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A sociomaterial analysis of guest-host relationships in digital environments

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how trust is built in the relationships between guests and hosts in digital environments of peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms. The growth of P2P platforms and their use of information and communication technologies have sparked scholarly and public discussions about trust in the digital age. Trust is a social phenomenon essential for cooperation and orderly social relationships. By applying a sociomaterial perspective, this thesis explores how trust is built with technological means and the implications it has for social relationships in a tourism setting.

Trust building is investigated by drawing on insights from tourism studies, information systems studies, and organizational studies. This multi-disciplinary perspective is applied in studying the case of the Airbnb platform's guests and hosts. By analysing guest-host relationships and their interactions with the platform's technologies, the thesis shows how trust between guests and hosts is transformed by algorithmic means of organizational control.

The relationship between trust and control is analysed in four research papers that deal with trust building from different perspectives. Together, the papers provide a multilayered explanation of the relationship between trust and control. The analysis begins with Paper 1, which investigates the discursive framing of trustworthiness in the platform's policies. Paper 2 and 3 employ digital ethnographic observations and interviews with Airbnb guests and hosts to understand what happens when they interact with each other and the platform. Finally, the conceptual review of scholarly work in Paper 4 identifies how trust building relates to surveillance.

The thesis contributes to the debate on digital technologies in tourism, relating trust to control in tourism literature. It shows that trust is closely related to algorithmic management of online marketplaces. This allows platform organizations to shape relationships between guests and hosts as well as influence the use of their assets. The thesis proposes viewing P2P platforms as actively shaping the outcomes of guest and host interactions, rather than just mediating them. Practically, this thesis offers insights into the implications of using information and communication technologies to manage consumer-provider relationships.

Key words: trust, algorithmic management, surveillance, accountability, platforms, tourism, guest-host relationships

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"We plan, God laughs."

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Aurimas Pumputis

Malmö, September 2024

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List of Papers

Paper I

Pumputis, A., Mieli, M., (Accepted). From trust to trustworthiness: formalizing consumer behaviour with discourse on Airbnb platform, In Tabari, S., Chen, W., Colmekcioglu, N (Eds.), *Consumer behaviour in Hospitality and Tourism: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges*. Routledge.

Paper II

Pumputis, A. (2023). Complexities of trust building through sociomaterial arrangements of peer-to-peer platforms. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1–14. Published online: 22 May 2023. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2023.2214848

Paper III

Pumputis. A. (unpublished). Scripting accountability on peer-to-peer platforms: Mutual evaluations in algorithmic management of Airbnb guests and hosts.

Paper IV

Gössling, S., Larson, M., & Pumputis, A. (2021). Mutual surveillance on Airbnb. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 91 (November 2021), 103314. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103314

Author's contribution to the papers

Paper 1 and 4 are coauthored. Contributions of each author are clarified below. Paper 2 and 3 are single authored.

Paper I: From trust to trustworthiness: formalizing consumer behaviour with discourse on Airbnb platform

Aurimas Pumputis: Research Design (equal); Conceptualization (lead); Literature Review (lead); Methodology (equal); Data Collection (lead); Analysis (equal); Writing - Original Draft (lead); Writing - Review & Editing (equal).

Micol Mieli: Research Design (equal); Conceptualization (supporting); Methodology (equal); Data Collection; Analysis (equal); Writing - Original Draft (supporting); Writing - Review & Editing (equal).

Paper IV: Mutual Surveillance on Airbnb

As the paper states, all authors have had equal contributions throughout conceptualizing, designing and writing the paper. This is because the paper was in the writing stage for a long period and all authors invested a great deal of time in the process. It is hard to distinguish the exact contributions of each author, as we have all cooperated throughout the process. An attempt to do so is below.

Stefan Gössling: Research Design (lead); Conceptualization (supporting); Analysis (supporting); Writing - Original Draft (supporting); Writing - Review & Editing (lead).

Mia Larson: Research Design (supporting); Conceptualization (supporting); Methodology (lead); Writing - Original Draft (supporting); Writing - Review & Editing (lead).

Aurimas Pumputis: Research Design (supporting); Conceptualization (lead); Literature Review (lead); Analysis (lead); Writing - Original Draft (lead); Writing - Review & Editing (supporting).

1. Introduction

In this thesis, I am interested in understanding how trust is built in the relationships of guests and hosts that meet on peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms. P2P platforms, which have appeared as part of the sharing economy, continue to be widely used by tourists for gaining access to assets, opinions and services, including touristic accommodation (Gössling & Hall, 2019). Especially in the rentals of touristic accommodation, tourists as guests are matches with hosts, who are essentially people or organizations that they know little about. Transactions with them become risky for tourists due to the need to book services far from home, in places where the consumer lacks tacit knowledge about operating in that context (Williams & Baláž, 2015).

This makes it difficult for tourists to anticipate and predict what will happen when they arrive at their destinations and meet their hosts. In the guest-host relationships, trust is a response to such lack of knowledge about the future (Williams & Baláž, 2021). Lewis and Weigert (1985, p. 976) note that "trust begins where prediction ends". Trust allows acting with confidence that the outcomes of one's actions will be positive, whether in interpersonal exchanges or in a society (Misztal, 1997). *Trusting* means having a positive attitude towards the world that helps reduce the complexity of making decisions, in much the same way as being able to predict the outcome of one's actions would (Luhmann, 1979).

The starting point of this thesis is therefore the capacity of trust to reduce the complexity of the future and the risks involved in travel. Building on these qualities of trust, sociologists describe trust as something essential for stable relationships, fundamental for any exchange or social interaction to happen (Misztal, 1997). Naturally, it is also fundamental for any economic relationship on P2P platforms.

Trust can be reinforced by structural means – creating structural assurance and ensuring situational normality (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Structural assurance refers to enacting regulatory frameworks and safeguards for ensuring that commercial agents fulfil their obligations. Here, situational normality refers to a general expectation that this environment will operate as normal and that no major negative events will negatively impact the trip or stay (Williams & Baláž, 2021). In a regular tourism setting, such regulatory frameworks can be enacted by applying standards and rules, referring to expert-approved guidebooks and rating schemes.

However, how can such assurances be made in a P2P context, where all consumers and providers are strangers on the internet?

P2P platforms, especially in the touristic accommodation sector, lack strict regulatory frameworks that support trust. Dredge (2017) shows that platforms in the so-called sharing economy are unwilling to adapt to universal governmental rules due to their global business models and operations across jurisdictions. As a result, no single regulatory framework can be applied to their operations. Furthermore, platform organizations lack interest in adopting strict regulation, as it stifles their global growth and development (Dredge, 2017). Avoiding regulation allows them to reduce operating costs and enable innovation; however, it also creates a need to build trust between consumers and providers within the platform (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Guttentag, 2015). This means that instead of adapting to external standards and rating schemes, platforms develop their own ways to evaluate users and establish trust.

Cooperation in an online marketplace can also be maintained by substituting trust with control. As known from organizational studies, together trust and control enable individuals and groups to function effectively and are the basic points of building confidence between parties (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; Das & Teng, 1998). In this context, control is usually defined as a process of regulating the behaviours of an organization's members in order to achieve specific goals (Das & Teng, 1998). Stark and Pais (2020) observe that platforms are a unique model of organizing, where control extends into relationships outside the organization itself. A platform's users, whether they provide or consume services, are considered and managed as 'members' of an organization. This means that mutual reviewing and other activities that are usually understood as building trust (Ert & Fleischer, 2019) are calculated and algorithmically translated into rankings, which are used to control the online P2P marketplace.

Is control a substitute for trust on P2P platforms? Control in this context is closely related to the use of algorithmic management – collecting, processing and visualizing data on individuals and holding them accountable for their actions according to that data (Stark & Pais, 2020). This brings organizational mechanisms of control into otherwise consumer-focused digital marketplaces (Stark & Broeck, 2024). Trust implies an opposite process, where a platform's users can decide how to interact on the basis of established trustworthiness. Trust is personal to each user, whereas algorithmic control is enacted systematically. The evaluative frameworks on platforms blur the boundary between trust and control. This thesis starts by investigating this blurred boundary by studying how trust is built in the digital environment of the Airbnb platform.

1.1. Trust in the digital peer-to-peer environment

Trust building on P2P platforms is based on their material infrastructure. Guests and hosts engage in writing mutual reviews and assigning ratings as a record of their interactions, read through a digital interface on their devices. All of this is enabled by technological infrastructures. Earlier studies have shown that such infrastructures are used to monitor and regulate online environments by representing, collating, sorting, filtering, and matching people (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011).

Material infrastructures are therefore not neutral; they have social implications that are 'written' into the code that defines how they operate (Kitchin, 2017). As noted by Montfort et al. (2012, p. 3), code is not just a mathematical sequence of commands – "it has significant social, political, and aesthetic dimensions". These dimensions are shaped by all kinds of decisions, politics, ideologies, and materialities of hardware that mediate the effects of code. Therefore, the way platforms are coded and designed has effects on the world, which carry social and political meanings for their users. On P2P platforms, these effects are related to ideological discourses about the sharing economy as a new form of more sustainable and just consumption, based on business models that tend to avoid external regulation (Schor, 2015). Yet as P2P marketplaces become algorithmically controlled, this ideological discourse becomes merely a form of rhetoric used to justify their algorithmic management (Schor & Vallas, 2021).

Trust is one of the most discussed topics on P2P platforms. As part of the sharing economy discourse (discussed in Paper 1 of this thesis), trust is regarded as the key elements around which social ties are built (Schor & Vallas, 2021). Platforms employ technologies to build trust as an assurance that consumers and providers can forge meaningful and lasting relationships. Such discourse is largely built on examples from early accommodation sharing schemes that lacked commercial interest (e.g., Couchsurfing). These platforms also lacked formal disciplinary measures, and instead allowed users to engage with each other on the basis of an online reputation that allowed building trust (Celata et al., 2017). However, with the commercial success of platforms such as Airbnb, using online reputation systems as technological mediators of trust was noted to resemble surveillance, modulated through the platform as a social network (Germann Molz, 2014). This meant it became important to manage how the platform's users present themselves in front of other users, allowing the platform organization to avoid directly interfering in their encounters.

Research suggests that reputation systems do enhance trust and reduce uncertainty (Corten, 2019), however, the biases inherent in use of trust metrics limit this effect (Zervas et al., 2021). For example, Bridges and Vásquez (2018) demonstrate that, when writing online evaluations, platform users employ subtle and nuanced language to report less-than-positive experiences, making their qualitative accounts

obscure. The quantitative metrics that are accumulated to form an individuals' reputation also appear inflated, particularly on Airbnb. Zervas et al. (2021) find that over 95% of Airbnb listings are rated at 4.5 or higher on its 5-point scale, which is higher than any other accommodation platform. Similar observations suggest that, for platform users, maintaining a positive track record becomes a goal in itself (Baute-Díaz et al., 2019). The effect these implications have on building trust between guests and hosts is explored in Paper 2 of this thesis.

The presence of mutual surveillance (discussed in detail in Paper 4) shows that trust management technologies are also used for control of P2P marketplaces. P2P platforms are designed to track and measure the performance of both hosts and guests. For example, Newlands (2020) has demonstrated that elements of algorithmic management are embedded in the platform's design to track and measure the work of service providers. The research papers that comprise this thesis show that the same kind of algorithm-driven surveillance is applied widely in touristic accommodation rentals.

This thesis focuses on Airbnb, a major P2P touristic accommodation rental platform, as a case study of building trust in a digital environment. The P2P accommodation market is made up of various global platforms that match consumers and service providers (e.g., Airbnb, Booking.com, VRBO, Hotels.com, etc.), and Airbnb is just one of many. However, Airbnb is also a platform that claims to be 'designed for trust' (Aufmann, 2016), i.e., includes structural features that facilitate trust building. In the thesis, maintaining a focus on one platform allowed me to explore the case from different angles, highlighting both the structural features of its digital environment and appropriations of that design in its users' everyday practice. Airbnb is also an important actor in the tourism industry, with a continuously growing global supply of vacation homes hosted both professionally and on a P2P basis (Adamiak, 2022). Finally, the selected case has attracted considerable scholarly attention with its mutual reviewing system as a basis for trust building, providing a rich corpus of research and insights into trust formation between tourists and hosts that could be built on.

Different perspectives on trust building in digital contexts exist, and it is not the aim of this study to suggest that any one of them is more correct than the other. Therefore, in the analysis of the chosen case, I apply a multilayered theoretical perspective based on the theoretical perspectives in the field of sociomateriality (cf., Leonardi, 2013; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Sociomateriality represents a diverse field of knowledge about the entanglement of people and the materiality of the world (Schultze et al., 2020). In this thesis, I apply the knowledge from this field by shifting analytical perspective between the structural features of the digital environment and the performative acts of guests and hosts that operate in it. Such metaphorical zooming in and out of different aspects that contribute to trust building allow a tracking of the connections between them (Nicolini, 2009). Trust building

is then understood as a process that unfolds in an assemblage of involved actors, technologies, and their relationships.

1.2. Aims and contributions

The main thesis presented in this doctoral thesis is that on P2P platforms trust, as the basis for interpersonal relationships, is built in an environment structured for control. Trust is desirable in guest-host interactions for various reasons outlined in the previous section. However, the need to control social relationships stems from lack of trust, rather than the opposite (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to explore how guest-host relationships are managed by P2P platforms, including how trust is built in a digital environment designed for control.

The discussions developed in four research papers based on this aim contribute to the literature in tourism studies by offering a better understanding of how platforms shape trust in tourism. Furthermore, the studies conducted in this thesis present a sociomaterial theoretical perspective for analysis of the digital environment. With increased use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), artificial intelligence, and algorithmic management on P2P platforms, this knowledge is important for understanding how social relationships in this environment are being and continue to be shaped. While the overall aim is explorative and rather general, it is broken down into four research questions that guide each of the papers presented in the findings of the thesis.

Paper 1 is written as a co-authored book chapter entitled *From trust to trustworthiness: formalizing consumer behaviour with discourse on Airbnb platform*. This study analyses the concept of trust by focusing on the notion of trustworthiness in a platform's discourse. It aims to understand how the platform establishes standards for consumers' behaviour and addresses the following research question:

RQ1: How are a P2P platform's policies and guidelines used to develop a narrative of trustworthiness?

This study approaches the matter through a discourse analysis of Airbnb's community guidelines, terms of service, and community policies. Terms, policies, and guidelines are understood as discursive devices that provide a basis for the technological infrastructure of the platform, which requires that guests and hosts perform according to the standards necessary for that infrastructure to carry out its purpose. In this paper, we argue that these documents are developed as a 'discursive performance' (Gillespie, 2019) that formalizes consumption, i.e., creates a formal basis for consumption practices. The findings show that the narrative developed by these documents signifies an intricate relationship between language and material

aspects of consumption on platforms. It demonstrates that trustworthiness is a notion that is established discursively along with rules and regulations.

Paper 2, entitled *Complexities of trust building through sociomaterial arrangements of peer-to-peer platforms*, extends the discussion on trust by presenting a virtual ethnographic study of how tourists on Airbnb perform trust building. This is approached with the following research question:

RQ 2: How is trust being built in a sociomaterial assemblage of P2P platforms?

Empirically, the study is based on a digital ethnographic study of Airbnb guests, following the approach outlined by Hine (2015). This means that trust building is considered a continuous process that happens in both online and offline interactions simultaneously, rather than considering them separately. The paper explores trust building as a sociomaterial process that happens in an assemblage of a platform's infrastructure, ratings, reviews, and users' practices for mutual evaluations. The paper questions overreliance on technology, evaluations, and rankings for building trust, as it produces a quantifiable 'measurement of trustworthiness' instead of interpersonal trust. By doing so, it also highlights the importance of distrust in the guest-host relationship.

Paper 3, entitled *Scripting accountability on peer-to-peer platforms: Mutual evaluations in algorithmic management of Airbnb guests and hosts*, continues the exploration of trust building by focusing on metrics for managing accountability. This study explores how management of accountability in a platform's environment and its business model are intricately related to trust building, because they use the same structure of mutual surveillance. The study is guided by the following research question:

RQ3. *How is accountability scripted in the use of ratings and reviews on P2P platforms?*

The study takes an exploratory approach, starting from a rather broad research question that focuses on the notion of scripting developed in the Actor-Network-Theory tradition (Akrich, 1992; Jelsma, 2003). The study is aimed at understanding how a platform's operating model is inscribed into its affordances for measuring and managing accountability for hosts' performance. Like Paper 2, it approaches the question using a digital ethnographic methodology, however, incorporating a platform's walkthrough (see Light et al., 2018) as a way to understand the platform's operating model and related scripts. The study shows that mutual reviews used to create familiarity between users are produced to show compliance with performance standards, thus implicating their informative value for users.

Paper 4, entitled *Mutual Surveillance on Airbnb*, explores the structures of surveillance that enable online evaluations on the Airbnb platform. In doing this, the study focuses on online evaluations as both the basis of trust building and a

method for mutual surveillance. The study is guided by the following research question:

RQ 4: What are the mechanisms that enable mutual surveillance on P2P platforms?

Online evaluations have been an important and well-discussed topic in relation to P2P platforms. Therefore, this paper approaches the research question by conducting a conceptual literature review of existing research on online evaluations of Airbnb. A conceptual model for theorizing surveillance is developed by looking for previously unexplored connections between constructs that already exist in research on platforms and relating them to the concept of surveillance (Jaakkola, 2020). The conceptual model is developed for understanding the structural mechanisms that enable mutual surveillance. It shows that mutual surveillance practised by a platform's users is the basis on which trust and control rest.

