

# **BUILDING A HEURISTIC EVALUATION FOR SHORT-TERM RENTAL MARKET: DESIGN, MARKETING AND EXPERIENCE**

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## **Abstract**

The tourism industry's sharing economy is growing, but homeowners are weak in providing the required services. In this paper, the concept of heuristic evaluation has been introduced to the hospitality industry. We build a heuristic evaluation for short-term rentals. We followed video ethnography based on Gorder and Lorimer's reality show "stayhere." We codify the heuristic evaluation based on design, marketing, and experience categories. On the Airbnb platform, homeowners signal their quality of properties by referring to the "stayhere" show. This helps them to increase the occupation and price rates. This will overcome the asymmetric information between parties. Guests can evaluate the property more accurately before booking. Hosts can benefit from this assessment to understand the guests' expectations. Thanks to redesigning their homes, they can become more competitive against centrally located places (tyranny of distance). A potential market for assuring the quality of homes through the certificates issued by different experts or organizations in the hospitality industry exists. The digital platform may modify its rankings and reviews to reflect better the situation of the house.

**Key Words:** Heuristic Evaluation, Design, Marketing, Experience, Asymmetric information, Tyranny of distance

**Jel Codes:** L83, L84

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# KISA SÜRELİ KİRALAMA PAZARI İÇİN SEZGİSEL BİR DEĞERLENDİRME OLUŞTURMA: TASARIM, PAZARLAMA VE DENEYİM

## Özet

Turizm endüstrisinde paylaşım ekonomisi büyümekte, ancak ev sahipleri gerekli hizmetleri sağlamakta zayıf kalmışlardır. Bu makalede, konaklama endüstrisine sezgisel değerlendirme kavramı tanıtılmıştır. Kısa süreli kiralama için sezgisel bir değerlendirme oluşturulmuştur. Gorder ve Lorimer'in "stayhere" adlı realite şovuna dayanan video etnografisi takip edilmiştir. Sezgisel değerlendirme tasarım, pazarlama ve deneyim kategorilerine göre kodlanmıştır. Airbnb platformunda ev sahipleri, "stayhere" şovuna atıfta bulunarak mülklerinin kalitesini işaret etmiştir. Bu, doluluk ve fiyat oranlarını artırmalarına yardımcı olmuştur. Bu değerlendirme yöntemiyle taraflar arasındaki asimetrik bilginin üstesinden gelinecektir. Sezgisel değerlendirme, misafirler rezervasyondan önce tesisi daha doğru değerlendirmelerine ve ev sahiplerine konukların beklentilerini anlamalarına yardımcı olacaktır. Evlerini yeniden tasarlamaları sayesinde merkezi konumdaki yerlere (mesafe gücü) karşı daha rekabetçi hale getirebilirler. Sezgisel değerlendirmede konaklama endüstrisindeki farklı uzmanlar veya kuruluşlar tarafından verilen sertifikalar aracılığıyla evlerin kalitesini güvence altına almak için potansiyel bir pazar mevcuttur. Dijital kiralama platformları da evin durumunu daha iyi yansıtmak için sıralamalarını ve incelemelerini değiştirebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sezgisel Değerlendirme, Tasarım, Pazarlama, Deneyim, Asimetrik bilgi, Mesafe gücü

**Jel Kodları:** L83, L84,

## INTRODUCTION

Homeowners already spend more than they anticipated in the short-te rental industry. Most are new in the industry, and they have no experience. Usually, they cannot meet the ends with the mortgage, insurance, and utilities. However, they expect that guests will cover the bills and bring a hefty profit. Therefore, most houses become a money-losing investment. The paper suggests a heuristic evaluation for guiding the

homeowners to improve their design, market, and experience offerings to attract more customers with a premium price.

Research in Canada reveals the even distribution between top earners and others in the short-term rental business. A few hosts earn most of the revenue. The top 1% of homeowners receive 20% of all revenue, and the top 10% make more than half of all income (Combs, Kerrigan, Wachsumuth, 2020).

