 15 guests who had stayed in P2P accommodation in Malaysia. The respondents' profiles are presented in Table 3. Six male P2P accommodation hosts were interviewed. Two of them were from Sabah, one from Kuala Lumpur, two from Johor, and one from Selangor. Four female P2P accommodation hosts were interviewed. Two of them were from Sabah, and the other two were from Kuala Lumpur.

3.2. Findings and discussion of service experience attributes

The findings appear to reveal four themes that reflect the attributes of the P2P accommodation experience. These are related to property/accommodation, the host, local people and culture, and location. This implies that great emphasis is given to the homely feeling of the facilities, social interactions between host and guest, personal experiences with local people, and learning about the local culture, as well as the convenience and proximity of the location. These are recorded in Table 4.

The empirical evidence showed that most guest respondents (G3, G4, G5, G6, G10, G14, and G15) stated that their experience with P2P accommodation gave them a homely feeling, even though they were physically away from home. Likewise, host respondents H1, H2, and H10 agreed that P2P accommodation provides a homely experience, which is what distinguishes P2P accommodations from traditional hotels. Their responses were as follows:

'I think experience home-alike' (G6), 'Feeling like staying at your own home' (G5), 'It's a very good home experience for the whole family' (G10), 'Family gathering experiences' (G14)

'Make them to feel like they are at home' (H1), 'Make them to feel like they are at home' (H2), 'You will have dining table where my family members can sit and eat together' (H10)

'Actually, I provide them like 100% completed, is a home, is a very cosy home. I give them like almost 90% of cooking utensil, they want a fry pan, they want a wok, everything I provide to them' (H1)

It seems that the feeling of being at home may be the main reason travellers stay in P2P accommodation. Giving P2P accommodation a homely feel when physically far away from home is considered vital from the perspectives of both hosts and guests. Indeed, host participants H1, H2, and H10 seem to agree that a homely feel is a key aspect that distinguishes P2P accommodations from traditional hotels. Likewise, social interactions, local culture, and location are deemed vital elements that contribute to the service experience of peer-to-peer accommodation. Accordingly, Lin, Fan, Zhang and Lau [69] pointed out that interactions between P2P accommodation hosts and guests, place/location, and the local culture are considered to be authentic experiences in the context of peer-to-peer accommodation.

Lalicic and Weismayer [49] have asserted that the authentic experience derived from the interaction with hosts leads to better guest satisfaction. It adds to the journey's meaningfulness, especially when travellers mix themselves with the locals and participate in both local and authentic activities [69]. Guests who stay at P2P accommodation will have a higher chance of experiencing the local culture than guests who stay at hotels. They can easily interact with the locals as some P2P accommodations are located in residential areas less popular with tourists.

This seems to correspond well with Lee and Kim's [70] findings, which stated that the home-like atmosphere is an important selection criterion for guests, one which encourages them to stay longer in P2P accommodation than in a traditional hotel. It also highlights that Airbnb users deeply value the feeling of being at home, which is also associated with the facilities for daily use [70]. Likewise, the guests stressed the importance of location. This corresponds well with Varma et al. [62], who confirmed that location is one of the most important factors for Airbnb users in selecting accommodation, something H1 also mentioned.

Hence, these experience dimensions contribute to the uniqueness and appeal of P2P accommodation in Malaysia and attract travellers who like to engage with local people and culture. Indeed, cultural exploration and experiencing the local lifestyle are two important reasons for travellers to choose P2P accommodation [71], as also evidenced by the host and guest responses in Table 4; the rationale behind that is the desire to understand the local lifestyle and create memorable experiences.

Furthermore, the findings contradict the outcomes of Cheng and Jin's [72] study, where amenities and host services were reported to be less relevant to the P2P experience [73]. Priporas et al. [73] proposed that monetary benefits, cost-saving prices, and value for money were the primary factors influencing guests' experience. Nonetheless, the findings of the current study correspond well with Tussyadiah and Zach's [5] analysis of online reviews of Airbnb listings. They are also consistent with past studies stating that P2P accommodation offers the experiential value of being in authentic, non-tourist settings [8,74]. These attributes create value and memorable experiences of staying at P2P and are the unique experiential dimension of P2P accommodation. They correspond well with authenticity [61], relationship with the host [7], location [62], and unique accommodation and variety [63], which can all be classified as experiences.