1.3.   Structure of the thesis

In the introductory part, I have presented trust building on P2P platforms as the focus of this thesis. The rest of the thesis is written as a compilation that brings together four different research papers. Therefore, the upcoming chapters will concern each of the four papers that comprise the empirical part of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review focused on the concepts explored in the research papers. Here, I explain my understanding of the relationship between trust, as the phenomenon that appears in guest-host relationships, and control of the digital marketplace, studied through the concepts of accountability and mutual surveillance. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework for the analysis. It starts by explaining the meaning of platforms as a sociomaterial assemblage. Since the thesis relies on a multi-level explanation of the observed phenomena, this chapter explains the theoretical lenses used at different levels of analysis. The section provides explains the selection of analytical concepts from different traditions that are common in the research field of sociomateriality. Chapter 4 presents the methodology designed to investigate trust building on platforms using this multi-level framework, and how methods used on different levels complement each other.

These three chapters provide context for the findings of the research papers, which are themselves summarized in Chapter 5. The final Chapter 6 uses insights from the research papers' findings for a concluding discussion on trust building and control in digital environments. This leads to a discussion on the implications it has for tourism, P2P platforms and society.

2. Trust and control on P2P platforms

In a broad sense, trust can be understood as a person's confidence in their expectations for the future (Luhmann, 1979). It is necessary for operating in a social world, because without trust individuals could only have a vague idea about the outcomes of the decisions they need to make. Trust reduces the complexity of taking decisions by limiting the possible outcomes that need to be considered, and it allows individuals to take action with confidence (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). In the digital environments of P2P platforms, trust allows exchanges between strangers to happen with confidence that they will benefit both the guest and the host.

Trust is especially important in research on P2P platforms, given that their primary purpose is to match service providers and consumers (Perren & Kozinets, 2018). It allows transactions to happen with relatively little interference from the platform organization and at a low cost. In this context, trust can serve as a substitute for control, when control is not possible to maintain. Consequently, the designs of most early accommodation sharing platforms lacked direct control mechanisms and relied mostly on self-regulation and trust between their users (Celata et al., 2017). However, with the platforms' growth, trust becomes harder to maintain, and platforms shift to managing relationships using more direct algorithmic control (Newlands, 2020; O' Regan & Choe, 2017; Stark & Pais, 2020). The interplay between trust and control is at the core of my framework for understanding tourist and host relationships that are managed by platforms.

When positive expectations cannot be established, trust is replaced by distrust, which serves the same purpose, however, on the basis of negative expectations. The dynamics between trust and distrust lead to different grounds for social relationships: trust grounds relationships in solidarity, while distrust grounds them in suspicion and need for control (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). When trust is lacking, other forms of control are required to have confidence in expectations for the future. In the academic literature on P2P platforms, two common framings of control are surveillance and accountability.

This chapter reviews the existing literature on trust as a social phenomenon that tourists and hosts need to have confidence in using a platform, as well as the literature on other forms of control used to create this confidence. I will discuss

surveillance and accountability as two ways to frame control that materialize in online evaluations and their relationship with building trust. Trust is a large topic that has thus far been studied in a variety of fields, such as organizational management (e.g., Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998), marketing (e.g., Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), tourism (e.g., Fam et al., 2004; Sparks & Browning, 2011), and political sciences (Uslaner, 2002). While these fields focus on different aspects of trust, they complement the typical sociological understanding of why and how trust appears in social relationships. Therefore, this review is based on an interdisciplinary view of trust and control.

2.1. Trust as a social phenomenon

As a social phenomenon, trust can be separated into generalized (or impersonal) and interpersonal trust. Misztal (1997) separates these categories based on Simmel's (2004 [1978]) understanding that trust between individuals is generalized into general trust in others. The two types differ based on the object of trust, where the object of interpersonal trust is another individual, and the object of generalized trust is other people in general. Both interpersonal and generalized trust are necessary for a digital platform to function, since they connect previously unassociated individuals (Perren & Kozinets, 2018). Interpersonal trust is important to understanding the bases for relationship between specific members of a P2P platform, however, it is not enough to understand generalized trust in the platform. Here, I will discuss these two types of trust in turn, starting with generalized trust.

Generalized trust or trust in other people in general has been described as the basis for functioning social institutions and can be understood as a social mechanism for maintaining social relationships based on people's beliefs and motivations (Misztal, 1997). Simmel described its importance by stating that:

> Without the general trust that people have in each other, society itself would disintegrate, for very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation. (Simmel, 2004 [1978], pp. 177–178)

Trust has rational reasons that have been highlighted in later studies, such as familiarity with the object of trust and rational decision-making (Rousseau et al., 1998). However, Simmel highlights a faith-like quality of trust, depicting it as something stronger than rational reasons to trust (Möllering, 2001). Although knowledge and certainty concerning another person are important in developing trust, as a phenomenon it cannot be understood solely through knowledge and certainty, as trust becomes important especially when these two things are lacking

(Misztal, 1997). This highlights a problem in the trust research – trust is built on belief in favourable outcomes but is also more than just belief. It always involves an element of risk, since we cannot have complete knowledge about the behaviour and motivations of others, whether in interpersonal or generalized relationships. Trust becomes relevant when we lack complete knowledge and understanding, but have enough of it not to be completely ignorant (Simmel, 2004 [1978]; Luhmann, 1979; Misztal, 1997).

Simmel's earlier work (1950) has inspired many of the later sociological theories of trust as a social mechanism that allows us to build and maintain social relationships (Misztal, 1997; Uslaner, 2002). Building on his work, Luhmann (1979) finds that trust stems from familiarity – previous knowledge that can serve as the basis for engaging in action as though only specific possibilities concerning the future exist.

Luhmann relates trust to familiarity – to the past as a basis for expectations for the future. Consider Luhmann's (1979, p. 20) quote about trust:

> Of course, trust is only possible in a familiar world; it needs history as a reliable background. <…> But rather than being just an inference from the past, trust goes beyond the information it receives and risks defining the future. <…> In trusting, one engages in action as though there were only certain possibilities in the future.

Being familiar with another person enables not only forming realistic expectations for the future, but also accounting for possible risks. Then, *trusting* is the act of suspending belief in the risks and committing to the expected future "as though there were only certain possibilities" (ibid.). His idea is largely phenomenological, as familiarity stems from an individual's collected experiences of the world, rather than just familiarity with the other person as the object of trust. In that sense, it includes not only familiarity with an individual, but shared cultural and moral assumptions about that world (Uslaner, 2002). Thus, although trust requires some knowledge as its basis, much of it is based on a shared understanding of the world and an individual's experience of it.

Like trust, distrust also plays an important role in building confidence in the future. Trust and distrust are viewed as functional equivalents in forming expectations about possible desirable or undesirable future outcomes (Lewicki et al., 1998; Luhmann, 1979). Distrust involves pervasive negative expectations and signals intentions to protect oneself from the actions of another (Lewicki et al., 1998). Thus, trust and distrust function similarly by allowing individuals to manage uncertainty in social interactions (Luhmann, 1979). Trust achieves this by allowing specific desirable outcomes to be considered certain, and distrust by allowing undesirable events to be considered likely, thus allowing the individual to act and prevent such outcomes.

This means that distrust should not simply be considered the opposite or a lack of trust. A lack of trust restores the complexity of future possibilities and prevents

action. Meanwhile, distrust dictates a specific course of action that is based on suspicion, monitoring and taking precautions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). On a generalized level, this means that a system of surveillance and safeguards is necessary to have confidence and order. On an interpersonal level, distrust would signal a lack of confidence in another party based on suspicion regarding their motivations and actions (Kramer, 1999). Distrust is thus a negative strategy for action, both in interpersonal relationships and in structuring social relationships in larger groups of individuals, such as in P2P marketplaces.

Luhmann's (1979) work is important in defining trust and distrust as social mechanisms that stem from familiarity; however, it does not elaborate on the bases for familiarity. Yet because I study how trust is built by individuals on P2P platforms, it is important to understand the exact bases for being familiar with other individuals. This has been approached by many more recent studies, especially in research on organizations that operationalizes trust on an interpersonal level and applies more functional definitions. For example, these studies have referred to trust being built on cognitive and affective bases (McAllister, 1995), social roles and reputation (Kramer, 1999), as well as deterrence and rational calculation (Rousseau et al., 1998). Such research focuses on how good reasons to trust are formed by individuals. These conceptualizations provide a way to understand the concrete bases on which trust can be developed and generalized.

Interpersonal trust can be separated from generalized trust by focusing on particular individuals and their interactions. At this level, social categories such as reputation and expectations regarding people's roles in the context of interaction become important for understanding how trust is experienced (Kramer, 1999). In these studies, the generalized or cultural attitude towards trusting has been defined as a propensity to trust – an individual trait of having positive generalized expectations concerning others (Mayer et al., 1995). This basic idea forms the first part of my framework for understanding trust building in individual interactions between guests and hosts. It is the basis for the empirical study described in Paper 2.

Paper 2 in this thesis studies trust building among Airbnb guests and hosts by applying Mayer et al.'s (1995) integrative model of trust. Here, trust is defined as a psychological state involving a willingness to be vulnerable towards another person, based on positive expectations concerning their motivations and actions (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). The study is therefore focused on individual interactions between guests and hosts. An individual can develop familiarity with the other person based on agglomerated online evaluations that help form expectations. In this case, reputation, cues about identity, and social role categories the other person occupies become reasons to trust (Kramer, 1999). They may serve to inform rational decision-making; however, trust also has an affective dimension based on emotional bonds (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Affective foundations for trust are found in care shown for the other person's wellbeing and the mutual relationship

between them (McAllister, 1995). Thus, on an interpersonal level, reasons to trust are based on knowledge about the other person, mutually shown care and friendship.

The framework proposed by Mayer et al. (1995) is effective for understanding both the cognitive and affective reasons to trust. The model identifies an actor's ability, benevolence, and integrity as the main bases for trust. Ability represents the skills and competences that allow the actors to have influence on the domain in which trust develops, e.g., competences in hosting or matching guests and hosts. Benevolence represents the actors' altruistic motives, showing care for each other. Integrity shows the actors' adherence to common norms and values (Mayer et al., 1995). Online evaluations used by P2P platforms provide various combinations of these factors, however, as noted by other more recent studies (Öberg, 2021; Pelgander et al., 2022), ability appears as the most prevalent component in trust building based on online evaluations, as competences to perform services are easiest to review. Integrity and benevolence are difficult to account for, as they are related to the affective bases for trust. This suggests that interpersonal relationships on platforms can be very functional, i.e., related only to the transaction at hand.
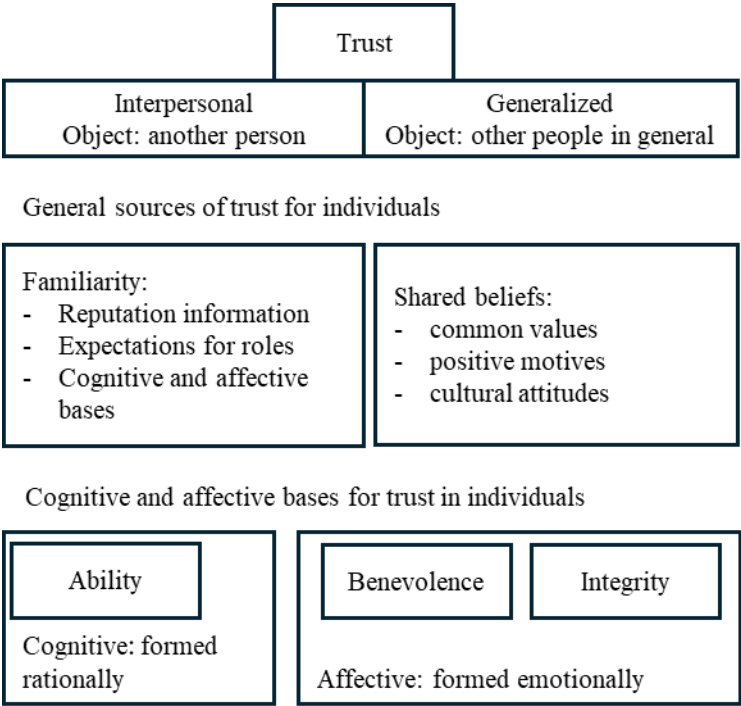
Figure 1. Framework for understanding general composition of trust

The overall framework I use for understanding the general composition of trust on the basis of previous discussion is presented in Figure 1. It describes both interpersonal and generalized trust as stemming from familiarity and shared beliefs between individuals, detailing what these categories consist of. Cognitive and affective bases for trust are described separately as the bases on which trust is built, considering that familiarity stems from developing an understanding of the object of trust on these bases.

The described framework provides a way to understand trust as something that is built on familiarity with the object of trust. It proposes what can be considered 'good reasons to trust' as information upon which familiarity can be built, however, it does not account for the more experiential element of trusting beyond these good reasons (Möllering, 2001). In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I detail how the online evaluations used by P2P platforms help build familiarity on the bases presented in the framework by utilizing online reputation. The following section will consider how generalized trust in a platform is supported to provide a basis for trust beyond good reasons.

2.2. Interpersonal trust and reputation on P2P platforms

A P2P platform is designed to match consumers and service providers, and interpersonal trust represents the trust between them. In this context, trust is built by using a person's online reputation. Online reputation is seen as a collective measure of a user's previous evaluations and indicates if they are trustworthy (Jøsang et al., 2007; Zloteanu et al., 2018). In the platform's digital environment, online reputation is the main source of information for building familiarity with individual users. Online reputation is managed via technological systems that utilize user-generated reviews and ratings, therefore trust building is performed in a technological environment (Jøsang et al., 2007). This means that building of reputation is embedded in a platform's social and material elements, such as devices, apps, algorithms, as well as rules and regulations for using them.

As a measure of trustworthiness, online reputation allows guests and hosts to rate each other via publicly written reviews and ratings. This practice has a sanctioning effect, as platform users strive to maintain higher ratings and thus adhere to the shared standards required to do so (Zloteanu et al., 2018). As a result, platform organizations can maintain limited interference in the guest and host interactions. For example, on Airbnb, guests and hosts trade individually and almost anyone can use the platform (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). The platform organization does not need to keep a close eye on them, as behaviour that does not comply with shared standards and expectations would be signalled by negative reviews.

Online reputation is built by collecting and displaying online reviews and ratings. Reviewing is a known method of providing consumers with information in online marketplaces, already used by eBay in the 1990s (Kollock, 1999). Online travel reviews are also well trusted as a credible source of information for travel decision-making (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Thus, aggregating reviews into a measure of online reputation appears to be an effective way to reduce the complexity of interacting with strangers in P2P environments.

There are several issues associated with using reviews and ratings to develop online reputation. For example, Corten (2019) shows that it turns reputational information into an incentive to participate in reviewing. As noted by Baute-Díaz et al. (2019), this results in the accumulation of reputation *per se* becoming a goal of using P2P platforms, which can result in manipulating reputational information to highlight more positive aspects. It is also difficult for new users to accumulate reputation, as users will often prioritize interactions with those who have already established a good record (Corten, 2019). This makes online reputation less reliable in developing familiarity with the individual it concerns.

This has implications for the possibility to learn about previous instances of failing to meet expectations and of harmful or non-cooperative behaviour, which should be reflected by online reputation. The scores obtained on platforms are often positively skewed or represent an overly positive view of past interactions (Meijerink & Schoenmakers, 2020; Zervas et al., 2021). In addition to previously noted issues, this overall positivity is related to the social aspects of writing online evaluations. Evaluations are mutual; therefore, they involve the reciprocal and empathetic attitudes of hosts and guests. Reciprocity – the tendency to respond to positive behaviour positively – prompts users to respond to positive evaluations by returning positive evaluations (Proserpio et al., 2018). Meanwhile, empathy has implications for review scores, since dealing with a subject such as a host produces a more indulgent and compassionate attitude than dealing with an object such as the accommodation itself (Pera et al., 2019). The social aspects of online reviewing also highlight the importance of a platform's technological design for trust building. For example, empathetic and reciprocal reviewing on Airbnb is supported by its feature that separates public and private feedback. This allows more critical comments to be kept private, while presenting a more positive public evaluation.

These studies have shown that gaining familiarity on the basis of online reputation is not a straightforward task. For both guests looking for a tourist accommodation and hosts looking for trustworthy guests, establishing trustworthiness often turns into a long process of sifting through endless reviews. Airbnb guests and hosts whom I have interviewed while collecting data for Paper 2 and 3 reported using various strategies in their approach to this, such confirming information on the Airbnb platform in other possible sources, cross-referencing reviews and profiles of reviewers, or arranging calls outside the accommodation platform. Paper 2, in particular, shows that when familiarity is established, it more often leads to what

Blomqvist and Cook (2018) termed "swift trust" – trust based mostly on rational assessment of the competences of the other party, while affective trust cues are ignored for the benefit of short-term transaction. Swift trust allows transactions to happen, however, it cannot be easily generalized to overall trust in the platform. With regard to understanding trust, the way to build generalized trust on P2P platforms is considered in the next section.

2.3. Generalized trust on P2P platforms

In addition to interpersonal trust, generalized trust in the platform itself is important for it to function. Generalized trust represents a user's trust that the platform will be able to manage exchanges and that other users of a platform are generally trustworthy (Perren & Kozinets, 2018). Pelgander et al. (2022) have shown that such trust in the platform is based mainly on its ability to perform its functions. This refers to the ability to manage reputation through its design, protect personal information, ensure security of transactions, and insurance coverages (Fraanje & Spaargaren, 2019; Schor & Vallas, 2021). Therefore, trust in the platform refers not only to interpersonal interactions, but also to use of devices that access the platform, and the ability to operate in its designed environment (Öberg, 2021).

Trust in the platform is more often based on its functions and ability to manage interactions, rather than the more emotional commitments apparent in interpersonal relationships. Pelgander et al. (2022) suggest that this makes trust on P2P platforms transactional – built mostly on a rational assessment of competences to provide the promised service. This would suggest that the most important role a platform plays in building trust is in maintaining a design that facilitates building cognitive or rational bases for trust. However, studies of sociality between platform users have shown that trust in a platform is often based on more than transactional value. For example, Celata et al. (2017) show that, on accommodation platforms, reciprocity – or a belief that good intentions and benevolence towards the other party in an exchange will result in returned good intentions – is an integral part of trust in other members of a platform.