Professional tourism managers receive lengthy and intensive tourism education. However, short-term rental owners have no educational background in the tourism industry. They lend their houses without having experience. Some hire professional management companies. Yet, most of these companies are established for long-term rental homes (Gall, 2020). Many issues related to serving guests, such as cozy beds, welcoming packages, and outside activities, are not familiar to these companies. The short-term business is customer-centric, and managers' duties provide guest experience from the booking process through checking out (Gall, 2020). So, traditional property managers need to become hospitality providers (Gall, 2020).

The sharing economy is to share unused resources through technology platforms in many industries (Mauri et al., 2018; Mody et al., 2019). In the literature, short-term rentals are discussed through the financial comparison between long-term and short-term rental markets. Based on the discussion, the return on short-term rentals is a crucial factor to determines the decision. For example, in 2015, in Barcelona, the average long-term rental charge was 28 EURO per night, while the average Airbnb price (short term rental) was 71 EURO per night. Hence, a homeowner had to rent their property 11.5 days a month on average to receive a long-term rental. According to Coles et al. (2017), this same calculation for New York is 18 days per month. So, Barcelona's short-term market is more financially favorable (Garcia-Lopez, Jofre-Monseny, Martinez-Mazza, Segú, 2018).

However, several costs are not considered, such as furniture, utilities, maintenance, platform, and opportunity. Therefore, the required nights to compensate are higher (Avci, 2020). So, unless the short-term rental fee charges are not high enough, the business is not lucrative

Owners pay the utilities and maintenance costs during the short-term stay. The long-term leases often cover the utilities and the care of the equipment when broken.

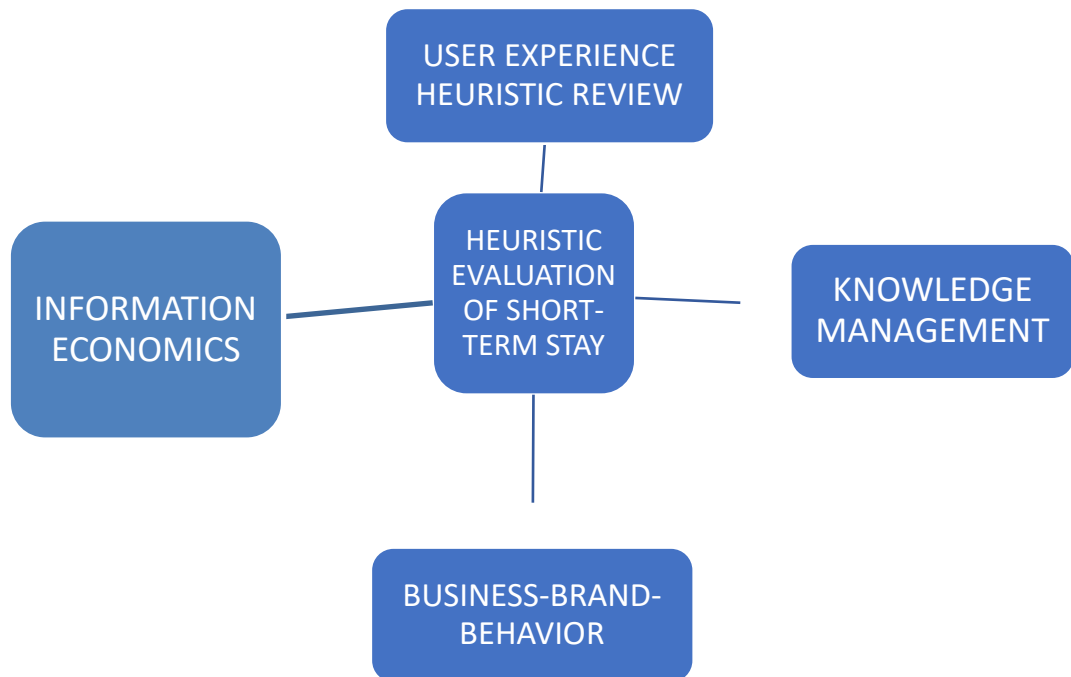
The platform charges a fee for each transaction. However, in the long-run rental, the transaction fee occurs rarely when new tenants move.

There are enormous **opportunity costs** in the short-term rental business. Owners should spend a great deal of time managing the coordination, including dealing with demanding customers, adjusting check-in and check-out, cleaning, making the place attractive, presenting properties and surroundings, bookkeeping, and receiving positive comments. It may become a necessity to hire a property management company. The property management company usually charges 20% of the rental revenue. In the long-run rental, the owners do not offer this service.