In short, P2P accommodation can be regarded as a form of place experience. The experiences are derived from the four attributes identified, namely property, host, local people and location, and they reflect the uniqueness of the experience attributes of P2P accommodation. Unlike other accommodation types and hotels, the accommodation, host, and surrounding culture and location all contribute to the quality of the experiences. Hosts that focus on these aspects can attract travellers and indirectly enhance guest satisfaction.

3.3. Findings and discussion of service quality dimensions

In the SERVQUAL model, tangibles, assurance, empathy, reliability, and responsiveness are the five service quality dimensions [42]. Yet empirical data from this study found seven P2P service quality dimensions. These are responsiveness, reliability, caring, home facilities, personal advice, feeling welcome, and helpfulness, as reported in Table 5. Interestingly, personal advice and feeling welcome are not part of the SERVQUAL model. Home facilities, personal advice, and helpfulness were the three most common themes, followed by reliability and feeling welcome.

The importance of home facilities was stressed by most participants, including H5, G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, and G6. Personal advice was mentioned by H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H7. Helpfulness featured in the responses of H1, H2, H4, H7, G3, G5, and G11. These attributes have a significant impact on the characteristics and experiences of peer-to-peer accommodation and the perceived quality of peer-to-peer accommodation for the host and participants. Based on the attributes of the experiences identified, peer-to-peer accommodation can be seen as a 'home away from home', an opportunity for social interaction and engagement with local culture. This seems to suggest that travellers in Malaysia stay in peer-to-peer accommodation to experience a homely feeling. Hence, peer-to-peer accommodation is perceived as a place that provides homely experiences with elements of local and social interconnectedness.

3.4. Findings that show responsiveness

Responsiveness has been described as the 'caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers' [33: p. 23]. The in-depth interviews carried out during this research have found responsiveness to be the key element that makes guests feel that they have been provided with great service by the peer-to-peer accommodation hosts. This is consistent with the findings of Gunter [75], which confirmed that responsiveness from hosts was one of the most important criteria in obtaining positive reviews from peer-to-peer

accommodation guests. As mentioned by host participants H2 and H4, they must attend to their guests immediately if there are any requests or complaints in order to achieve high standards of service quality, as evidenced by the following responses:

'When you have any sort of issue, any complaints, you attend to them immediately because you don't want to make them think that they are unimportant [...] and that's how actually you give them a feeling of good service', 'Promptly reply upon the guests request', 'How fast you respond to their thing is also important'

This is also seen in the guests' responses: *'Fast response from host'* (G1)

This is in line with the findings of a recent study conducted in Malaysia, confirming that host responsiveness is guests' major customer service concern when staying at peer-to-peer accommodation [76].

Reliability is the second service quality dimension that emerged from the responses. Reliability implies the 'ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately' [33: p. 23]. It is crucial in the context of peer-to-peer accommodation because most guests make their bookings on accommodation platforms via the internet. As stressed by guest participants G1, G2, G3, and G9, misrepresentation of the accommodation by photos or descriptions on the website will eventually bring the guests great disappointment and dissatisfaction. These aspects are evidenced by the following responses:

'There is no mis-presentation at all so whatever I see in the photos is exactly what I see in person',

'So, what it was promised in ad itself like the owner will say whatever will be provided, sofa, TV, Wi-Fi, how many rooms, how many beds, cutleries, water heater. As a consumer, what was promoted and agreed online must be fulfilled in the real world'

Hence, it is highly important that whatever is promised on internet sites must match the experiences of the guests that are staying at the accommodation. Prior studies suggest that this sense of reliability has both a direct and an indirect significant relationship with guest loyalty in the context of peer-to-peer accommodation [49,77].