This notion is closely related to the discourse on P2P platforms being part of the so-called sharing economy. Schor and Vallas (2021) discuss the notion of sharing economy as a mostly rhetorically established ethos of sharing – a common ideal of a marketplace based on social values of sharing and sociality. Sharing in this case represents a communitarian ideal of exchanging underutilized resources between members of a platform through collaboration (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Sociality refers to the use of reputation as a social currency – a form of capital that grants access to the shared underutilized resources (ibid.). Although the sharing ethos is noted as a rhetorical figure employed to promote the use of P2P platforms

(Schor, 2015; Schor & Vallas, 2021), it builds a basis for a common framework of values that a platform's users can refer to.

This adds another layer to the framework for understanding trust on P2P platforms. As shown in the previous section, discussions of trust on P2P platforms are often limited to user trust generated through digital means, which is based on rational assessment of competences and ability to fulfil expectations for the roles of a guest or a host. However, the sharing rhetoric provides access to a common value framework that can complement the information necessary to assess the integrity and benevolence of other users. Mayer et al. (1995), as well as other trust scholars, consider common values to be the basis for assessing the integrity required to form trust. Pro-social rhetoric based on sharing also promotes benevolent attitudes among platform users, therefore, this rhetoric can contribute to building generalized trust in a platform's environment. Paper 1 in this thesis explores this notion by analysing the discursive work done by the Airbnb platform organization in defining its policies and regulations, paying attention to the notions of sociality and sharing that justify the means of control on this platform and establish a generalized idea of trustworthiness.
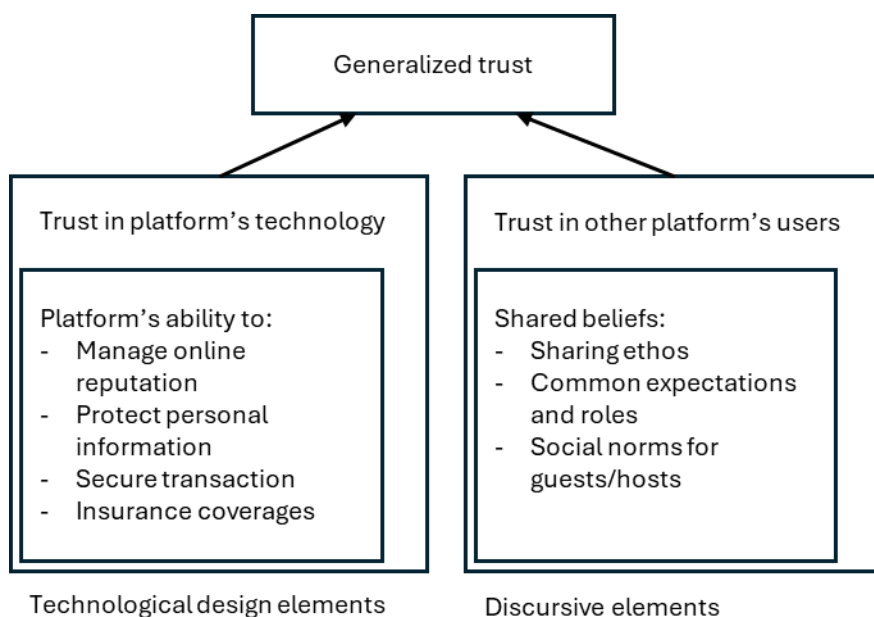

Figure 2. Sources of generalized trust on P2P platforms

The framework for understanding generalized trust on these bases is presented in Figure 2. Generalized trust on platforms is shown to be mainly based on trust in the

platform's ability to manage relationships based on its technological design, and discursive work in establishing shared beliefs and roles. Together, the two technological and discursive elements form an assemblage of bases for understanding the platform and other users in general as trustworthy.

In investigating the claims about sharing and sociality being promoted by P2P platforms, it is important to note that they have thus far been questioned by various studies. Especially studies of major platforms such as Airbnb have shown that sociality on these platforms is limited by incentives to professionalize service provision (e.g., Gil & Sequera, 2020; Newlands et al., 2019). Professionalization, particularly on the Airbnb platform, is a response to using reputational information for framing competition on this platform. As better rated hosts are perceived as more attractive and visible, hosts tend to optimize their listing management by outsourcing hosting tasks, such as cleaning and greeting guests, utilizing third-party data management tools, and working with several listings at the same time (Bosma, 2022). As a result, Airbnb is noted to have become a platform with a double market of accommodation provided by either casual hosts with private shared listings or professional hosts who manage multiple short-term rental listings (Adamiak, 2022).

The sharing ethos promoted by Airbnb would suggest that hosts in this marketplace are peers who welcome guests into their own living spaces or spare apartments. However, as Demir and Emekli (2021) argue, commercial multi-listing hosts, which are common on the Airbnb platform, mainly specialize in short-term rentals and prioritize increasing volume of transactions over maintaining sociality. Gil and Sequera (2020) also suggest that promoting hosting on a professional basis conflicts with the image of P2P platforms as part of the sharing economy, where guests may meet with locals who share their spaces with tourists. This is problematic for trust building, as expectations concerning professional hosts are usually different than expectations concerning casual hosts (Ert & Fleischer, 2019). The changing role of hosts makes reputation management on the basis of standardized quantitative ratings a predominant basis for trust building.

This discussion suggests that generalized trust on P2P platforms is twofold. It is largely transactional, based on expectations concerning the platform's and service providers' ability to provide their core services. However, it also contains belief in the integrity and benevolence of the platform and its users. The cognitive bases appear to be largely embedded in the platform's technological design and the services it provides. The affective bases for trust are formed discursively as common values established in the discourse about the sharing economy.

The frameworks presented in Figure 1 and 2 show the overall understanding of trust on P2P platforms applied in this thesis, also considering that familiarity in interpersonal relationships is mainly based on online reputation. Trust established on the basis of familiarity and shared beliefs develops confidence for guests and hosts to engage in transactions with each other. However, in considering P2P

platforms as digital environments, we also need to consider the need for distrust and control. This is done in the next sections, which present mutual surveillance and accountability as mechanisms of control in digital environments, and their relationship to trust.

2.4. Trust and control: surveillance and accountability

Control is a process of regulating behaviour in order to meet specific goals and has been extensively studied in organizational research related to trust (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007). Most commonly, it is based on formal rules and procedures, as well as informal social norms and values (Das & Teng, 1998). Formal control is based on formalization of expectations in rules and procedures, and monitoring of compliance with those formal rules (Costa, 2003; Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007). The element of monitoring highlights the role of mutual surveillance in establishing control on P2P platforms, as platform organizations 'outsource' monitoring to consumers and providers who write mutual reviews. Social norms, as informal control measures, highlight the importance of reputational information and the need to be accountable, which creates social pressure to meet set standards and internalize norms.

Both formal and informal means of control have implications for trust building. Traditional managerial views suggest that control can replace trust when it is lacking (e.g., Dekker, 2004). In this view, trust and control can be seen as alternative routes to arrive at a stable order in an organized context (Gulati, 1995), and both can be a basis for developing expectations for the future (Luhmann, 1979). However, the relationship between trust and control is complex and highly context dependent (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007). As shown by Powell (1996), when individuals cannot develop trust on the basis of familiarity, formal control arrangements are necessary. However, overreliance on formal control, such as surveillance, also prevents later development of trust (Costa, 2003), suggesting that trust and control cannot necessarily be substitutes for each other.

On the other hand, when control is exercised using proper methods, based on clear expectations and rules, as well as mutual agreement, trust and control can be mutually reinforcing (Sitkin, 1995). Thus, whether trust and control can replace each other, or reinforce each other, depends greatly on the circumstances and context in which they are developed. Control in an organized setting can also be based on people's accountability, as a social control mechanism that involves pressure to act according to others' expectations through a need to account for their behaviour (Beu & Buckley, 2001). In this case, clear and mutually agreed-upon

standards become the core of controlling relationships and benefit the building of trust (Beu & Buckley, 2001; Sitkin, 1995).

This review of studies relating trust and control shows that their relationship is complex and can lead to different, even contradictory, explanations. In different circumstances, control can be a substitute for trust, but it can also prevent or reinforce it. Therefore, instead of examining the relationship between trust and control as general categories, in this thesis, I focus on surveillance and accountability as mechanisms of social control. The next section of this reviews considers surveillance, which is conceptualized in more detail in Paper 4 of this thesis, as a structural attempt to employ mutual evaluations for collecting, processing, and visualizing user data, and its relationship with trust. The subsequent section defines accountability, which is studied in Paper 3, as the sociomaterial practice of producing online evaluations in the platform's environment.

2.5. Trust and surveillance

Thus far, we have considered trust to mean having confidence in the future based on familiarity and shared beliefs. In both interpersonal relationships and generalized trust in a platform, such familiarity is achieved using an online evaluations system. Such system collects reviews and ratings of individuals and demonstrates that a platform is capable of monitoring and displaying what happens in individual interactions. However, many studies have likened online evaluations to the practice of surveillance, especially when it is applied to monitoring workers engaged on gig economy platforms (Newlands, 2020) or hosting on accommodation sharing platforms (Christensen, 2022; Germann Molz, 2014). These notions have become the basis for exploring surveillance on the Airbnb platform as mutual observation and reporting performed by its guests and hosts in Paper 4 of this thesis. The paper stresses that mutual surveillance is enabled by the platform's structural elements intended to observe and record users using technological means.

Surveillance is not a new concept, however, over time its meaning and significance have shifted across different contexts. Fowler and Fowler (1964, p. 1302) defined surveillance as the close observation of individuals, who "are not trusted to work or go about unwatched". Earlier surveillance has mostly been associated with large governmental structures and agencies (Weller, 2012). However, more recently surveillance has become a more common concept in discussing the commercial setting (Minca & Roelofsen, 2019; Newlands et al., 2019; Stark & Levy, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Developments of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for collecting information about individuals are increasingly a part of commercial activity and are justified by a utilitarian rationale, usually claiming that collection of information is necessary for convenience and introducing new services

(Weller, 2012; Zuboff, 2019). On platforms, this rationale has been paired with that of accruing an online reputation as a trade-off for increased options for consumers (Hearn, 2010).

In this context, surveillance is understood as the use of ICTs for collecting, processing and visualizing information about a platform's users. Due to reliance on ICTs and algorithmic processing, scholars usually note that surveillance in the platform economy is algorithmic (Ettlinger, 2018; Stark & Pais, 2020). Its value is mainly found in its ability to predict and anticipate action though data collection, processing and analysis instead of directly imposing rules and regulations (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011). Collected reviews and ratings that represent an individual provide the platform organization with "live" insights into the consumer experience (Murakami Wood & Ball, 2013). The collected data can then be used for aligning the practices and consumption experiences of platform users with the ideologies and protocols of the organization (Ball, 2017).

With recent developments of ICTs, algorithmic forms of surveillance have been noted as a way to manage work on digital marketplaces. For example, Jamil (2020) shows that Uber uses a system of technological and organizational means to track, index and discipline its service providers and consumers. Their user data are directly related to an authenticated personal profile, which maintains a record of users' conduct and allows disciplining them to behave according to imposed norms (Jamil, 2020). This is particularly important on gig economy platforms, where the bulk of workers are independent contractors who need to be monitored (Newlands, 2020). Newlands et al. (2019) explains that quantifiable ratings created on the basis of collected data discipline a platform's users to act in accordance with its rules and regulations.

A similar self-disciplining function of algorithmic surveillance, paired with the need to collect and maintain online reputation, has also been noted on accommodation sharing platforms (Germann Molz, 2014). Having a good reputation on platforms is rewarded, and users adjust their behaviour to the standards they see as necessary for maintaining a better reputation. Christensen (2022) shows that the kind of self-discipline used is guided by the affordances of a platform's design. On the Airbnb platform, this is exemplified by the Superhost status – a quality mark assigned to hosts who maintain high performance and top-scoring reviews. The quality mark represents algorithmically calculated review scores that are turned into a metric of high-quality hospitality. Hosts with this mark are rewarded with higher search rankings, and potentially better business opportunities, while in return they have to adjust their hosting practices to the algorithmic logic of the platform's performance measurements (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018). Algorithmic surveillance thus forms a decentralized system in which a platform's users willingly monitor each other via the mediation of digital technologies.

In this thesis, the structure of surveillance is theorized as an assemblage of interrelated mechanisms that identify relations between platforms and users. In Paper 4, we refer to this structure as a surveillant assemblage, a concept introduced by Haggerty and Erickson (2000) to describe interrelated technologies and practices that span over the everyday lives of individuals and at the same time involve surveillance. The metaphor of assemblage applies the original notion of Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) assemblage theory for studying surveillance, stressing the connectedness of different surveillance technologies. The theory is widely used and has been further developed in surveillance studies, with for example Andrejevic (2012) applying it to describe surveillance in "digital enclosures" (p. 95) of data-driven commerce and security, where data on an individual may be collected and processed in a different context, according to the needs of the organization. The surveillant assemblage helps in understanding the links and relations between such mechanisms and practices, describing them as a "rhizomatic" structure of interlinked, associated elements (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000), which also includes a subtle element of growth, i.e., social and economic structures increasingly becoming enrooted in the assemblage.

Due to its dependence on a platform's affordances, mutual surveillance – conceptualized in Paper 4 of this thesis – represents the structural attempts made by a platform organization to manage relationships. Affordances in digital environments are designed to achieve specific purposes (Lanamäki et al., 2016; McGrenere & Ho, 2000). This would suggest that the online evaluation system developed in the platform's environment is designed to enact algorithmic surveillance.

Algorithmic surveillance has specific implications for trust relationships. Enactment of a system of surveillance suggests that, in addition to generalized trust, control is still necessary, mainly in its alignment with corporate interests in maintaining self-discipline among platform users, which is rewarded with reputation as a currency (Christensen, 2022). Trust online is embedded with visibility, the aim of which is to portray the self positively for the observation of others and to accumulate reputation as a currency (Germann Molz, 2014). As observed on other social media platforms that increase people's visibility and access to information (cf. Zuboff, 2019), mutual observation and delivery of data for corporate actors and other consumers to see become a norm of everyday life. For P2P platforms specifically, this allows platform organizations to outsource moderation of community to its users, requiring them to take precautions and mitigate risks themselves (Andrejevic, 2005; Germann Molz, 2014).

Interest in understanding how such self-discipline is practised draws attention to the practice of producing mutual evaluations on the studied platform. I analyse this in Paper 3, paying especial attention to understanding how the platform's norms and technological design are embedded in the attempt to generate familiarity between

users. This is further discussed in the next section as a sociomaterial practice of performing accountability in the platform's digital environment.

2.6. Trust and accountability

Familiarity between P2P platform users is built on accounts that are written in the form of reviews and ratings. These accounts are not only a tool for trust building, but also a way to hold people accountable for their actions. Accountability – a process of providing reason for conduct, justifying, and explaining someone's behaviour (Mulgan, 2000; Scott & Lyman, 1968) – is an important aspect of building trust. Accountability can mitigate conflict and distrust because it justifies behaviour (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). The evaluations on which online reputation is based are accounts of someone's conduct, written in a specific logic meant to excuse or justify behaviour. Thus, accounts are written in a socially acceptable form defined according to the standards of the culture they are written in (Scott & Lyman, 1968). In this section, I will review studies that discuss how accountability is performed in a setting of digital platforms.

Accountability is a term rarely discussed when studying tourists and hosts. Tourism studies more commonly refer to accountability in terms of justifying the use of ICT-based systems in tourism business models and attempts to regulate them (Gössling, 2021; Leal et al., 2021). The concept is more commonly used in organizational studies that investigate how pressures to be accountable affect organizations and individuals, for example, tourism enterprises that are evaluated on the TripAdvisor platform (e.g., Scott & Orlikowski, 2012). Therefore, here I will mostly refer to literature from studies on organizations for defining accountability and how it contributes to building trust in tourist-host relationships on platforms.

Roberts (1991) stresses that accountability is a social practice that has both moral and strategic dimensions. Accounts are provided strategically, as not meeting the expectations of constituents who review their performance can harm an individual's reputation and sanction them (Abramova et al., 2015; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012). Therefore, accounts are not neutral; they present an instrumentally arranged version of reality required for the existing form of governance and norms (Roberts, 1991). However, as noted by various scholars (e.g., Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Messner, 2009; Strathern, 2000), demand for accountability has been steadily increasing, bringing with it increasingly pervasive use of quantitative measures to define acceptable conduct.

Increasing demands for accountability have also drawn significant critique of using accountability as a mechanism for regulating behaviour. Such criticism mostly

revolves around overreliance on transparency and quantification of people's practices (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Messner, 2009; Roberts, 2009). Roberts (2009) notes that increasing requirements to be transparent about one's conduct can obscure accountability by distorting communication and representing a perfected ideal, rather than actual conduct. Roberts (2009) highlights that the demand for transparency alludes to the performative nature of accountability. Requirements for transparency prompt people to communicate an idealized vision of their actions in relation to expectations. This results in avoidance of being transparent, as ideals cannot be lived up to.

Messner (2009) expands on the notion that the demand for accountability draws resistance, as it is impossible to give an 'unbiased' account of oneself. The demand for transparency renders vulnerable the person who is required to account for their actions. The person who is held accountable in a system that relies on public reviews is thus inclined to resist and look for ways to avoid reporting or being reported. Messner (2009) argues that "the accountable self is vulnerable to accountability insofar as it is an *opaque* self that cannot account for everything it has lived through; an *exposed* self that experiences accountability as an intrusion into its own practice; and a *mediated* self whose accounts have to rely on a medium that is not of its own making" (p. 919, original emphasis). Therefore, demands for accountability can become oppressive, especially as individuals are required to account in a system that is foreign to them. Online evaluation schemes that rely on ratings and reviews processed by algorithmic systems represent such a system, where individuals put considerable effort into producing overly positive accounts, thus avoiding reporting undesirable occurrences.