In the literature, there are attempts at evaluation choices. The travelers are asked according to economic (price, refund policy), grading (rating score), distance (e.g., closeness to the major landmarks), location (crime rate), and property policies & amenities (pet friendliness, parking) criteria (Tavanaa, Mousavic, Minad, Salehiand, 2020). However, the impact of design, marketing, and experience is missing in the academic literature.

There are four components of the heuristic evaluation: the heuristic evaluation of user experience, 3B (business, brand, behavior), information economics, and knowledge management (figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Four Components of Heuristic Evaluation



The **heuristic review of user experience (UX)** requires a group of evaluators to review the design with the accepted usability standards. This review is faster because we do not need to find users, participants, or stakeholders. This guideline will help them look from the user's perspective to evaluate their home for short-term rental. The main question in the heuristic review is, "do users understand the value proposition for the content offered to them?"

**3B represents business (product, design), brand (customer relations, marketing), and behavior (motivation, experience).** A successful enterprise should align all these three aspects (Tavassoli, 2015). In terms of a short-term rental, homeowners should understand their guests' expectations: why do they prefer to stay at home rather than hotels, what are they looking for (transportation, cooking opportunities, relaxation), and what problems do they face (Tierney, 2018)?

Guests feel that they are deceived because they found the rental houses are not reliable in terms of accommodation and services. This is an **information asymmetry** since the parties in the interaction have different information (Akerlof, 1970). The less informed party may try to prevent the other from taking advantage by avoiding the short-term rental. However, this behavior change may cause inefficiency. The heuristic evaluation offers two primary solutions to this problem, signaling and screening.

The input of the new economy is knowledge, which is obtained by coding. We can code the experts' **tacit knowledge** that they built over the long years. It is easy for physical capital to own, calculate, account for, and use for companies but expertise. Therefore, the coding of information needs to be learned. We articulate the deficiency of user experience of short-term rentals due to inadequate coding and show how to implement the quick reference guide (heuristic evaluation) to eliminate this deficit.

Airbnb provides information about the listing (home, room, the number of bedrooms, and the cancellation policy) and prices. The design, marketing, and experience that composes the heuristic evaluation merely cover. Therefore, the host and photographs' description parts are crucial to introducing houses and their true values.

## **LITERATURE**

### **Heuristic Review And User Experience**

The heuristic review requires a group of evaluators to review the design with the accepted standards in usability. This review is faster than other tests because we do not need to find users, participants, or stakeholders.

The heuristic review in user experience aims to complete tasks in the app from start to finish. As a rule, users do not like to solve puzzles on how to do it. The confusion of the interface will reduce the user's trust in the site. We remove the unnecessary blocs. The user should feel competent in the design schema.

An auditing procedure based on rules of thumb for good design is Norman's four principles, Nielsen's ten principles, ISO's seven principles, Krug's ten directions, and Shneiderman's seven principles. Most are carrying the test owners' names. These principles have many similarities. They are applied for web applications in general-purpose without tailoring a specific industry.

Research on heuristic evaluation has shown that, on average, one evaluator will find about 35% of the problems. Five evaluators can find 75%. Ten evaluators only see 85%. So, a good number is around five evaluators (Nielsen, 2000).