As the core of empathy, caring, as explained by Parasuraman et al. (33: p. 23), is the core of host responsiveness. An caring and empathetic host provides quality service, which reflects the level of empathy that leads to a display of service quality. As an example, guest participant G1 felt taken care of when the peer-to-peer accommodation host took him on a private tour and introduced him to some good places to visit. This is in line with another statement from host participant H1, a 22-time winner of SuperHost in Airbnb, as he explained his success: *'[I'm] a caring host'*. In the same vein, guest participant G7 stressed the importance of hosts providing care because that is what distinguishes peer-to-peer accommodation from hotels. These aspects are expressed in the following responses:

'If someone call and check, it makes us feel like someone is really taking care of us'

'I am a caring host' (H1)

'A person who is always understanding. I would say the most important thing is understanding because when you hire an Airbnb, it's not like a hotel where you can take up the phone and press "0" and you reception straightaway and you can ask for anything any question'

'Sensitive to other people's need, that kind of personalities are important for an Airbnb host'

This implies that caring is an important dimension by which peer-to-peer accommodation can distinguish itself in the sharing economy from 'mainstream' tourist accommodation [61]. In this sense, hosts that are willing to provide their guests with a better staying experience are considered caring.

Home facilities also emerged as an important service quality dimension from the responses. These are vital to encourage guests to stay in homes rather than at other accommodation, such as hotels. The term refers to tangibles such as physical facilities and other equipment. This includes basic items in kitchens, washing machines, and dryers, which hotels do not provide. Their importance for peer-to-peer accommodation has been emphasised by the results of An et al. [25], who reported that these facilities are the major factor in increasing service quality. These facilities make P2P accommodation unique, and they may enhance the home environment as well as guest satisfaction [78]. This aspect is reported by the respondents as follows:

'I would assume to have a bit more amenities, like tea like coffee. There was one I went to with espresso machine. That was good'

'They got the facilities they are actually staying at their own house which they got the dining area, they got the TV, washing area that kind of thing and then get together they can chat. If we are talking about hotel, definitely they don't have the flexibility, they would be having their own rooms so it is not very convenient. That's how I look at it, that's why people actually choose Airbnb or homestay rather than the hotel'

'I would expect it should have internet connection, air-conditioner and water heater and washing machine and normal cooking utensils'

Interestingly, P2P accommodation guests regard the kitchen as one of the most important home facilities. This is evidenced by the following responses, indicating that the kitchen is one of the most important factors in choosing peer-to-peer accommodation over traditional hotel establishments:

'For me, the reason why I stay in Airbnb is because of the cooking facilities', I'll choose Airbnb when I have a bigger group of friends. So in Airbnb context, I'll prioritise the kitchen. That's one of the plus points for Airbnb accommodation because hotel rooms don't have kitchen', 'If I'm holidaying, the kitchen, it has to be with the basic necessities'

In the service experience context of P2P accommodation, hosts should be responsible for providing accurate and relevant

information as well as relevant personal advice to their guests. The provision of general information and information about local attractions is important to guests, as they are not familiar with the place and not all information is available on the internet. Personal advice from the hosts is deemed a unique service to the guests. This is consistent with Sthapit and Jiménez-Barreto [79], who stated that hosts who provide useful information are more likely to generate a memorable staying experience for their guests. This is in agreement with the responses of host participants H1, H2, H3, H4, and H7, who highlighted that they regularly give personal advice regarding the best places to visit and to eat at to enhance the guests' staying experiences:

'Accommodation. I always tell them in my own opinion, not like those copy from book'

'I tell them my experience and also when they ask me is there any good mystery place to try off, I always give them my own opinion, not from Google, so those my guests are very happy', or 'Offer advises, map, information about nearby attractions'

Personal advice from hosts will often be appreciated by P2P accommodation guests. Feeling welcome is essential in a hospitality environment. This is equally important in the context of peer-to-peer accommodation, as expressed in the following:

'Everyone loves a warm welcome from the host. They also happy and satisfied and feel like very welcomed when they are staying at my Airbnb'

This dimension also corresponds with Ariffin and Maghzi [80], who indicated that a sense of a 'warm welcome' is the second most important dimension in elaborating the hospitality of hotel services. At the same time, Barsky and Nash [81] also revealed that feeling welcome is the emotional equivalent of loyalty to upscale hotels. This finding is consistent with Tussyadiah and Zach [5], who found that feeling welcome positively influenced the guests' satisfaction levels in peer-to-peer accommodation. This is evidenced in the responses of H1, H7, and H10, who mentioned the importance of giving a warm welcome to their guests upon arrival.