Avoidance of being accountable can be linked to reliance on the quantitative measures present in an algorithmically managed system. Quantitative ratings are observed as common metrics for accountability in organizational settings. For example, Espeland and Sauder (2007), who have extensively studied the expanding use of rating and ranking schemes among law schools, suggest that specifically using quantitative metrics to account for performance changes the nature of accountability, forcing organizations to direct their resources towards being 'auditable' rather than providing comprehensive accounts of their conduct. The authors specifically suggest that organizations and individuals react to being audited by making their practices comparable according to a standard embedded in metrics. Later studies of accountability on digital platforms (McDaid et al., 2019; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012), as well as my Paper 3, suggest that the same effects are seen among individuals who are subject to being measured by rankings and ratings on P2P platforms.

Here, reactivity to measurements is understood on the basis of two mechanisms – self-fulfilling prophesies and commensuration (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). The former means a process by which the reactions to measurements confirm the expectations embedded in the measures, as increasing their validity encourages

certain behaviours. Commensuration characterizes reactivity to measurements as a process of transforming qualities into quantities. Expressing qualities in a quantified manner simplifies information and allows easy comparisons to be made between things and entities. However, it also draws the focus of attention to engaging in practices that can be quantified and contribute to production of favourable metrics.

Paper 3 in this thesis attempts to extend this argument by showing that commensuration is inscribed in the design of the platform's features, which co-constitute accountability as a means to support algorithmic decision-making on the platform. The users react to measurement and commensuration, which results in misaligned expectations regarding accountability and trust between guests and hosts. The pressure to be accountable causes individuals to present an optimized view of their conduct. However, in a platform's setting, the entity that determines the rankings of users is an algorithm, and the accounts have to be optimized to the needs of that algorithm.

In this study, I have observed that accounts on platforms are written according to standards of algorithmic culture. Striphas (2015, p. 396) characterizes it as "the enfolding of human thought, conduct, organization and expression into the logic of big-data and large-scale computation". This means that what is considered important and visible is defined via computational logic that largely relies on collecting vast amounts of data and processing them algorithmically. As noted by Van Nuenen (2019), this allows mass participation in evaluation schemes, involving tourists in real-time data gathering, and quantifying the data they produce, as this format is necessary for algorithmic systems. This process also changes the logic on which businesses and P2P hosts account for their performance.

This phenomenon has been observed in the way accountability is performed via the online hospitality evaluation platform Trip Advisor (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012). Orlikowski and Scott (2014, p. 864) show that leaving the production of online evaluations to a crowd of anonymous and distributed consumers produces accountability standards that are "grounded in personal opinions and experiences" (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014, p. 864). When performed by experts, evaluations are usually grounded in professional knowledge and judgement based on a plurality of formal, standardized criteria, and weighting of appropriate preferences (Karpik, 2010). However, evaluations performed following the algorithmic logic of platforms differ due to the lack of formal criteria, establishing a completely different "crowd-based" form of accountability (Karunakaran et al., 2022).

The study presented in Paper 3 explores how the platform's design directs users to produce their accounts in this algorithmic logic, which is different from what guests and hosts expect from evaluations as a source of online reputation. In relation to trust building, it asks what the implications are of accounting towards an algorithm

for achieving familiarity between individuals, and how a platform's online reviewing system is scripted to achieve accountability.

2.7. Accountability in studies of algorithms

With recent developments of ICTs for commercial purposes, surveillance, and moderation of social media content, accountability has also become a prominent topic in critical studies of algorithms and media. Although similar principles apply, such as that of accountability being a social mechanism for explaining and justifying action, in this stream of literature the concept is used differently. To avoid confusion, I will briefly note these differences.

Algorithms are not value-free systems, as they are shaped by all kinds of political and social decisions and created for non-neutral purposes, i.e., creating value and capital, nudging behaviour, structuring preferences, sorting, and classifying people (Kitchin, 2017). Understanding algorithms as non-neutral has become a basis for calling for 'algorithmic accountability', which usually means seeking to increase transparency on algorithmically made decisions and the kind of data used to develop algorithms (Martin, 2019). As explained by Amoore (2020), calls for accountability of algorithms originate from attempts to seek out the origins of algorithms in the form of their source code, as a means to control the social outcomes they produce. It is often expected that transparency concerning data use and source codes will help prevent often discriminatory and erroneous outcomes that are either designed into algorithmic systems or appear unexpectedly (Amoore, 2020; Martin, 2019). Calls for accountability in this context therefore largely reflect a political demand to know what organizations do when they develop algorithmic systems.

Similar calls for greater accountability and transparency of algorithms used by platforms that process crowdsourced tourists' data have also appeared in tourism studies. For example, Leal et al. (2021) suggest implementing principles of accountability, responsibility and transparency in the design of such algorithmic platforms. Designing systems that are more transparent and accountable would address the previously noticed issues of consumers having little insight into the functioning of platforms they use, for example, in relation to the ratings and rankings published on platforms (Gössling, 2017).

Studies of algorithmic accountability relate trust and transparency. It is suggested that increased transparency would lead to better trust in algorithm-driven services and recommendation systems (Shin & Park, 2019) as well as better management of trust between platform users (Leal et al., 2021). However, these and similar studies focus on the ability to regulate the process of designing and deploying the code and material infrastructures that enable algorithmic management of platforms, while rarely relating to trust as a social phenomenon. Here, the material infrastructure and

its design are the focus of scientific attention, however, it mainly concerns larger political aims to regulate platforms and the social outcomes they produce, rather than understanding the sociomaterial entanglements of users and platforms.

Studies of platforms generally seem to range from those that aim to understand rankings and evaluations as social phenomena, as sociomaterial sources of control and surveillance, to studies of the material infrastructure that enables use of rankings and evaluations as political elements that need to be controlled. Rankings and evaluations are an inherent part of using platforms, not only due to their use for algorithmic management of digitalized consumption on platforms (Leal et al., 2021), but also due to their use in managing social connections via trust (Perren & Kozinets, 2018), and control of workforce (Newlands, 2020). With this thesis, I draw attention to the concepts of trust, surveillance, and accountability as ways to employ online evaluations for managing relationships between tourists and hosts. Building on the studies reviewed here, I draw attention to the fact that the relationships between platforms, guests and hosts are sociomaterial and are constituted by the surveillance, trust, and accountability that are specific to a digital environment. The theoretical basis for these notions is explored in the next section.

3. Multi-layered theoretical approach

In this chapter, I will turn to explaining my theoretical approach to understanding how trust is built on P2P platforms. The previous chapter described trust as occurring in generalized and interpersonal form. Therefore, the theoretical approach to studying trust on P2P platforms requires an understanding of how trust develops both in guest-host encounters and when it develops as a general attitude that the platforms and people who meet through them can be trusted. I approach this by studying the platform as a sociomaterial assemblage that forms a digital environment for guest-host meetings.

To accomplish this, I have worked with what Orlikowski and Scott (2014) describe as "the broad banner of sociomateriality" – a perspective in which the social and material aspects of organizing are seen in a constitutive entanglement. Sociomateriality is not a united theory, but rather a philosophical stance approached from different perspectives (Schultze et al., 2020). As the term implies, sociomateriality consists of two distinct aspects – the social and the material – which are studied in a mutual entanglement that creates conditions for specific outcomes to appear (Carlile et al., 2013). Different approaches to sociomateriality exist. For example, Scott and Orlikowski (2014) maintain the position that social aspects are inseparable from material ones, which is useful for understanding how the relationships are enacted in practice. Others, for example Leonardi (2012), suggest understanding sociomateriality as instances in which materiality "takes on meaning and has effects as it becomes enmeshed in a variety of phenomena" (p. 14). In this way, social aspects can still be separated from material ones, which gain meaning as they become entangled in the social world.

In this dissertation, instead of referring to one specific approach, I have applied various approaches to sociomateriality based on each specific study's purpose. Paper 1 relies on analysis of discourse as a tool for creating norms and building a common understanding of trustworthiness. Paper 2 and 3 analyse the actions of tourists and hosts in the environment, where actions are scripted to meet the platform organization's goals. Paper 4 explores structural mechanisms that enable surveillance as a mode of control. Applying different approaches allows zooming in and out of what happens when guests and hosts meet as well as tracking connections between these encounters and the platform's structural elements.

I structured my explanation for the phenomenon of trust building on P2P platforms after the separate studies using a diverse toolkit of analytical concepts had been carried out. Therefore, it can only relate to what Jones (2014) describes as a 'weak' sociomaterial perspective – applying only some of the constitutive elements of this view. Studying trust from a complete sociomaterial perspective would entail focusing on the social practices through which reality is performatively enacted (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). However, I do not aim to theorize trust building as solely emerging through practice, or as solely being the result of pre-existing structural mechanisms. Relationships of different parts of sociomaterial assemblage are complex, and neither perspective would be able to show the complete picture.

The complete view of this sociomaterial assemblage is thus more complex than a single theoretical focus can describe. The movements of zooming in and out of guest-host interactions are an attempt at theorizing trust building in digital environments as a multi-layered phenomenon. In doing so, I do not aim at explaining what the right or wrong way of researching trust is, or at constructing a coherent theory that researchers of platforms should apply. Instead, this thesis constructs an *a posteriori* view of trust building based on knowledge collected through the four studies carried out in writing this thesis.

This chapter is structured in the following way. Section 3.1 explains P2P platforms as an organizational form for guest-host encounters. Section 3.2 explains the sociomaterial approach and my application of sociomaterial assemblage for understanding platforms. Section 3.3 extends the discussion to consider performativity as one of the key attributes of this environment. Section 3.4 explains the theoretical basis underlying the movements of zooming in and out of the digital environment.

3.1. Platforms as a new form of organizing

Since the emergence of the sharing economy discourse, platforms have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, and different conceptualizations of platforms exist. I approach them as a distinct organizational form meant to connect consumers and providers in a digital environment. This is based on an understanding of platforms as intermediators of multi-sided markets that connect peers as consumers and providers (Perren & Kozinets, 2018), and as a hybrid form of corporate organization for platformized labour (Frenken & Fuenfschilling, 2021). Finally, platforms are understood as an assemblage of constantly varying and changing relationships (Mackenzie, 2018). This stresses that, instead of being static and fully accomplished arrangements, platforms are in a constant state of change and transformation (Langley & Leyshon, 2017). Building on these different conceptualizations, I view

them as a sociomaterial assemblage of technologies, infrastructures, organizational practices, and platform users.

One of the defining aspects of P2P platforms is their business models and the ability to create digital environments for meetings of consumers and service providers. The P2P business models have largely been studied as part of the previously discussed sharing economy. For example, Reinholdt and Dolnicar (2017) define Airbnb and other P2P accommodation platforms as P2P network facilitators for multi-sided markets. Multi-sidedness means that the platform manages a marketplace where exchange parties are connected as different sides of a market, e.g., consumers and providers. The authors suggest that hosts offer underutilized space, which guests rent for a short period of time. This defines P2P platforms as part of the sharing economy, as an economic model for sharing underutilized resources, such as an unused room in a flat on Airbnb (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). However, as many professional service providers and large businesses entered the sharing platforms, it became apparent that the resources shared or traded via platforms are no longer underutilized.

The typology of resources shared on P2P platforms is expanded by Wirtz et al. (2019), who suggest that platforms facilitate sharing of assets with either unconstrained or constrained capacity. The former means assets that can only be shared with a certain number of consumers at a time, e.g., accommodation, vehicles. The latter refers to assets that can be simultaneously consumed by an unlimited number of consumers, such as digital files, music, and information. Access to the shared assets or services can be given on a P2P basis (Zervas et al., 2017), or be provided by a platform (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). This means that P2P platforms can be used to share a broad range of assets and services, and the providers can be either casual or professional. Thus, the platform business models and designs have been changing to adapt to the needs of more diverse users and providers.

Despite this diversity, the common aspect of P2P platforms is their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for connecting consumers and providers and governing their marketplaces (Gössling & Hall, 2019; Perren & Kozinets, 2018). This has specific implications for building social relationships and trust. Perren and Kozinets (2018) stress that technological means are used to mediate sociality between platform users. Based on earlier work by Adler (2001), they highlight that platforms operate as part of a knowledge-based economy, where knowledge about other people in the market is the key to developing trust and social relationships between them and is generated technologically. However, although the importance of ICTs is acknowledged by most of conceptualizations of platforms, earlier research on platforms is often limited to solely understanding the technological aspects (Perren & Kozinets, 2018).

A larger sociomaterial focus is found in sociological studies that view platforms not only as a technologically mediated business model, but also as an assemblage of

relationships between involved users and organizations (Srnicek, 2016). They regard platforms as assembled and configured through practices of platformizing. As MacKenzie (2018, p. 37) explains, "platformizing configures people and things in constantly varying and experimentally modulated relations". This means that platforms are an assemblage of relationships between people and material infrastructures. More importantly, it stresses the ongoing nature of platformizing, a process that continuously shapes both the technology and organization that controls it and users. In this case, a platform can be considered a mode of socio-technical intermediation of business arrangements and users (Langley & Leyshon, 2017). Building on such an understanding, I refer to platforms as an assemblage of devices, infrastructures, algorithms, related routines, rules, and their users.

As an assemblage, a platform is an emerging ensemble of relationships and the entities that constitute it. This makes a platform a distinct form of organizing a marketplace that cannot be understood simply by its function to mediate transactions. Rather, by utilizing means of algorithmic management, platforms co-opt users and assets that do not belong to the platform organization (Stark & Pais, 2020). The different devices, and procedures for their use, create an environment controlled by algorithmic means, which changes the way of establishing trust or accountability (Stark & Broeck, 2024). More specifically, this means that consumers and service providers act like an organization, where they need to develop relationships based on algorithmically calculatable reasons to trust each other (ibid.).

In this thesis, I refer to the devices, guests, and hosts as the platform's members, which are part of a sociomaterial assemblage along with the platform organization, and rules and regulations. This assemblage is distinct from other forms of organizing consumption through its use of user data and information collected by users about each other for the sake of governance. Frenken and Fuenfschilling (2021) refer to such assemblages as a new corporate form with specific capacity to control a workforce without employing them. Users, as consumers and providers, are thus an important part of this assemblage that takes part in its algorithmic management by collecting and reporting information on each other. While presented as a form of building trust between consumers and providers, this enables subtle tracking and ranking of workers who use platforms in a manner that resembles surveillance.

As an organizational form, this sociomaterial assemblage follows its own regulations. For example, Gorwa (2019) suggests that platforms have several modes of governance: being governed by existing laws, by users self-governing the platform's marketplace, and by platforms' ability to govern work and consumption. Similarly, Frenken and Fuenfschilling (2021) find that a platform's set of rules and regulations for both work and consumption can be swiftly changed by the platform organization. In this way, platforms adapt to new commercial opportunities, as well as external regulatory changes, and changes in their user behaviour. As an assemblage, a platform can constantly change due to both the relationships of

entities that form it and external pressures. Thus, studying trust building on platforms requires an analytical approach that can capture how guests and hosts act in a changing environment. The next section discusses how this can be achieved by applying the sociomaterial perspective.

3.2. Sociomaterial assemblage

The changing nature of platforms is captured by the notion of sociomaterial assemblage. It refers to sociomaterial phenomena as being in a constant state of becoming (Introna, 2013). Thus, sociomaterial phenomena consist of their social and material parts, which mutually constitute each other and can only be separated for analytical purposes (Barad, 2003). For example, the discourses of platform organizations can only be understood by also analysing the material structures that they describe, and the practices involved in building trust unfold specifically in relation to the technological and social elements involved in the process.

This view is based on several theoretical perspectives on entanglements between social and material aspects of life. It originates from a relational ontology based on Latour's (2005) and Barad's (2003) ideas about studying relationships between entities as more fundamental than the entities themselves. Thus, the main ontological assumption of the sociomaterial perspective is that the social (e.g., humans, practices, organization, beliefs, etc.) and the material (e.g., computers, code, devices, tables, trains, etc.) elements of a phenomenon mutually constitute each other through their relationships. A sociomaterial assemblage is thus not something 'complete', but a constant process of emerging relationships that are made to achieve specific accomplishments (Introna, 2013). Thinking about platforms as such an assemblage directs our view towards the flows and movement within the assemblage (Wise, 2005), including understanding of how this movement is constrained or enabled to achieve specific outcomes, such as creating a trust-based relationship.

The sociomaterial perspective rejects the dualism between the social and the material as distinct parts of a phenomenon. It is an attempt to decentre both the human actor and "the material" (or technological) aspects in an explanation of a phenomenon. Instead of privileging either of the two, sociomateriality assumes that actors, entities, and categories emerge into their existing state due to their relationships with each other, and the researcher's task is to understand how those relationships become durable (Hultin, 2019; Leonardi, 2013). Durable relationships have consequences that "endure beyond the present, in a matter other than our body, and we can interact at a distance…" (Latour, 1996b, p. 239). They root the phenomena that are enacted in social interactions in material artefacts that remain after and outside the interaction. Therefore, giving attention to the sociomateriality

of a phenomenon means not only studying how social acts are performed, but also the consequences that remain after them (Carlile et al., 2013).

This thesis deals specifically with such sociomaterial consequences of managing trust via platforms. It starts with understanding that technologies of control enact control through a modulated relationship with the platform. As shown by Germann Molz (2014), touristic accommodation platforms enact control as self-discipline, performed by guests and hosts due to their relationship with technologies that facilitate trust using reputational information. Earlier studies have pointed out that this kind of control has established a regime of decentralized and non-hierarchical surveillance through an organization's power to monitor and discipline (Andrejevic, 2005). More recently, it has been shown that such self-discipline stems from systematic use of algorithmic management, which is used not only to monitor and discipline gig workers as usually understood (Newlands, 2020), but also to enact the same kind of control of consumers (Stark & Broeck, 2024).