### **Business, Brand, Behavior (3B)**

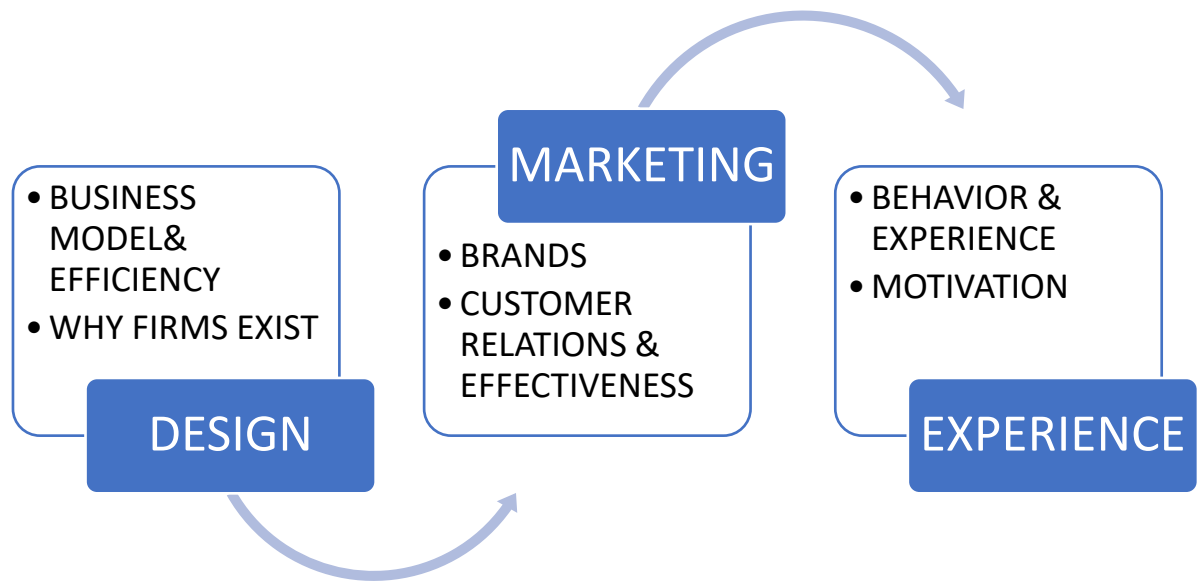
The business-oriented company has a robust organizational structure and high-quality products and designs. With its high production capacity, it reduces costs, increases sales, and standardizes its work in the market by taking advantage of economies of scale (Tavassoli, 2015). However, it cannot establish good communication with its users. It cannot set a vision and strategy to improve its business to users' demands.

The customer-oriented company differentiates itself from other companies through branding (marketing) (Kearon et al., 2017; Alter & Oppenheimer, 2008). It organizes strong advertising and public relations campaigns for branding and increases awareness. The representative meticulously takes care of the customer (such as fast after-sale services), the benefit of the customer's features is explained, and offers a stylish product. It uses a high amount of customer data to provide better service. However, it cannot meet the deep needs of the user.

The user-oriented company aims to enrich the user's activities (behavior, experience) (Wood, 2012). It prioritizes emotional and cognitive needs over physical ones. It treats the user with his environment. It follows the daily activities and lifestyles of people. While constructing the solution, it works with the stakeholders by building strong empathy. If the business production capacity is inadequate, its customer relations are weak; the superior user experience cannot return to sale. Therefore, the three components (business-brand-behavior) should be aligned.

The interlink between business, customer relations, and user experience is aligned with efficiency, effectiveness, and experience (figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Design-Marketing-Experience Alignment



Source : Tavassoli, 2015

### **Short-term Stay: The Impact of Sharing Economy on the Market**

The short-term rental is a part of the sharing economy that carries elements of the sharing economy, enhancing society's welfare. However, gentrification, uneven distribution, and a drop in hotels' revenues are the negative aspects of the process.

A reinvention of the economy has been seen in recent years through the growth of a shared economy. A sharing economy is an opportunity for individuals to exchange their underutilized assets with others through information technology intermediaries. The modern sharing economy is diverse and has multiple different components. Shared housing for a rental is one type of structure and organization. In the housing consumption context, the sharing economy has redefined to involve real property use's exclusivity. (Petropoulos, 2017).

The key features of the sharing economy are access, user-to-user, and allocation of idle resources. More individuals are voluntarily engaging in economic activity, drawing on private resources (both assets and labor) that would otherwise remain unused (Constantiou, Marton & Tuunainen, 2017). Sharing the economy positively affects



communities by strengthening local economies, living standards, necessary infrastructure, entrepreneurship opportunities, and social relationships (Jašková, 2019).

## **METHOD**

### **Video Ethnography And Heuristic Evaluation**

Video ethnography is the video documentation of subjects' actions in their natural environment to experience and perceive (Schaeffer, 1995). It is widely used in anthropology and sociology (Pink, 2007).

Video ethnography permits observing experts, allowing them to view the captured video content, address their practice reflexively, and improve through analysis.