Helpfulness is also one of the personal-touch elements that are integral in shaping customer experience and their level of satisfaction [82]. Dabholkar et al. [71], in their longitudinal study, concluded that helpfulness is a part of personal attention, which operates as a factor of service quality. By the same token, host participants H1, H2, H4, and H7 emphasised the importance of helpfulness, especially in terms of providing good service to P2P guests. Guests also view this trait positively, and one of the guest participants, G11, stressed how crucial it was for a host to be helpful:

'If you don't want to service people, it's very hard for you to work in this industry so helpfulness definitely is in there already' (H1)

'always say I am very helpful and very good' (H2)

'As a good host, you [have] to get ready when the guests needed [you]' (H4)

'We are always contactable' (H7)

Furthermore, a helpful host has a higher chance of receiving positive reviews on the booking platform, as reported by G11: 'A helpful host will lead me to give a positive review'.

The seven service quality dimensions identified consist of tangible and intangible elements and can be categorised as internal and external factors, as presented in Table 6. These dimensions form the service quality model of P2P. Just like experience attributes, these service quality dimensions are essential areas that hosts should focus on to improve the experience quality of P2P accommodation. Marketing strategies should be focused on these dimensions.

The findings reveal seven service quality dimensions, as presented in Table 6. Four service quality dimensions, namely tangibles, reactivity, reliability, and care, are compatible with the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model [42] and with previous studies on hotels and B&Bs. The tangible element that emerged in P2P accommodation is found across other service quality models including LOGSERV,

Table 6
Comparison of SERVQUAL and P2PSERVQUAL dimensions.

No.	SERVQUAL dimensions	Peer-to-peer accommodation dimensions (P2PSERVQUAL)	Description
1	Tangibles	Home facilities	Dining area, TV and washing area, cooking facilities, washing machines, amenities
2	Responsiveness	Responsiveness	Attend and reply promptly Fast response, always on standby
3	Reliability	Reliability	Provide what was promised All items are provided as booked
4	Empathy	Caring	No misrepresentation, no differences from the photos Put yourself in the shoes of the customer Always understanding Take care of guests Responsive to the needs of others
5		Personal advice	Provide advice and relevant information, for example a map of the location, and recommendations where to go and where to eat
6		Helpfulness	Always be there when needs or problems arise Always contactable and available in case of an emergency Helpful host
7		Feeling welcome	Warm welcome from the host, warm sense of hospitality

LOGQUAL, DINESERVE, HOLSER, HISTOUR, and ECOSERV, even though their nature and context are different. Tangibles are important for service experience and service quality measurement as consumer experience the result of both tangible and intangible elements.

The emergence of the dimensions of personal advice, helpfulness, and feeling welcome seems to suggest that hosts pay great attention to guests feeling at home, with friendliness and courtesy being essential hospitality services. This can only be achieved through direct guest–host interactions. Unlike other accommodation types, helpfulness and the provision of personal advice are crucial, as a large amount of P2P accommodation is located outside traditional tourist areas. Furthermore, these dimensions matter for guests when evaluating P2P accommodation, and they are factors that differentiate it from other types. This shows that the quality dimensions of P2PSERVQUAL are clearly different from SERVQUAL.

4. Conclusions and contributions

Based on the findings, it seems that guests' experiences are influenced by their interactions with the host, their engagement with the local culture and the local people, and the location. These can be considered key experience attributes which create unique P2P experiences in Malaysia. Seven quality dimensions of P2P accommodation have been identified: tangibles (home facilities), personal advice, helpfulness, feeling welcome, responsiveness, reliability, and caring. Of the seven quality dimensions, only one dimension is related to a tangible item. The findings demonstrate that the service quality dimensions of P2P accommodation differ from other types of accommodation; personal advice, feeling welcome and helpfulness emerged as new dimensions. This suggests that interaction between the host and guests is an important form of 'connectivity' in P2P accommodation but not in hotels, as pointed out by Belarmino, Whalen, Koh and Bowen [7]. In this context, relationship building is crucial in P2P hosting; and hosts should capitalise on this aspect to offer memorable and unique guest experiences. This seems to suggest that the success of P2P accommodation is largely dependent on service experience and the quality of service. These are the key factors for P2P hosts to attract and retain customers, while hotels tend to offer additional services.