The sociomaterial perspective in this thesis serves primarily to highlight how the interrelationships between platform users and technologies enact trust and accountability performatively. As explained in Paper 3, this means that discourses and technologies enact specific realities in which users operate (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). This is discussed in depth in the next section, grounding the analysis of both discourses and interaction with technologies in performative enactment of guest-host relationships.

3.3.   Performativity of discourse and technologies

As an analytical concept, performativity has been commonly used to analyse the effects that discourse has on the reality it describes. It refers to enactment of the reality that language describes (Barad, 2003; Callon, 1998). In the entanglements of humans and technologies, it refers not only to language, but also to the enactment of social reality as a sociomaterial process (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). In essence, the term builds on speech act theory, as presented by Austin (1962) and developed by Searle (1979). The concept of speech acts is well-known among semioticians and linguists as a characteristic of speech – the use of language to enact what the speaker wishes to convey. It is a communicative action, an utterance that conveys the speaker's intentions, paving a path towards the expressed outcome (Searle, 1979).

Social scientists have adapted the performativity of speech acts in a number of settings. For example, Butler (1990) refers to performativity to understand how gender identities take part in creating the reality they describe. Other studies that apply the notion of performativity have shown that financial models and economic theories produce the market conditions and effects they attempt to represent and explain (Callon, 1998; MacKenzie, 2006). It shows that economic discourses, and

the tools used to perform tasks necessary to create them, also create a phenomenon studied by the discipline, rather than simply describing it (MacKenzie, 2006). As a speech act, discourse sets the conditions for enacting the future imagined by the speaker. Even if the speaker's intention is merely to represent a phenomenon, and is expressed in a seemingly objective discourse, the utterance of a reality already paves the way towards it (Searle, 1979).

Barad (2003) has further discussed the performativity of scientific discourse as material-discursive. Similarly to the studies by Callon (1998) and Mackenzie (2006), Barad (2003) shows that scientific discourse, and the tools and methods used to create scientific knowledge, create outcomes that remain durable. This means that discourses, tools and devices are used as 'apparatuses' to enact boundaries for a phenomenon and constitute reality as well as our understanding of it. This notion is explained by an example of actual physical measurement tools used to measure and produce concepts in natural sciences (Barad, 2003). The results of measurements are intrinsically related to how the measurements work, and together with writing up the measured phenomenon, they introduce the boundaries for understanding the phenomenon. Thus, measurements and discourses are not merely static arrangements, but apparatuses that constitute what is intelligible and material, in other words they constitute what humans can act upon.

Performativity is important in discussing how consumer-provider relationships based on trust and accountability are developed in digital environments. Both trust and accountability require that people be made visible by their reputation. However, Roberts (2009) as well as Espeland and Sauder (2007) show that a demand to be transparent about one's actions and enforced visibility are performative in creating outcomes for the visible persons. Visibility puts pressure on a person to behave according to standards, which are not necessarily internal to the person, which forces them to adjust the way they present themselves in order to avoid being transparent. For platforms, this means that the devices used for enacting visibility act as a force that produces discipline through observation and creates norms for conduct. However, it also urges people to provide false accounts and employ various tactics to depict themselves and others as meeting standards, even if they do not meet them (see McDaid et al., 2019).

In studying digital environments, performativity is well described by Lessig's (1999) formulation that in cyberspace "code is law". Code, like discourse, has the performative power to shape the world in some way (Fuller, 2003). However, as this notion has been further scrutinized by research into the effects of algorithms, code's effects appeared limited by the architectures and protocols that define it (Kitchin, 2017). Code is not so much a law, but a proposition of reality, the implementation of which depends on myriad accidental connections between the technologies and the people that act in them (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011). Therefore, the relationship between social and material aspects of these environments is complex and cannot

be completely explained as effects of top-down means of algorithmic management and control, but it still needs to account for such mechanisms.

In their ability to shape the world, algorithms act like discourse (Fuller, 2003). Thus, Barad's (2003) explanation of discourse's importance in performing reality can apply in a very similar manner. Discourse does not only refer to spoken words and descriptive statements, instead:

> Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements. (Barad 2003, p. 819)

The same essential function of "constraining and enabling" what can be said or done is performed by the algorithms that structure digital environments. In the environment of tourism, the discourses and technologies that enable sharing, hosting, algorithms, and trust enact the meaning of these phenomena and constitute how a platform's users make sense of what is trustworthy, a good host, and how sharing should be carried out.

In this thesis, performativity in digital environments is explored in two ways – by referring to discourses that shape the idea of trustworthiness, as in Paper 1, and by examining the scripting of a platform's environment, as in Paper 3. Here, discourse refers to the knowledge about the platform that is "constrained or enabled" by its communication, and scripting refers to the affordances coded into the digital environment to meet the policies and business needs of the platform. This moves the focus of this thesis away from technologies as mediators of tourism to understanding that tourism performed with platforms is a unique phenomenon, referred to by Hannam et al. (2014) as 'rearticulated' by ubiquitous connectivity and technology. The sociomaterial perspective shows that this connectivity enacts the durable outcomes studied in this thesis.

The studies in Paper 1 and 3 analyse both the environment and the users' acts in it. Therefore, while Scott and Orlikowski (2014) suggest that performativity unfolds in people's practice, I propose a broader approach. Instead of focusing on practices alone, I aim to maintain an analytic relationship between the actions of guest and hosts, and the structural forces that shape the environment in which they meet. Therefore, in my explanation of trust building on P2P platforms, I use the broad toolkit of methods and analytical concepts introduced in the following sections.

3.4. The toolkit: zooming in and out of guest-host interactions

With all the previous considerations, this thesis presents trust building in digital environments as a multifaceted phenomenon. I approach it from various directions and present the findings as a multi-layered explanation that relies on several perspectives. Different studies consider the performative acts of guests and hosts, the structural elements of the digital environment, and discourses that frame it. This thesis is a product of these separate studies, all of which focus on the same digital environment. In forming my explanation of the observed phenomena, I borrow Nicolini's (2009) approach of assembling a toolkit of the analytical concepts needed to appreciate different aspects of a phenomenon. Nicolini's (2009) toolkit consists of the concepts required to understand sociomaterial practices of organizing. My toolkit is made with the purpose of understanding the digital environment in which trust and control unfold. This is done by zooming into encounters between tourists, hosts, and the platform, and then zooming out to trace how they are connected.

3.4.1. Zooming in: affordances and scripts

I perform the movements of zooming into guest-host interactions in Paper 2 and 3. In this case, that means observing the real-life events that contribute to building of trust, following the guests and hosts as they step through the digital environment and asking them about the meanings and experiences of interaction with each other and the platform. The main concepts driving this thinking were the affordances and scripts of the digital environment.

Affordances are a common concept for analysis of the relationship between technology and its users. Affordances are commonly understood as relational features that mediate interactions, however, social scientific studies of sociomateriality have previously claimed that the concept needs a more explicated ontology (Carlile et al., 2013). Described simply, affordances are the resources and constraints that a technology provides to its users (Norman, 1988). However, the concept is more complex, since perception of affordances is "based on our past knowledge and experience applied to our perception of the things about us" (ibid., p. 219). McGrenere and Ho (2000) further stress their relational nature by noting that affordances "are relative to the action capabilities of a particular actor" (p. 1). Being relative to "action capabilities" suggests that affordances depend on the relationship between properties of the technology and the ability of a human actor to perceive and actualize them. This signifies that affordances are action-oriented, i.e., they are actualized as a person interacts with technology to achieve specific goals (Dohn, 2009).

Affordances are firmly rooted in the material existence of things, framing the tangible aspects of a technology and the outcomes it creates (Carlile et al., 2013). Platforms are built through the process of coding and determining the actions of their users in a way that can be mediated (Mackenzie, 2018), therefore, their affordances are established mainly through the process of designing both the technical interface and the related requirements. Mackenzie (2006) notes that coded objects are capable of supporting or extending the agency of non-present parties, such as system designers, programmers, users, corporations, or governments, which causes the designed affordances of P2P platforms to mediate not only users' interactions, but also platform developers' desires. Thus, a user's movements in the digital environment can be enabled or constrained by inscribing relevant affordances in the technological design of the platform.

My attention to affordances was captured by Hutchby's (2001) early suggestion that affordances can be useful to analyse people's use of technology by addressing the functional and relational aspects that frame possibilities for action. As the thesis progressed, however, it appeared that the concept of affordances has attributed technology too much power over what social interactions are afforded, and often becomes simply equated with a technology's functions (Jarzabkowski & Pinch, 2013). Studying P2P platforms as sociomaterial entanglements required a different approach, as appropriations of platforms in tourism needed to be analysed as emerging and ongoing accomplishments, rather than given by distinct properties of platforms and users. Therefore, analytically I refer to the concept of scripting, as described by Jelsma (2003) and Jarzabkowski and Pinch (2013), to relate the platform's affordances and the user's actions.

3.4.2. Scripting a digital environment

Scripting is a way to connect the use and design of technology, based on earlier semiotics-inspired Actor-Network-Theory thinking. Following Woolgar's (1990) definition, scripting of technologies ensures that the user 'reads' them the intended way. Jelsma (2003) adopts the notion of scripts for understanding human action in a setting, where technology is an active mediator between users, their goals, and the designers. Scripts are understood as structural features of an artefact that encourage acceptable action, while counteracting other actions (Jelsma, 2003). Using a semiotic metaphor, Jelsma (2003) explains that scripts have prescriptive power to direct the user towards desired actions, based on inscriptions made in the technology by its designer. This means that the designer inscribes the technology with affordances that direct users to its desired use, by designing it to allow the user to act in a desired way, and to prevent other actions.

In this thesis, I use the concept of scripting to extend the understanding of a platform's affordances. The concept suggests that technological objects are 'inscribed' with affordances that steer behaviour towards actions that fulfil the

designer's agenda. As Akrich (1992, p. 208) explains "technical objects define a framework of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act". Such a framework for action becomes a useful analytical tool for understanding appropriations of technology in digital environments, as they are themselves a product of technological design and carry scripts. A good example of this is the Airbnb platform, as its virtual environment of use is purposefully designed to support building trust between users (Aufmann, 2016). This would suggest that its users operate in a scripted environment, where specific affordances are included to suggest how users should 'read' the environment for trust relationships to emerge.

The concept of scripting has its origins in Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which is a widespread approach to studying sociomaterial phenomena (Schultze et al., 2020). Like Barad (2003), it highlights the performativity of sociomaterial phenomena and studies the way in which human actors are entangled with the material (Latour, 2005). ANT focuses its analytical attention on the relationships between human and non-human actors, challenging the usual assumption that only humans can have agency. Although this is not a fundamental question for this thesis, it shows that the concepts used in the ANT approach are focused on the environment in which scripts unfold, allowing for a deeper analysis. While I do not aim to explore the philosophical questions of whether non-human actors should be attributed agency similar to that of humans, the concepts used in various studies are useful for understanding how tourists and hosts relate to the digital environment in which they act.

For example, tourism research has previously largely benefited from the ANT approach to studying its relationship with materiality. ANT has contributed to understanding how tourism systems are assembled as interdependent sociomaterial configurations that consist of people, organizations, technologies, and spaces (van der Duim et al., 2017). This means that humans and material objects have equal importance in understanding the outcomes produced by such systems. Studying how human-material relations are ordered and associated with each other in a systematic manner shows that tourism, especially when it involves technological stakeholders, is more complex than usually assumed (ibid.)

In this light, scripting is a useful concept for understanding the entanglement between a platform's material infrastructure, tourists, and hosts, focusing attention on the moments in which they use the devices, digital interfaces, communication tools and other services a platform provides. As a concept developed in ANT, scripting can help us understand how elements of the sociomaterial assemblage that constitutes platforms relate to each other. It suggests that social reality is produced by fluid entities that appear in inter-connected realities and form a network, and it considers the whole of interacting elements rather than separating them (Latour, 1996a). Social reality itself is seen as a product of interactions within a network that has "as many dimensions as they [nodes in the network] have connections" (Latour, 1996a, p. 370). Inscriptions in the platform made according to the platform

organizations business model are useful to understand how the users' actions are tied to the larger business interests.

Analysis of scripting focuses on relationships between the platform, policies that underlie its use, and humans that use it. They convey meaning that informs practices of using technology and drive routine actions towards specific goals. However, as noted by Jarzabkowski and Pinch (2013), individuals may engage with technology in unexpected ways, effectively reinscribing it so that the prescribed action sequence does not need to be followed. Thus, inscriptions may carry prescriptive power over a technology's users and give direction for action, and connect the design and use processes, but their actual appropriations of technology may be taken in unexpected directions.

3.4.3. Zooming out: structural mechanisms and discourses

I perform the movement of zooming out twice: in Paper 1 and Paper 4. Paper 1 directs attention to the platform's discourse that frames guest-host interactions. Meanwhile, Paper 4 conceptualizes surveillance as a form of control by proposing a conceptual view of structural mechanisms that enable surveillance in the studied digital environment. Both studies signify the interconnectedness of trust building with the business model and the interests of the platform organization. The studied discourses show how trustworthiness is a notion constructed discursively through various policies. The conceptual study shows how these policies relate to a platform's communication, technological infrastructures and services.

The first movement of zooming out is performed in the analysis of discourses that underpin the use of the Airbnb platform. My interest in the platform's discourse was sparked by research in media studies showing that platforms govern their users' behaviour via discourses and affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Gorwa, 2019). These studies have demonstrated that even though consumer-directed policy documents are rarely read by a platform's users, they are often carefully crafted and work towards establishing an environment, where users are directed to act in desired ways. The same documents are also crafted to give the platform organization more power in making decisions that manage and discipline users (Gillespie, 2019). However, such studies have not been carried out on P2P platforms within the sharing economy. P2P platforms rely on trust to ensure that direct exchanges happen, but how is trust understood in this context and what form of trust are users driven towards? In the study in Paper 1, we show that discourse is used to form a narrative that establishes the meaning of trustworthiness on the platform.

Trustworthiness is therefore understood as a performatively enacted concept. Policies and documents that describe the platform's use enact boundaries for actions that are allowed or constrained and set the platform's users in a desired direction. While Paper 1 focuses on discourse, this discussion is extended in Paper 3, where

the relationship between discourses and the platform's scripts is also shown. Discourses and scripts complement each other. While the written discourse sets the rules and desired platform use, the previously discussed scripts more actively direct the users towards fulfilling the outcomes set by its discursive material.

Another important concept for zooming out is the structural mechanisms of the digital environment. Structural mechanisms are considered as a concept that describes the intentional enactments of control in a platform's marketplace. The concept proposes that the platform organization shapes the digital environment of a platform by enacting a structure of control, inscribed with specific affordances. Building trust is thus a part of what the digital environment is built for. It is thus insufficient to only study the practices of platform users, as that would show a different view of what constitutes trust building. Studies that take such an approach eventually tend to equate trust with accountability (e.g., Mouritsen & Thrane, 2006) as a by-product of the practice of evaluating. At the same time, it is insufficient to attribute structural mechanisms with all the power to generate outcomes in a digital environment. That would strip the agency from the platform's users, who have been shown in my and other empirical works to be able to work around the official scripts (as shown in Paper 2 and 3 of this thesis) and find ways to develop techniques of productive resistance to algorithmic management (as shown by Ettlinger, 2018).

The aim of conceptualizing structural mechanisms is not to enmesh the structures and actors into a sociomaterial whole, but rather to separate them. This was therefore a useful approach for the conceptual purpose of the zooming out movement in Paper 4. It allows identifying different elements of the sociomaterial assemblage. Although the discussion of structural mechanisms is presented in Paper 4, it was the first paper written and published in this thesis. The conceptualization here is framed using a critical realist theoretical approach (Sayer, 2008; Volkoff & Strong, 2013). Therefore, it presents the relationships between entities in the digital environment as enacted by the structural mechanisms that shape it. It proposes a structured approach to sociomaterial phenomena, however, in later thesis work, I have moved to a more relational understanding of sociomateriality as a constantly unfolding process. Since the studied sociomaterial assemblage is understood as being in a state of constant change, its structural components relate to each other and users in different temporary ways. Thus, it appeared that separating all the different components of the assemblage and trying to distinctively name them is useful mainly for conceptual purposes, but that understanding the particular details of platform use requires a more flexible, relationship-based approach.

4. Research methodology

The toolkit approach to trust building described in the previous chapter also requires specific methodological choices. This thesis has taken the shape of a case study of the Airbnb platform, utilizing different methods suitable for an inquiry into how trust is built in a digital environment. According to Yin (2013), a case study can be defined as an inquiry into a phenomenon in its reality. In that sense, this thesis explores how trust is built in the reality of guests and hosts in a digital environment. This is a pluralist approach, where priority is given to exploring the phenomenon from different angles, with a multi-method methodology and several data sources (Tasci et al., 2020). It allows observing and analysing a phenomenon up close in an ethnographic fashion, as well as developing a broader, conceptual view.

This chapter presents the methodological choices I have made in the four studies that comprise this dissertation. While the research process typically begins by creating a research approach or strategy (Creswell, 2013), this dissertation is a compilation of four studies carried out and written up separately. These studies contribute to each other and our understanding of P2P platforms, however, they employ different designs and strategies. Thus, this thesis proposes an abductive explanation of the trust building process. I have collected the data on different occasions, as it was necessary for each paper presented in the analytical part. The data were collected and analysed for the purpose of each study, and the studies' results were compiled later on. Together, they form an in-depth case study of a single platform.