Video-ethnographic approaches aim to highlight experts' experience, expertise, and insight into the complexities of their work processes (Carroll et al., 2008). This is done by first reviewing their work and organizational strategies with experts and explaining the social, technical, environmental, and organizational contingencies that enable and limit them. In reviewing video clips, researchers gain insight into practice areas that could benefit from a redesign by encouraging experts to address their practices.

We code the heuristic review of Genevieve Gorder, an interior designer, and Peter Lorimer, a real estate broker, based on their tv drama show "stayhere" on Netflix.

Stayhere is an American reality television series on Netflix that focuses on home improvements for short-term rentals. The eight episodes were released on Netflix on August 17, 2018 (Van Voorhis, 2018).

Experts Gorder and Lorimer help homeowners transform their unsuccessful rentals into highly sought ones (Strohm, 2018). They take on eight properties scattered across the United States, including a houseboat in Seattle, Washington, a brownstone in Brooklyn, New York, and a firehouse in Washington, D.C.

After our experts redesign each property, the houses become a moneymaker. They have been so booked up that the homeowners have raised their rates. Some are even making so much money they have purchased other properties (Strohm, 2018).

Experts flip the short-term rentals of regular people into fabulous destination getaways. Interior designer Gorder is a two-time Emmy nominee known for her role on T.L.C.'s "Trading Spaces" and several other home design shows (Nota, 2018)

Lorimer, a well-known real estate agent in L.A., is making videos related to real estate. The agency lists 12 high-end properties available for rent around the Los Angeles area, from \$550 to \$5,625 per night. (Nota, 2018). He has already realized 405 YouTube videos and 248 Facebook videos on real estate (Van Voorhis, 2018).

Gorder and Lorimer help vacation rental owners transform their one-star disappointment into a five-star stay (Nota, 2018). They aim to create moneymakers for homeowners and memorable experiences for their guests. The hosts introduce each city with a brief history of its rental market or tourism landscape and vacation rental data from AllTheRooms, including total rental units, average nightly rates, and annual revenues. This sets up how the hosts can make each property more competitive in its market (Nota, 2018)

They do so through the total renovation of both the property and the owners' marketing strategy. While Gorder revamps the property's design and adds features designed for guest appeal, Lorimer teaches the owners about branding and pricing (Nota, 2018).

Along the way, homeowners learn how to add amenities, local experiences, and marketing tactics to make their guests happy and earn more money. At the end of the episode, the homeowners are surprised with a magazine-worthy home reveal and rental rates that meet their financial and occupancy goals. The Netflix series leave out the challenges of home renovations and short-term rental management (Nota, 2018).

Gorder and Lorimer revamp the property with contemporary design, stocking it full of both Instagram-worthy features and amenities that guests are looking for (Nota, 2018)

Both hosts always bring their concepts back to the equally important goals of increasing revenue and delivering special guest experiences throughout the episodes. They show their areas of expertise through strategies like owning a niche in the market through design and quality (Nota, 2018)

Based on codification (insights-affinity clustering-conceptualization), we design the heuristic evaluation in three main categories and three sub-categories: Design (**interior architecture, quality & quantity of beds, art & depersonalization**), marketing (**niche, reviews & social media, pictures**), and experience (**welcoming, in-house activities, attractive local place**) (table 1)

**Table 1.** GL Heuristic Evaluation

| HEURISTIC EVALUATION OF SHORT-TERM RENTAL                              | Comments/What to Improve |
|--|--------------------------|
| Current Revenue  | Target Revenue           |
| <b>DESIGN</b>  |                          |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>   |                          |
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, bedroom, and bathroom) |                          |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>                                    |                          |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet                                 |                          |
| <b>Art and Depersonalized</b>  |                          |
| Local artist and depersonalized  |                          |
| <b>MARKETING</b>   |                          |
| <b>Niche</b>   |                          |
| Focus to niche   |                          |
| <b>Review &amp; Social Media</b>                                       |                          |
| A positive review, social media  |                          |
| <b>Pictures</b>  |                          |
| Professional photographer  |                          |
| <b>EXPERIENCE</b>  |                          |
| <b>Welcoming</b>   |                          |
| Welcome package  |                          |
| <b>In house activities</b>   |                          |
| Things to do inside the house  |                          |
| <b>Local attractive place</b>  |                          |
| Local place to eat, see, do  |                          |

**Source:** Gordon and Lorimer, 2018

## **Design**

**Interior Architecture:** A unique design will help distinguish properties from all the other rentals. The advantage of short-term rental is that hotels can be cold and sterile, and homes are warm and welcoming. The house should bring a warm feeling. The living space should be fun.