It has been shown that the service quality dimensions of P2P accommodation are different from those of the SERVQUAL model and those of previous studies of accommodation. This also indicates that the service quality dimensions of P2P accommodation in Malaysia differ from those elsewhere, due to cultural differences. Among the seven service quality dimensions identified from P2PSERVQUAL and characterise P2P accommodation, personal advice is crucial as Malaysian culture emphasizes on the intimacy relationship between people. Thus, Malaysia guests prefer to listen to the advice from the hosts instead of from the internet. Besides, helpfulness plays an important role in shaping the P2PSERVQUAL model due to the neighbourhood spirit that Malaysian have already get used to. Lastly, Malaysian guests strongly prefer to have the warm welcome from the hosts as Malaysia culture believes in the connection between people.

In short, three dimensions—personal advice, helpfulness and feeling welcomed—only appear in P2P accommodation, signifying its uniqueness experiences and Malaysia style of P2P accommodations. It appears that P2P accommodations focus on these dimensions, reflecting the Malaysian culture that is friendly and welcoming and caring in most situations. Meeting people, social interaction and developing good relationships are the Malaysian culture that has shown the differences of Malaysian culture. Consequently, communication with the host is a key factor in improving overall P2P housing experiences. The difference in cultural context has shown significant expectations and preferences differences exist between Malaysian and international guests in P2P accommodation. These attributes have an impact on P2P operations and accommodations. As Malaysian guests, their expectations and level of satisfaction are also affected by those attributes. The appearance and location of the property in Malaysia are vital for the Malaysian guest; and serve as the key motivators to choose P2P accommodation. It seems that the high expectations of domestic guests for the friendly environment, the facilities of the houses are important elements for the guests from the point of view of the host.

The paper addresses gaps in the understanding of the experience attributes and service quality of P2P accommodation in Malaysia. Both guests and hosts significantly value the service experience and service quality of P2P accommodation. This implies that P2P is a unique type of accommodation that is driven by experiential aspects. These experiences derive from the interactions between guests and hosts, as well as engagement with local neighbours. Further, it suggests sustainable P2P accommodation service experiences can be achieved through the active participation of guests in their host communities/physical environment. This illuminates the importance of co-creation experiences in P2P accommodation and the need for an innovative approach in managing it and contributes to a novel understanding of the service quality dimensions of P2P accommodation through the new service quality model known as P2PSERVQUAL.

The paper has several implications for academics and practitioners. The findings suggest that hosts should ensure their home facilities meet the expected requirements for guests. It is of utmost importance that whatever has been promised before the guests' arrival is fulfilled, as this significantly impacts the guests' perception of reliability. Additionally, hosts should be responsive to guest inquiries and attend to them promptly. The actions taken by hosts in this regard are closely linked to the level of care perceived by the guests during their stay. Therefore, P2P accommodation hosts are strongly recommended to prioritize providing personal advice, helpfulness, and creating a welcoming atmosphere. These dimensions distinguish them from average P2P accommodation hosts and contribute to delivering excellent service. It adds to the tourism and hospitality literature in service experiences, and it proposes a new service quality model called P2PSERVQUAL, which, unlike SERVQUAL, includes personal advice, helpfulness and feeling welcome as three new service quality dimensions. These results provide a better understanding of what motivates guests to stay at P2P accommodation, specifically through its different service quality dimensions. This information offers hosts clear areas to focus on to develop relevant marketing strategies for peer-to-peer accommodation and to manage P2P accommodation experiences.

Given that P2P accommodation is currently legal but lacks regulation in Malaysia. Thus, it strongly recommends that both the

federal government and state authorities, including municipal and city councils to prioritize the development of comprehensive regulations concerning safety compliance, licensing and rating standards and taxation for P2P accommodation. Thus, treating P2P accommodation as legitimate business entities but as relevant operational framework. Implementing such regulations will help to establish a secure and regulated environment, ensuring that P2P accommodation operate on par with other types of accommodation businesses.

The research has several limitations, one of which is that the study location is limited to one country. The use of a qualitative design also limits the generalisation of the findings. However, the data is sourced from both guests and hosts for a rich and well-rounded understanding of the P2P experience. Future research would extend the study to other countries and use mixed methods to enhance the potential generalisation of the findings.

Author contribution statement

Jennifer Chan Kim Lian: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Wong Tze Sheng: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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