Yin (2013) recommends conducting case studies using data from documentation, archival records, interviews and observations, among other data sources. These are the sources I have relied upon as well. The discourse analysis is conducted by studying relevant documents, digital ethnographic methods were used for observing and interviewing guests and hosts, and a conceptual literature review in this thesis builds on previous academic and public knowledge about the case. The data sources are specific for each method and analytical approach, as relevant in each separate study.

The methodology is explained in the following form. Section 4.1. presents the ontological considerations that guide this thesis. Section 4.2. presents the overall case study design and an overview of the methods applied in the different papers. Section 4.3. presents discourse analysis as the method applied in Paper 1.

Section 4.4. presents the digital ethnographic methods used in Paper 2 and 3. Section 4.5. presents the approach to a conceptual literature review applied in Paper 4.

4.1. Relational ontology

In the early stages of working on this thesis, I was often asked "whose perspective is this about?" Is it about the guests, the hosts, or the platform organization? The answer is essentially "neither". It is common to start and focus social scientific research around social entities or structures, such as tourists and hosts, presenting their perspectives on a phenomenon. Yet with this thesis, I follow the approach proposed by Emirbayer (1997) of maintaining the focus on the sociomaterial relationships between entities, rather than the entities themselves. In this case, the relationships between guests, hosts, and the platform are the primary focus of analysis. More specifically, the empirical studies in this thesis aim at understanding what these relationships become in the digital environment of P2P platforms. This means that instead of presenting the perspective of hosts, guests, or an organization, this thesis investigates a process from various angles that may not be clearly visible for either of the involved parties alone.

Such an approach signifies a relational ontology, where relationships are considered as the primary unit of reality (Schultze et al., 2020) and regards humans and things as mutually constitutive. In essence, it recognizes that "phenomena do not exist independently of their relations" (Schultze et al., 2020, p. 815), which means that people and things that exist both in nature and culture are related and inseparable. In this thesis, I have arrived at this view by conducting empirical studies.

The first study was carried out while writing Paper 4 (published in 2021) and followed a critical realist ontological framing. Unlike the relational ontology used in later studies, analysis from a critical realist perspective focuses on the relationship between people and technology as distinct entities (Leonardi, 2013). This view has worked well in conceptualizing the structural mechanisms of surveillance in Paper 4, as it clearly presents involved entities and their interrelations. However, as my further studies moved towards understanding the process of trust building, it became apparent that distinctions between entities needed for a critical realist analysis are often impossible to make. Trust is a psychological as well as social phenomenon, and separating guests and hosts as people that develop trust and the technologies that facilitate it would have resulted a fragmented picture that could look very differently when approached from a different angle.

Therefore, in the remaining studies, I rely on a sociomaterial perspective that follows a relational understanding of the world, focusing on the becoming of entities, or what shapes them and how (Introna, 2013). This means that the researched subjects are never fully constituted and that there is always some space

for them to be reworked and change (Hultin, 2019). This follows Barad's (2003) proposition that the process of research is that of deciding and enacting boundaries for entities and processes in the entanglements of social and material aspects. In a similar way, this thesis is also an attempt at enacting some intelligible boundaries for entities and relationships that constitute P2P platforms, trust in this context, as well as tourism as a sociomaterial phenomenon. This approach is especially useful in a case study, as it develops rich context-dependent knowledge of the observed phenomenon, and the relationships that constitute it.

Barad's (2003) discussion on accountability also has implications for construction of scientific discourse and practice. It suggests that science does not merely represent an observed phenomenon, but that it has a performative power to create durable outcomes (Barad, 2003). Later applications of such an approach to knowledge creations points at the need for researchers to take accountability for the outcomes of scientific practices, as they result in durable outcomes that have lasting consequences (Hultin, 2019; Schultze et al., 2020). This has broad implications for taking responsibility for the management of social relationships on the basis of knowledge, whether it is based on scientific or algorithmic knowledge. The way scientific knowledge is produced is also closely related to the reality it produces, rather than just representing it. The practices of doing research and produced discourses enact the boundaries of their subjects, defining what is known, thus also shaping the reality in which they exist, the standards according to which they are understood and judged.

Relational ontology is especially fitting for researching purposefully designed environments, controlled through inscriptions of algorithmic affordances. As discussed in the previous Chapter 3, algorithms as well as scientific discourses have a performative quality. For example, the algorithms that shape the cultures of digital spaces (Striphas, 2015) take part in defining what is considered important and authentic (van Nuenen, 2019). In a more specific example, Kitchin and Dodge (2011) show that code and infrastructures that constitute algorithmic systems create effects that both echo prior actions and conventions and are contingent – scripted and rewritten based on needs of their designers. Like language, code and applications of algorithms used to control a digital environment define what platform users, tourists, hosts, and other stakeholders in tourism systems refer to as trustworthy knowledge.

The rest of this methodology section presents the choices made in each of the studies that comprise this thesis, while regarding how these approaches developed over the course of conducting those studies. While the thesis itself presents a coherent explanation for the observed phenomena the methodology section gives a more detailed view of the process in which these methods were applied and sometimes developed for the purposes of a specific study.

4.2. Case study design

This thesis has taken the shape of a qualitative case study, where Airbnb represents a critical case of a platform designed for trust (Aufmann, 2016). A critical case here is formed by observing the phenomenon across a wide range of observations that are bound to a specific space and time (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, in this thesis, the space and time are bound differently – by affordances and infrastructures of a digital platform, rather than a specific location consisting of buildings, rooms, and people within them.

A case study helps generate rich context-dependent knowledge about a phenomenon, observing it in real life situations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This is useful for the study of sociomateriality, as the object of such study unfolds in context-dependent enactments of the observed everyday life (Hultin, 2019). Trust develops between users who act in a specific context and situation. As a sociomaterial enactment, trust building is therefore a context-dependent phenomenon, where specific affordances, scripts and boundaries unfold due to the relationship of people and their context. These enactments of trust building are observed using digital ethnographic methods (Hine, 2015). Findings from digital ethnographic studies are then related to the discourse analysis and the conceptual literature review for identifying structural elements of the observed digital environment.

The case study in this thesis is thus built around a combination of interpretivist research methods and an inquiry into mechanisms that structure a platform's environment. Interpretivist methods help us understand trust building as an outcome of interactions between guests and hosts, yet they also direct the researcher's attention to the phenomena as interpreted by the researched people. The Airbnb platform has been selected as a case both due to the convenience of finding a large number of guests and hosts that use the platform, and due to it having been previously studied a great deal. For example, Dann et al. (2019) note that this platform has specifically attracted the attention of researchers from various domains who have investigated its technological, economic, social, and legal environments. In this thesis, the focus on the case of Airbnb provides specific boundaries in terms of technological and social aspects but allows access to a diverse user base.

This allowed application of different research methods, to inquire into the case from various angles. Although listed as Paper 4, the first study carried out in this thesis was the conceptual literature review of surveillance mechanisms. At the beginning of the thesis writing, this review allowed the complexity of the sociomaterial assemblage that constitutes P2P platforms to be captured and insights that informed other empirical studies to be generated. Digital ethnographic methods applied in empirical papers allowed zooming into specific enactments of trust and accountability in platform use. The conceptual review has also revealed that a platform's discourse – in the form of community guidelines and policies that define

the platform's features and suggest accepted appropriations – also plays an important role in the enactments of surveillance, trust, and accountability. This has led to development of a study based on analysis of discourses in the platform's policy documents. The methods used in these studies are presented in Table 1 and explained in further sections along with related theoretical considerations.

Table 1. Research and analysis methods used in different studies

Study	Methods	Analytic approach	Data used
Paper 1	Discourse analysis of Terms of Service, Community Policies, Guidelines	Discourse analysis	15 main analysed documents (42 items in total)
Paper 2	Media go-along observations and interviews	Grounded theory	15 media go-alongs observations and interviews
Paper 3	Media go-alongs, platform's walkthrough	Grounded theory	10 interviews; 15 documents and pages analysed
Paper 4	Literature review	Conceptual review	65 papers analysed (171 items used in total)

4.3. Discourse analysis in the study of sociomateriality

Paper 1 in this thesis is based on a discourse analysis of the Airbnb platform's Terms of Service, community policies, and guidelines. Hardy and Thomas (2015) note that it is common to criticize discursive approaches in research for neglecting the material and instead focusing on representation and language. This view locates material and discursive elements in opposing dialectic positions. However, the relationship between material and discourse does not have to be that of direct oppositions (Putnam, 2015). Discourse analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between materiality and human activity. This notion is based on Mumby's (2011) suggestion that discourses do more than represent materiality; they also enact and constitute reality by articulating and understanding interactions and related material entities. As further observed by Jones (2014), even in Barad's (2003) account of performativity, which is largely used as the basis for sociomaterial inquiry (Scott & Orlikowski, 2014), discourses are noted as playing a key role in the performativity of reality.

In the case of Airbnb, discourses show how the platform is constructed to align its users' actions with the platform's business model. In achieving this, it is constructed as part of the larger discourse of the sharing economy (discussed in detail by Schor, 2015). The analytical approach in this study regarded discourse as constituting the norms and boundaries for people's actions (Fairclough, 1996; Skålén et al., 2006). A discourse is thus seen as a means to govern and introduce order. Such an understanding is more often pronounced in media studies of social media platforms (Gillespie, 2019; Gorwa, 2019). Media studies have shown that discourse takes part in the studied constitutive entanglement along with technological affordances and devices that affect human behaviour (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Our study takes this notion as its starting point and investigates how discourses contribute to structuring a digital environment. Further digital ethnographic studies in other papers corroborate the findings of our discourse analysis with deeper insights into the topic.

In our study, we focus on three types of content that formulate the platform's discourse: legal terms of service, community policies and community guidelines. The analysis focuses on how this content is used to reify what Airbnb proposes to be 'trustworthy'. We refer to Gillespie (2019) to analyse this content as a 'discursive performance' in building confidence in the platform, setting a formal basis for trustworthiness and urging users to act towards it. The analysis we perform looks further into the rhetoric applied to establish a notion of what constitutes a trustworthy consumer, the roles of hosts and the platform organization.

4.4. Digital ethnographic methods

A qualitative ethnographic design of studies for Paper 2 and 3 allows accounting for individual cultural, or learning-based differences in perceptions of the platform and interactions with it. The empirical material used in Paper 2 and 3 is thus comprises digital ethnographic data, consisting of interviews with tourists, virtual go-along observations of users, and related documents. Reliance on interviews and observations makes the design of this study similar to other qualitative case studies of digital applications and platforms. The exact methods used in the study are discussed in the next section.

Ethnographic research is grounded in a desire to understand people's everyday lives, behaviour, and experiences, rather than producing predictive theories about patterns of behaviour (Crang & Cook, 2007). Similarly, this thesis is driven by a desire to understand how social relationships are enacted in sociomaterial assemblages. Ethnographic methods and principles of data collection proved to be useful for this purpose. I do not claim to be conducting an ethnography of platforms as it is understood by Atkinson (2015), i.e., involving an intensive and lengthy period of

engagement with the field where empirical material is collected. However, ethnographic methods are useful for studies of online phenomena (such as platform use), as they can be effectively adapted to different settings (Caliandro, 2018).

As cautioned by Hine (2015), understanding phenomena that occur in both online and offline settings requires avoiding separation of the digital and the physical as distinct realms. Instead, the digital and the physical settings can be integrated to see the researched phenomenon as a continuous system and to capture it coherently and continuously (Boyd, 2015).

Researching sociomaterial entanglements poses a challenge for such research, as the enactments of sociomaterial phenomena happen in both settings. The guests and hosts on Airbnb interact with each other in person, but also appropriate technology and communicate online. For example, in Paper 2, I apply digital ethnographic methods to understand how this online-offline boundary is crossed, by asking research participants about interactions between guests and hosts, and evaluations that follow such interactions, but are produced on the Airbnb platform. In Paper 3, the focus shifts to the moments when the platform is used, which requires a different, less reflective approach.

Therefore, in conducting empirical research using ethnographic methods, I have tried to apply different methods and techniques that would be appropriate in specific cases. The methods in this study aim to capture enactments that happen in a setting not defined by separate boundaries of physical and virtual, but in a setting that is embedded in the everyday life of the participants (Hine, 2015). It is important to grasp their understanding of the platform, its affordances and scripts, follow them through their platform use, and observe how they are embedded in the studied assemblage.

4.4.1. Media go-along interviews and platform's walkthrough

The digital ethnographic methods employed in Paper 2 are based on the assumption that observing people in their platform use is similar to observing them 'on the move' (Büscher & Urry, 2009). This means that participants are observed and interviewed as they move from reflecting on physical interactions to reviewing those interactions and appropriating the platform's functions for that goal. Jørgensen (2016) offers a method of 'media go-along' for capturing such mobility in the platform's digital environment and physical interactions.

The method is similar to Kusenbach's (2003) ethnographic go-along interview method as a systematic approach to capturing the informant's actions and interpretations. Both methods are used for studying environments as material structures that give shape to a user's experience and afford or constrict certain actions (Jørgensen, 2016). This task is more straightforward in physical setting, where the researcher can move through space with the informant, following them in

their everyday routines. When adapting the method to digital environments, it is important to remember the notion that they can have the same kind of material affordances, i.e., allowing and limiting certain movements, and give shape to a person's actions and interpretations (Carlile et al., 2013).

The media go-along follows a media user as they step through the digital environment of the applications they engage with (Jørgensen, 2016). They differ from the usual go-along interviews, as the researcher draws attention to specific topics, rather than simply following the user's routine. These topics can relate to characteristics of a digital environment, such as representations, affordances, and communications the user engages with. In the case of studying Airbnb use, it mostly involved engaging with the platform for user's daily tasks in browsing, booking, managing existing and past bookings, communicating, evaluating and reviewing. I have conducted the go-along virtually, following the informants as they engage with the studied platform and asking them to reflect on and narrate their actions. This information is written in fieldnotes, and recorded as an interview, producing an output that can be analysed both as an observation and an interview and resulting in a rich description of the informant's usual practice.

The capabilities and limitations of methods are revealed in their practical application (Hine, 2015). I have applied the media go-along on two occasions, in Paper 2 and 3. Thus, in applying the go-along in Paper 3, I have also made some modifications in overall methodology. As this study focused on studying how accountability is enacted in specific appropriations of the platform, the reflective go-along was not sufficient. It was important to understand exact inscriptions of the platform, for which I have employed a walkthrough method, detailed by Light et al. (2018). The method is used to understand a platform's overall functionality and features. This method is suitable for understanding closed systems that require registration for entry, such as the Airbnb platform. During the walkthrough, the researcher systematically steps through various stages of registration and entry, everyday use, and discontinuation (Light et al., 2018). In the process, data are collected on the platform's vision, operating model and the rules of its use, all of which constitute the platform's digital environment.

The walkthrough makes explicit the details that are otherwise taken for granted when using digital applications (Light et al., 2018). Since there is no clearly defined list of Airbnb features and inscriptions, this method provided a way to systematically collect and analyse policy documents that define the platform's use, in combination with myself stepping through the platform from booking to reviewing stays, recording how important policies are actualized in the platform's design. The walkthrough steps are recorded in video recordings, screenshots, and collected policy pages.

The walkthrough of the Airbnb platform gives an idea about how the platform's use is scripted, but provides only limited information about its use. Information about

platform use was therefore obtained by conducting further media go-alongs, however, substantiating them with better techniques for conducting and analysing these data.

In the time between collecting data for Paper 2 and 3, the Covid-19 pandemic occurred and introduced new forms of data collection. Along with the pandemic, video-conferencing tools have seen a rapid development, and attitudes towards conducting interviews digitally have become more positive. Therefore, go-alongs in the study for Paper 3 were conducted while borrowing a technique of observing users 'in action', video-recording and interviewing them at the same time, which is common in the contextual designing approach from ICT studies (Holtzblatt & Beyer, 2017). The participants were interviewed over the video-conferencing platform *Zoom*, which allowed video-recording of the participant's steps in the platform and interviewing them as we stepped through various windows and functionalities available for users.

Referring to reviews written while interviewing or referring to earlier stays also helps the user reflect on the outcomes for them that are related to particular scripts. Zillinger et al. (2018) note that users are often unsure about what actions they have taken in the past when searching for information on the internet. Similarly, they might not be sure about specific steps taken in relation to evaluating and reviewing. Therefore, a more experimental approach may be better suited to observing specific online actions than typical interviews (Zillinger, 2020). Contextual interviews solve this problem and generate a rich dataset for later analysis. Since consumers who use information channels on the internet do not usually limit themselves to a specific channel or platform (Zillinger, 2020), this method also helps us understand how they involve both the researched platform and possible additional tools.

The go-alongs were conducted on two occasions. First, in 2020, go-along interviews were carried out with 15 participants, tourists who use Airbnb, and used in the study for Paper 2. The initial five participants were identified through snowballing from the researcher's personal network, while later interview participants were identified using purposive sampling – selecting participants who fulfil specific criteria (Daniel, 2012). In this case, the criteria were that participants should have travelled within the past six months and used Airbnb for arranging accommodation. Only people residing in southern Sweden or the Greater Copenhagen area were interviewed. The second round of go-alongs were conducted in Spring 2023 in the study for Paper 3. At this stage, 10 go-along interviews were conducted. This study is focused on understanding use of the platform and its functions, instead of focusing on the perspective of either guests or hosts. Therefore, this sample consists of both guests and hosts. The participants were identified by snowballing through extended personal networks and in social networks groups for tourist accommodation hosts. A detailed list of interview participants from both stages is provided in Appendix 1.

4.4.2. Use of documents

The platform's walkthrough also produced a large number of documents that were used to analyse inscriptions in the platform's design. The use of documents in Paper 3 is thus grounded in a theoretical understanding of platforms as scripted artefacts – being purposefully designed to afford some and constrict other actions (Jelsma, 2003). Interviews and go-along observations show how users interact with the platform, but the scripts built into the platform's design cannot be apparent from its use alone. Identifying scripts requires understanding the purposes for which the specific platform's features are created. Policy documents and guidelines for users to familiarize themselves with the platform's functions worked well to generate such an understanding.

Although these documents were gathered for a rather technical purpose, the policies and community guidelines were also identified as part of the surveillant assemblage that characterizes the Airbnb platform (see Paper 4 in this thesis). Documents are written artefacts that describe reality and take part in constructing it (Potter, 1996). They describe reality, thus contributing to the way people understand it, and may compel them to act in a certain way (Van Dijk, 1996) Therefore, descriptions are not merely passive events, and written documents are usually produced with specific interests in mind (Cameron, 2001). Therefore, we have decided to extend the study of collected documents to a study of co-constituting trustworthiness on Airbnb via its policies and guidelines, which is presented in Paper 1. For this study, the corpus of collected documents was expanded and a discourse analysis was carried out. The list of main documents used in this thesis and details about them are presented in Appendix 2.

4.4.3. Data analysis using a grounded theory approach

The data in the empirical studies were analysed by applying procedures from a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Charmaz & Bryant, 2016; Corbin & Strauss, 2012). However, it is important to note that my approach to data analysis is more abductive than the constructionist grounded theory analysis described by Charmaz and Bryant (2016). In data analysis, I follow a similar cyclical approach relying heavily on recurring cycles of coding as data are being collected and analysed, but at later stages such codes are informed by theory concerning specific researched phenomena, e.g., theory about trust building, which is already well established in the field.

Still, some of the main principles that Charmaz and Bryant (2016) describe guided my analytical process. As data were being collected, I have coded them openly, aiming to get "as close to the phenomenon as possible" (p. 386) and to compare data and codes across the analysis process. Of the more technical components of grounded theory, I have relied heavily on memo writing for recording the coding

process – where specific codes come from, how they compare across other codes and theory I have been working with, as well as recording other analytical reflections of the process – hints and ideas that come up more intuitively and could be checked at later stages.

Procedurally, interviews in all data collection stages were first coded with open coding, i.e., coding every line of the transcripts, to identify people's understandings, possible objects of interests, tentative relationships between concepts that appear in the data (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). This enabled an understanding of the participant's perception of the platform's functions, noting individual actions and comparing them to each other and the features of Airbnb's environment of use, as noted in the platform's walkthrough. Eventually the categories developed at this stage were used to identify the meanings that the platform's features have for users. The coded interviews were later reviewed and coded again using axial coding – data were re-read while using theoretical constructs as categories and looking for connections with earlier codes (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017).

4.5. Conceptual literature review

Paper 4 in this thesis presents a conceptual study of the structures of surveillance that enable online evaluations on Airbnb platform. The paper is based on a review of academic literature. We have taken this approach to grasp the overall structure of surveillant mechanisms, spelling out the relevant objects involved in producing outcomes (Hoddy, 2019). At the time of conducting this study, the literature on Airbnb was already vast, with Guttentag (2019) identifying 293 academic papers published about the platform by that time. The presented conceptualization abstracts mechanisms that structure interactions and presents their inter-relationships. This is done by analysing previous empirical studies of the Airbnb platforms and identifying the phenomena these structural mechanisms cause across the findings of different studies (Bygstad et al., 2016). Therefore, the conceptual review focuses on analysing earlier research papers presenting empirical studies of the Airbnb platform and its use of mutual reviewing. This material was used to construct a model of surveillant structures on this platform by showing a network of related concepts and mechanisms (Jaakkola, 2020). The model theorizes surveillance as an outcome of relationships between identified concepts.

Even though in the rest of this dissertation I approach sociomateriality as characterized by the entanglement of entities, constituted in their relationships, this conceptual review helped form an understanding of different elements involved in the sociomaterial entanglement. The resulting model was used as a theoretical starting point for the empirical studies presented in other articles. The conceptual model in this study is a result of synthesizing findings of the reviewed studies and

relating their already developed concepts to formulate new connections that can be explored further (Jaakkola, 2020).

5. Insights from research papers

This chapter presents summaries of the four research papers that comprise this dissertation.

Paper 1 is a co-authored book chapter submitted for review for an upcoming Routledge volume *Consumer behaviour in Hospitality and Tourism: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges*. The book is focused on consumer behaviour in contemporary times. This includes studies of consumer behaviour in the digital age, and consumer experience with use of apps and booking platforms, which makes it a relevant venue for a study on P2P platforms. The paper has been accepted for publication in the book.

Paper 2 and 4 have been published in academic journals in the tourism research field.

Paper 3 is an unpublished manuscript, currently submitted to the journal *Tourist Studies*. The journal publishes multi-disciplinary research about tourism. It includes theoretical and critical analyses of tourism, making it an appropriate venue for Paper 3.

5.1. Paper 1

Pumputis, A., Mieli, M., (Accepted). From trust to trustworthiness: formalizing consumer behaviour with discourse on Airbnb platform, In Tabari, S., Chen, W., Colmekcioglu, N (Eds.), *Consumer behaviour in Hospitality and Tourism: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges*. Routledge.

In the first paper, my coauthor Micol Mieli and I explore the discursive work undertaken by the Airbnb platform to establish the notion of trustworthiness in its marketplace. The paper was motivated by a desire to understand how a platform's policies and consumer-guiding documents establish norms in the marketplace.

Our findings show that the platform's documentation strikes a balance between trust in the platform as a mediator of exchanges and interpersonal trust between guests and hosts. Trust between guests and hosts is directly related to trust in the platform itself (Pelgander et al., 2022). Therefore, guests and hosts have predefined roles as members of the platform. Establishing and assigning specific roles to guests, hosts,

and the platform enable the creation of a formal framework for expectations regarding each of them. The policies we have studied inform us about what is appropriate for each role and set boundaries for actions. At the same time, the roles are described flexibly, so that the platform organization can adapt to expectations and pressures from the general public and maintain freedom for internal decision-making.

The expectations defined in these documents serve as the basis for establishing users' trustworthiness. Generally, trustworthiness is understood as a result of expectations derived from a person's reputation, which is formed by accumulating reviews and ratings (Zloteanu et al., 2018). Our study complements this understanding by showing that expectations for what should be considered trustworthy are formally established in documents containing both legal and informal guidelines. The platform's users are nudged towards fulfilling defined expectations that are then documented in the reviews they receive. For example, hosts are incentivized to aim for a Superhost quality mark, which rewards them with specific benefits for meeting expectations set for the host's role. Meeting such expectations is grounded in elaborate justifications and normative language. However, the discourse keeps the platform's own role in the exchange ambiguous, leaving it with the power to make decisions about issues defined in its policies on the spot.

The findings also hint at the structural properties of the sociomaterial assemblage in which guests and hosts operate. In this case, trustworthiness is constituted by a narrative, which is compatible with the features of the platform. Guests and hosts may refer to this narrative when building trust in their own interactions, which is explored in Paper 2 and 3 of this thesis. As we will see there, appropriation of the structural properties of the sociomaterial assemblage is highly dependent on the users and their own goals of using the platform. Therefore, Paper 2 and 3 take a different perspective on platforms, by zooming into how guests and hosts use the platform and interact with each other.

5.2. Paper 2

Pumputis, A. (2023). Complexities of trust building through sociomaterial arrangements of peer-to-peer platforms. *Current Issues in Tourism,* 27(11), 1800–1813. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2023.2214848.

While Paper 1 examines a platform's discourse as a structural part of the digital environment, Paper 2 explores how Airbnb guests act in it. The paper uses virtual ethnographic methods to analyse how the platform's mutual reviewing system is incorporated into trust building between guests and hosts. The paper also marks the

first shift in perspective, zooming into the world of the tourists who use the platform before, during and after interacting with hosts.

The analysis in this study is based on the integrative model of trust developed by Mayer et al. (1995). The model provides a framework to understand ability, benevolence, and integrity as the bases for trust. It is applied to understand when these bases appear in the guest-host relationship and how they relate to the platform's environment. The analysis also shows how distrust appears in the relationship when these bases are not established. Following Luhmann's (1979) theorization, distrust is seen as a functional equivalent of trust that enables reduction of the complexity of social world. With that in mind, the study questions whether the Airbnb's design for trust is sufficient to support guests' decision-making in choosing a host due to its disregard for distrust.

Perceptions of the bases for trust unfold over different stages of a guest's trip. Before the stay, trust is based on perceived ability – skills and competencies, and integrity – a common value framework. These perceptions are formed on the basis of reviews. During the stay, a temporary, swift trust (Blomqvist & Cook, 2018) is built. This form of trust is still based on ability and integrity. After the stay, maintaining a positive reputation becomes the guest's main concern, as guests and hosts provide reciprocal feedback. At this stage, the main basis for trust is benevolence – perceived goodwill shown to the other. Distrust in the relationship stems from violating these bases. For example, integrity can be harmed by violating a person's privacy, and perceptions of ability can be harmed by showing a lack of competence in hosting. Finally, although benevolence is one of the bases for trust, perceptions of benevolence diminish due to distrust shown before or during the stay.

Trust between guests and hosts is interpersonal and unfolds over time. In terms of the platform's digital environment, this means that its features support trust differently as the trip progresses. The reviewing system helps establish notions of trustworthiness in reviews read before the stay. A platform's policies establish standards for the service encounter that help form expectations concerning ability and integrity. Feedback given after the stay is divided into public and private reviews, allowing more benevolent reviewing – providing positive feedback in public reviews and keeping more critical comments private.

Designing the environment to facilitate this trust building process has implications for the guest-host relationship. The relationship takes the form of trust building via mutual reviews. Reviews help form initial expectations, however, at the same time the reviewing system nudges users towards benevolent reviewing – separating public feedback from private. While this allows resolution of doubtful scenarios by avoiding conflict, it also introduces what earlier research has called "positivity bias" in reviews (Bridges & Vásquez, 2018; Meijerink & Schoenmakers, 2020). As a process, trust building is constituted by creating and then using quasi-formalized knowledge about past encounters with another person. This knowledge is set in a

standard format and quantified by ratings; however, it is produced by a platform's users with their own goals and priorities. Trusting in this sociomaterial assemblage becomes a product of measuring the actual encounters against the knowledge derived from reviews. As this study shows, the outcome of this process is not always positive for the guests and hosts, as it often does not provide sufficient information to form reasonable expectations regarding the encounter.

5.3. Paper 3

Pumputis. A. (manuscript). Scripting accountability on peer-to-peer platforms: Mutual evaluations in algorithmic management of Airbnb guests and hosts.

This study introduces the concept of scripting, derived from Actor Network Theory, in order to understand how accountability relationships are formed on the Airbnb platform. Quantified ratings and written reviews used for trust building are investigated as measurements of tourists' and hosts' performance.

The study analyses both the Airbnb platform and how its reviewing system is used in practice, while analysing how accountability is enacted in this digital environment. Accountability is understood as a mechanism of control that allows a person to explain and answer for their behaviour, rather than merely being held responsible for it (Beu & Buckley, 2001). While platforms manage relationships of consumers and providers that meet for the first time through the platform, the same reviewing system that facilitates trust building is also known as the main mechanism for establishing and maintaining accountability (McDaid et al., 2019).

In this study, I further explore how users are guided by the inscriptions in the platform's design to create accounts of each other. Scripts are understood as structural features of the digital environment that guide a user's actions (Jelsma, 2003). The study is designed in two parts for identifying what scripts exist on the platform and how they are actualized when it is used. In the first part of the study, the platform's is analysed by employing the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018). This method allows the researcher to systematically walk through the platform, recording encountered design features. It also resulted in collecting a corpus of documents that explain the recorded features. The documents were analysed to identify the purpose underlying some of the design decisions. The second part of the study employs virtual go-along interviews (Jørgensen, 2016) to understand how the scripts are actualized as guests and hosts use the platform. The design of the study represents the shift between the perspective of the platform and that of the user. The perspective shifts throughout the analysis, focusing on how the two sides interrelate.

Previous research suggests that guests and hosts are usually accountable towards other platform users (McDaid et al., 2019). However, the findings of this study suggest that accountability in this setting is primarily directed at the platform's algorithmic search system. As an artifact produced by a platform's users, reviews are written in a form necessary for the algorithm that structures Airbnb's search results to optimally understand them. Reviews and ratings thus serve a dual purpose – (1) they help establish expectations for trustworthiness, and (2) measure the host's performance and ability in accordance with criteria considered by the search algorithm. This determines the ranking of a host's listing in guests' search for accommodation. As a result, reviews essentially become a tool of commensuration of hosting practices.

This has implications for reviewing as a part of the trust building process. Findings from both Paper 2 and earlier research (Bridges & Vásquez, 2018; McDaid et al., 2019) suggest that guests and hosts see the most use in reviews in informing future consumers and providers about their experience. However, commensuration of hosting leads them to apply strategies for obtaining standardized, high-rating reviews. The findings in this study suggest that this results in uninformative reviews that are not motivated by a need to fulfil standardized criteria, rather than providing an informative and trustworthy account of previous interactions. In the reviewing process, the guests and hosts essentially become decentralized and replaced by an algorithm. This produces a relationship in which hosts need to accumulate reviews, while guests are often unwilling to participate in writing reviews they see as uninformative. This study shows how an algorithmic system is used to subtly direct guests' attention from building trust bases with less visible hosts towards following commensurable ratings produced within the accountability system.

5.4. Paper 4

This paper aims to provide a conceptual overview of Airbnb's digital environment as a structure that enables surveillance. A conceptual model reflecting the mechanisms that structure this environment is made. The mechanisms are discussed as an assemblage that enables mutual surveillance between guests and hosts as part of their trust building practice.

The study was motivated by the observation that mutual reviewing is reminiscent of surveillance. This creates a contrast with the usual sharing economy rhetoric of trust as a quality of consumer-provider relationships on platforms (Schor, 2015). Trust is understood as involving a willingness to be vulnerable towards another person based

on positive expectations concerning their intentions or behaviour (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Yet surveillance of consumers and providers implies a lack of trust, otherwise it would not be necessary. Theoretically, the study uses the concept of surveillant assemblage to explore how surveillance is built into the platform's digital environment. Originally, the notion of assemblage was developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) to capture the complexity of social organizing. Haggerty and Erickson (2000) transfer this concept to a context in which collection of data about both individuals and societies is at the core of organizing. In this study, we explore how this phenomenon unfolds as part of guest-host interactions in a P2P setting.

The conceptualization of Airbnb as a surveillant assemblage is based on literature focused on tourism. Upon writing this paper, a large number of papers about Airbnb had already been published in the field, which allowed identification of a broad range of outcomes of surveillance and relating them to categories such as trust building, reputation, privacy, and reviewing. The studied literature provided either direct or indirect indications of mechanisms that comprise the surveillant assemblage in relation to these categories. Following Jaakkola's (2020) suggestion for conceptualizations, we have built a conceptual model on the basis of connections between concepts and theories developed in the reviewed literature. This helps identify new connections around the concept of surveillance in platformized tourism.

This paper introduces another shift in perspective by zooming out from the events that unfold in the user's world to investigate the structural elements that connect those events. The technological and social elements that constitute the surveillant assemblage are thus treated as its structural mechanisms. In the paper, we discuss how the structure of surveillance identified in the conceptual model relates to outcomes observed in the reviewed literature. In terms of trust building, this means that trust in the guest-host relationship is produced by both the platform users and its structural mechanisms.

The conceptual model of Airbnb's surveillant assemblage comprises four dimensions: communication, technology, services, and policies, which are identified as defining a set of norms for mutual surveillance. The discursive notions of trust and trustworthiness explored in Paper 1 and 2 provide justification for these norms, and the structure of identified mechanisms guides and shapes the agency of platform users. As a result, the trust built in guest-host interactions is a product of both the practices observed in Paper 2 and the structure of surveillance. In this study, surveillance is thus identified as a normalized part of building interpersonal trust when using a platform.

6. Concluding discussion

Today, platforms are an important part of tourism, and with further advances in artificial intelligence and algorithmic management, they will continue to be important actors in structuring tourism (Adamiak, 2022; Tuomi & Ascenção, 2023). Among other effects, platforms, starting with Airbnb, will continue to shape the relationships between tourists and hosts. The aim of this thesis was to explore how these relationships are shaped and managed in digital environments of P2P platforms. The explorations carried out in four research papers show how guest-host relationships are managed around trust and control. Trust is still an important part of these relationships, both promoted by the studied platform and described by guests. However, trust is coupled with algorithmic control, which is less visible for guests and hosts. ICTs for algorithmic management, as well as non-technological elements – such as discourse, the goals of the platform organization, as well as the platform's users, and the organizational form of the platform – are taking part in structuring guest-host relationships online.

This chapter discusses the contributions and implications of the findings from these explorations. In the first section, I present a discussion on the dynamics of trust and control in digital environments. The further sections discuss the implications for tourism and platforms, followed by theoretical implications, and finally limitations and further research directions.

6.1. Understanding the dynamics of trust and control in digital environments

A long tradition of sociological research has shown that trust is one of the main elements of organizing harmonious relationships and cooperation (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Luhmann, 1979; Misztal, 1997). It allows strangers to enter transactions facilitated by platforms. P2P platforms can achieve the same effect with structural methods of controlling their digital environments, which assures their users that the outcomes of their decisions will meet their expectations (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). The main contribution of this thesis is examining and presenting the dynamics between such control and trust building.

Findings from the research papers presented in this thesis show that trust building is closely related to the social and technological solutions in their design. This is first demonstrated in Paper 1, where trust building is related to the platform's discourse. The platform's documentation, in its policies and Terms of Use, balances the interests of the platform organization and consumers' expectations. The documents foreground trust in the overall rhetoric of the sharing economy, promoting behaviour that reaffirms this rhetoric, while maintaining the platform's operating model for capturing value in transactions. The documents both provide clear and normative guidelines for what is allowed for consumers and maintains ambivalence when necessary to protect the platform's interests. Most importantly, via discourse the platform organization crafts the notion of a trustworthy consumer. It provides formal indicators of what consumer behaviours render a user worthy of trust as well as relates them to the expected roles held by the guests, hosts, and the platform.

However, trust is not only a discursive notion, but also a major part of guest-host interactions. During interactions, trust building is facilitated in both individual and general terms. Individually, guests and hosts record their interactions via online evaluations, thus establishing the trustworthiness of each other as part of online reputation. Paper 2 shows that such trust is based on the testimonies to a provider's ability, benevolence, and integrity, as defined by Mayer et al. (1995). However, trust in a digital environment is temporary, and based on the need to engage in a specific transaction between individuals. In this context, trust is built over a short period of time and is sufficient for temporary relationships. It allows guests and hosts to be interdependent for a short period of time, without the need to extend their relationship.

Blomqvist and Cook (2018) describe such trust as 'swift trust', noting that it is common in organized settings, where groups of people have to temporarily work with each other. Similar to a workplace, the platform is designed to ensure enough trust for guests and hosts to be temporarily interdependent. They allow reviewing, reporting on the other's ability to perform their role of a guest or a host, and their integrity – the ability to follow a common framework for behaviour on the platform. The basis for swift trust between guests and hosts is the possibility to judge and understand their ability to meet the core expectations associated with their roles.

Individual trusting attitudes are generalized by establishing an ideological basis for evaluating them. Generalizing trust allows the platform to maintain its own reputation, as a place where a consumer meets other trusted people, and as an organizer of exchange that can maintain an orderly marketplace. An ideological basis is developed by discourse, which is studied in Paper 1, as well as the platform's affordances and scripts, which are examined in Paper 2 and 3. Together they produce the image that a platform itself is trustworthy.

Thus far, this discussion has focused on trust as a tool for building relationships among individuals. This is also a common framing in tourism studies, where trust is largely theorized as a marketing tool for building consumer-provider relationships (Cohen et al., 2014). However, recent studies of platforms by Stark and Pais (2020), Stark and Broeck (2024), and Frenken and Fuenfschilling (2020) have shown that organizing a platform's digital environment to facilitate trust is a key element of the hybrid organizational form that constitutes a platform. In this case, the quality of trust to maintain social order in groups of people becomes the basis for *organizing* a platform's user base. Stark and Broeck (2024) remind us that trust enables the extension of organizational practices beyond the boundaries of a firm (or in this case, a platform organization).

Perhaps the most important implication of this thesis is showing that, in a P2P platform setting, trust should be understood as closely tied with control of the P2P marketplace. Maintaining trust between consumers, providers, and the platform organization allows the firm to coopt consumers and providers as platform's members. This means that, by directing how users can build trust, the incentives to do so, and designing the tools for reviewing and reporting, the platform can exercise algorithmic control over the tourists, hosts and the assets they exchange. This means that the firm can benefit from coopted assets that it does not own by maintaining algorithmic control over its members (Stark & Pais, 2020). In this context, trust building reinforces control, as reputation-based trust pressures users to act according to standards and norms set by the platform and internalized by users.

Therefore, this thesis discusses the dynamics of trust and control in digital environments as more than tools for building and maintaining relationships. Paper 3 and 4 show how trust building takes part in reinforcing control on tourist accommodation platforms and coopting assets. The organizational algorithmic control (described by Stark & Pais, 2020; Stark & Broeck, 2024) and trust building discussed in tourism studies (discussed by Ert, Fleischer 2019, Roelofsen & Minca 2018, Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2017) interrelate to reinforce a platform's control through accountability and mutual surveillance.

In Paper 3, which focuses on understanding accountability on P2P platforms, I maintain the focus set in previous papers, relating the platform's terms and policies with the practices of guests and hosts. Such a perspective allows us to see that accountability on the studied P2P platform is a product of algorithmic management, as much as that of mutual reviewing. The study finds that a platform's environment is scripted to direct users towards accountability standards set in the platform's terms and policies. The identified standards are set not only to build trust, but primarily to allow the platform's algorithmic accommodation search engine to easily process information from listings and reviews. Van Nuenen (2019) and Striphas (2015) have previously demonstrated that the algorithmic logic of processing information is different to that of a common user. Paper 3 demonstrates that reviews written to fit an algorithmic logic are less intelligible to users, which

impedes their ability to build trust in the other party. Reviews in this format are written primarily to quantify and commensurate users and listings, while avoiding the contextual information needed for guests to choose a listing.

This results in increasing control of the platform based on commensurable data, and subsequently declining possibilities to build trust based on reviews. As information is more commensurable, trust becomes less important for the users. They can compare each other based on metrics, but fewer details are available about specific interactions. Therefore, hosts that aim to build interpersonal trust, rather than count on the algorithmic checks performed by the platform, must find external ways to communicate with their potential guests.

Espeland and Sauder (2007) show that, through accountability based on quantified metrics, management urges users to fit the standardized criteria, rather than being transparent about their actions. Thus, hosts and guests who are better equipped to understand these standards and algorithmic search results are also better equipped to use the platform. Such management promotes the use of third-party analytics and requires new skills in working with and understanding quantified information for successful hosting. More importantly, the platform's management extends the use of algorithmic management to control not only the work of hosts as gig workers, but also their relationships with guests.

Roelofsen and Minca (2018) and other critical hospitality scholars (e.g., Christensen, 2022; Germann Molz, 2014) have already noted how quantification 'invades' the private spaces and practices of hosts who use Airbnb. These authors have pointed out that especially the need to maintain an online reputation, high ratings and a large number of reviews affects hosts' performance and promotes professional hosting. Paper 4 of this thesis associates such invasiveness with surveillance.

The paper relates mutual reviewing performed by guests and hosts to the ubiquitous collection of data performed by various platforms (Zuboff, 2019) and describes online evaluations and reviewing as mutual surveillance. The paper presents a conceptual view of structural features on the Airbnb platform that enable mutual surveillance. Most importantly, this means that control via monitoring of each other, reporting and maintaining one's own online reputation have become a normal everyday activity for both guests and hosts. Normalization of surveillance, along with the discursive framing of trust building as the reason for mutual reviewing, obscures the fact that anything platform users do is translated into data that are collected and analysed by Airbnb.

6.2. Implications for tourism and platforms

The success of large P2P platforms such as Airbnb has brought trust to the attention of tourism scholars. Cohen et al. (2014) note that trust is an undertheorized concept in tourism studies, largely limited to its role in marketing. In a more recent study, Williams and Baláž (2021) conceptualize the role trust plays in mitigating risks inherent in international tourist mobility. A plethora of empirical studies focused on Airbnb have empirically examined the effects of its design and business model on building trust (e.g., Ert & Fleischer, 2019; Mao et al., 2020; Zamani et al., 2019). This thesis extends the understanding of trust in the tourism literature by relating it to algorithmic control of P2P marketplaces.

Trust enables the extension of relationships, which includes relationships of corporate control over assets coopted into platforms. Therefore, tourism studies would benefit from not solely viewing trust as a category of interpersonal relationships that reduces risks or helps retain customers. Trust can be manipulated and used for extending and normalizing norms of control. This has long-lasting implications for tourist destinations as well. Trust management through platforms promotes professionalizing hosting, i.e., developing additional hosting competences in working with data, including additional services for maintaining high ratings and manipulating online reviews.

Although the further effects of this trend are outside the scope of my empirical observations, similar findings from other studies have related it to the increasing concentration of short-term rental (STR) listings in popular tourist cities (Bosma, 2022). This trend also shows that extending corporate influence over assets outside the Airbnb firm takes part in materially transforming tourist destinations. This suggests that tourism stakeholders and planners would benefit from considering the sociomaterial implications of trust management technologies. For example, attempts to mitigate effects such as the concentration of STRs and housing crises it leads to could benefit from observing how trust management technologies contribute to these issues.

However, it is still important to consider that, in order to mitigate risks, it is important for platform users to be able to develop trust and distrust. As noted by Fraanje and Spaargaren (2019), increasing technological mediation of social relationships reduces the possibilities to develop social ties. This means that further development of trust management systems towards applying algorithmic logic can further reduce the guests' and hosts' ability to develop actual trust. As shown in Paper 3, although technological mediation of trust increases the efficiency of P2P exchanges, it can be detrimental to the users' ability to form realistic expectations about future interactions, or prompt them to look for alternative options.

The findings also indicate that policymakers and tourism planners will need to decide what kinds of relationships they want between tourists and their local hosts.

Platformization makes exchanges more efficient, but also extends the ability of global corporations to dictate their standards over the interactions of guests and hosts in local destinations. This thesis demonstrates that platforms such as Airbnb set standards for accountability between guests and hosts to meet the needs of developing their algorithmic systems. However, this also affects what information tourists and hosts can use to make decisions about their trips and stays. The stakeholders of tourism businesses will have to find ways to maintain appropriate standards for hosting and tourism and to decide what level of platformization is desirable for benefiting from algorithmic management.

6.3. Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this thesis suggests a sociomaterial approach to analysing the phenomena related to embeddedness of technologies in social relationships. The movements of zooming in and out of the relationship between guests and hosts allowed us to see more than the perspective of the guest or the host. In the case of this thesis, this approach allowed identification of relationships between trust and control in the process of trust building. Framing the analysis in a relational ontology that analyses trust building as a process of becoming allowed identification of relationships that are overlooked by traditional methods focused specifically on the perspectives of guests or hosts.

Technological developments occur faster than analysis of them does. Amoore (2020) shows that the ability to change and quickly adapt to external pressures allows tech corporations to stay ahead of regulation (Amoore, 2020). Sociomaterial approaches to analysis allow us to capture the changing nature of the field in which technologies structure tourism. This thesis is an example of applying such an approach. It proposes looking at technological developments from different perspectives, applying methods designed to study both the digital environments of platforms (such as the walkthrough method and digital ethnography) and conceptual tools for understanding larger relations between different actors and technologies.

Finally, this thesis proposes that sociomateriality is an appropriate tool for understanding how social relationships change in an algorithmic culture (see Striphas, 2015). As an example, trust is closely related to a person's experience of the world, their ability to develop positive expectations for the future and interaction with others. This study shows that building trust by following algorithmic logic also creates different expectations. This means that, for researchers as well as policymakers, it is important to understand how algorithmically taken decisions set boundaries for concepts such as trust and accountability. Following the earlier presented views of Barad (2003) and Schulze et al. (2020), this means accounting for the reality enacted through the use

algorithms as well as conducting research on them. Decisions taken when managing large platforms must consider how the boundaries are set in their digital environments.

6.4. Limitations and further research

The studies carried out while writing this thesis also have some limitations. First, studies of sociomateriality are common in the literature on information systems and organizations, however, this approach has seldom been used in tourism studies. The perspective applied in information system research usually takes people's practices to be the main unit of analysis (Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). Meanwhile, this thesis was written to present a multi-layered perspective on the studied phenomena. While it presents a detailed view from various angles, this means that the thesis does not develop an in-depth view of some concepts typically used in similar studies, such as social practices. This has made it harder to present and discuss the studies, while developing them.

It is important to note that, while working on thesis, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly altered the tourism industry. Not only did it drastically reduce the volumes of travel, it also led to significant changes in platform businesses. During the pandemic, Airbnb developed policies to limit social contact between guests and hosts, which could have changed its users' attitudes towards trust and safety. Data collection for Paper 2 was carried out before this significant event, while the data for Paper 3 were collected after it. Although the datasets did not show significant changes in attitudes towards trust and safety, the pandemic may have affected the participants' willingness to participate in research as well as their overall adaptability to use of digital technologies for planning trips.

These limitations as well as the implications noted in the previous section point to several possible directions for further research. First, while this thesis focused on understanding trust building in digital environments, it has hardly touched on specific practices of engaging with various new technologies that become inherent in platform use. Therefore, further studies could explore the sociomaterial practices of working with the third-party tools for data analytics that become inherent in hosting. Other tourism studies (e.g., Mieli & Zillinger, 2020; Wang et al., 2024) have shown that devices used by tourists, such as smartphones, change the way tourism is understood and practised. Further studies could also approach the specific implications use of such devices has for trust among guests and hosts.

Another important further avenue of research can be pursued by studying how the infrastructure within destinations is used by tourists and local populations. This thesis has focused on the digital environments in which tourists and hosts meet. However, they also share the material infrastructures that enable tourism, such as

airports, railway stations and other material infrastructure of mobility networks, as common as city streets. The sociomaterial perspective can be usefully applied to studying the use of such infrastructure and the social relationships that emerge or collapse due to their shared use.

Finally, coming from the previously discussed implications, this thesis suggests that we look at P2P platforms not as marketplaces where consumers and providers meet, but as an organized setting where corporate control becomes a part of relationships between otherwise unrelated people. This suggests that further research into guest-host interactions should consider the organized nature of digital marketplaces, exploring them from an interdisciplinary perspective between studies of organizations, consumption, and tourism. The shift in perspective proposed by this thesis would mean further considering how sociomaterial configurations proliferate algorithmic management over consumers, expanding corporate influence on local tourism, and the implication this has for the destinations and material infrastructures of tourism.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Details of interview participants in Paper 2 and 3. Provided in separate tables.

Characteristics of participants in Paper 2

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Nationality	Airbnb use experience
IP1	23	Male	UAE	Occasional user, for ~1 year
IP2	38	Female	Denmark	Occasional user, for ~4 years
IP3	26	Female	Ecuador	Frequent user, for ~2 year
IP4	30	Female	USA	Frequent user, for ~5 years
IP5	25	Female	USA	Frequent user, for ~5 years
IP6	26	Female	USA	Frequent user, for ~4 years
IP7	44	Male	Sweden	Frequent user, for ~10 years
IP8	30	Female	Norway	Occasional user, for ~1 year
IP9	31	Male	Canada	Frequent user, for ~6 years
IP10	39	Male	Sweden	Occasional user, for ~4 years
IP11	30	Female	Czech Republic	Occasional user, for ~4 years
IP12	32	Male	Peru	Occasional user, for ~1 year
IP13	29	Female	Mexico	Frequent user, for ~6 years
IP14	26	Female	Mexico	Occasional user, for ~2 years
IP15	23	Male	China	Occasional user, for ~1 year

Appendix 2. Documents used for analysis in Paper 3 and 4

	Document	Type	Number of pages	Document's purpose	Study in which the page was used
1	**Terms of Service**	Legal Terms	24	Contract between platform and user	Paper 3 and Paper 4
2	**Our Community Standards**	Guidelines/Rules	5	Standards for trustworthy behaviour	Paper 3 and Paper 4
3	**Non-discrimination Policy**	Community Policy	6	Principles for inclusion and respect	Paper 4
4	**Airbnb's Off-Platform Policy**	Community Policy	3	Defines allowed and prohibited actions not on Airbnb platform	Paper 3 and Paper 4
5	**Extenuating Circumstances Policy**	Community Policy	3	Establishes grounds for overriding cancelation policies	Paper 4
6	**Rebooking and Refund Policy**	Community Policy	3	Sets a basis for helping customers in need of rebooking and refunds	Paper 4
7	**Host and Guest Safety**	Community Policy	2	Establishes norms for safety	Paper 4
8	**Airbnb's Content Policy**	Community Policy	3	Designates allowed and disallowed use of content	Paper 3 and Paper 4
9	**Airbnb's Reviews Policy**	Community Policy	2	Designates norms for reviewing	Paper 3 and Paper 4
10	**Cancellation policies for your listing**	Guidelines	3	Helps select appropriate cancelation policy	Paper 4
11	**Find the cancellation policy for your stay**	Guidelines	2	Collects information about cancellation policies	Paper 4
12	**How search results work**	Guidelines	3	Builds confidence in using Airbnb's search engine	Paper 3 and Paper 4
13	**Airbnb service fees**	Guidelines	2	Explains the structure of fees on the platform	Paper 3 and Paper 4

14	**Responding to reviews**	Guidelines	1	Explains how to respond to reviews	Paper 3 and Paper 4
15	**Host Privacy Standards**	Legal terms	3	Sets expectations and prohibitions in use of personal data	Paper 4
16	**Getting protected through AirCover**	Guidelines	4	Provides information about what is considered under Airbnb guarantee for hosts	Paper 3
17	**Host your home on Airbnb**	Informational page	6	Promotes hosting on Airbnb	Paper 3
18	**Instant book**	Informational page	3	Promotes use of Instant book feature	Paper 3
19	**Reviews for Experiences**	Guidelines	2	Information about publishing reviews	Paper 3
20	**Reviews for stays**	Guidelines	3	Information about publishing reviews	Paper 3
21	**What legal and regulatory issues should I consider before hosting on Airbnb**	Guidelines/Rules	1	Information about rules important for hosts	Paper 3
22	**How to become a Superhost?**	Guidelines	2	Information on Superhost criteria	Paper 3 and Paper 4

(Appendix 2 continued)

Trust and control on peer-to-peer platforms

This thesis explores how trust is constructed in peer-to-peer (P2P) digital environments, specifically focusing on guests and hosts on platforms like Airbnb. With the rise of algorithms-based platforms for managing relationships online, trust has resurfaced as a central topic both in the general public and academia. This thesis analyses trust – a crucial element for cooperation and societal functioning, through a sociomaterial lens, investigating how technological tools contribute to its development in the context of tourism.

The thesis adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating insights from tourism studies, information systems, and organizational studies. This work offers a nuanced understanding of how P2P platforms like Airbnb not only mediate but actively shape the interactions between users. It provides valuable insights for understanding the role of digital technologies in managing consumer-provider relationships, ultimately contributing to broader discussions on trust and control in digital tourism environments.

Aurimas Pumputis is an interdisciplinary researcher with primary interest in the meeting of technologies and culture. He has a background in linguistics, cultural studies, and marketing. After completing an MA degree in Alborg University, and several years of professional experience, he has moved to Sweden to continue doctoral studies focused on tourism and technology in Lund University.

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