The place's attractiveness consists of four parts: living space (recreational areas), kitchen, bedrooms, and bathrooms. Our experts demolish the house to create a spacious kitchen (reduce the equipment size), fun living areas, and cozy bedrooms. They redesign as luxurious homes; however, luxury does not mean many items; fewer products but higher quality.

Even small details, including phone chargers or strollers, are essential. They create a platform for the meeting. They organize fire and barbecue amenities at gathering.

### **Quality & Quantity of Bedrooms**

The quantity and quality of beds and textiles are overemphasized. According to Gorder and Lorimer, the most critical aspect of a short stay in the bedroom include the number of beds, the position of beds, room environment, and textile quality.

Additional room reduces the cost per person in the renting place. Office rooms are converted to bedrooms. This makes it more affordable per person. The textile should be cotton, clean (white sheet, cover), and comfortable.

### **Art & depersonalization**

They use local artistic items and talents. They also remove personal items in the commercial space (depersonalized).

They aim to show the culture and the history of the property. Our experts implement local artistic features. If they design at home in Malibu, they check the Malibu style, which reflects a contemporary beach lifestyle and no animal products.

## **Marketing**

### **Niche**

They position the house to a specific customer category. The home and surroundings cater to the romantic getaway, family weekend, wedding, or friends gathering. They organize the design, write the house description, and find hashtags based on this niche market.

### **Review and social media**

At the GL, the specific goal is to set the stage for the guest to make excellent comments. In heuristic evaluation, social media is also taking account of the reviews: Hashtags, Instagram postings, YouTube videos, and blog writings are emphasized. They recommend that homeowners develop places at home to take pictures and post through specific hashtags. This also includes blogs about specialties of property such as a vineyard, mountain biking, and hiking. By giving Google a pay-per-click advertisement, they promote search engine optimization so people can find the place.

### **Pictures**

According to G.L., a design without taking professional photography is incomplete. The amateur shooting with a poor camera (cell phone) sends messages to guests that the property's quality is poor. The photographing period is shooting to find the best representative picture and discuss the property with different eyes.

### **Experience**

### **Welcoming**

There are three issues in welcoming packages: 5-star experience, spending 10 percent of a guest's first night's rental on a welcome perk and serving local tests.

### **In house activities**

A memorable experience for the guest is crucial. Given an attractive design, the static place becomes boring. In house activities, swimming, playing, watching, and eating are essential.

### **Local attractive place**

The eventual goal of a guest is to visit the surroundings. Presenting all the potentials of local activities, from seeing to eating, is crucial. A good host is a source of information and a guide for their guests.

## **HEURISTIC EVALUATION FOR SHORT-TERM RENTING**

In this part, we present how experts Gorder and Lorimer evaluate the house based on our decodification, what improvements they realize, and the outcomes.

### **Seattle Lakeside Houseboat**

Seattle has had a houseboat culture since the late 1800s. Today this tradition is still alive throughout Union Lake, making it one of the best for waterfront living. There are 5000 vacation rentals in Seattle, generating 125 million USD but only 27 household boats (not intense competition). The owners bought it for 145.000 USD in 2012. It is currently listed for 100 USD as a one-bedroom and one-bathroom. **There is only one night booked yet.** It is 630 square feet with a roof deck. Expenses associated (tax, mortgage, utilities) on the Houseboat are 4000 USD.

Space is crammed from the heuristic review; the kitchen should be rebuilt. Oversized laundry and the refrigerator should be removed, marketing photos are weak, and it needs to be rebuilt and rebranded.

The design strategy is to build a comfortable, cozy, tiny home, adding American native motives handmade wood doors. A mini dishwasher, refrigerator, and microwave are replaced. The living room is converted to a luxurious master bedroom with a harbor view since the bed is the most critical aspect of a rental unit. The upstairs has another bedroom with a lovely deck.

The marketing strategy is to build a romantic getaway. The expected monthly total revenue is 4,000 USD (250 USD\* 16 nights). They start Google ad pay-per-click as a romantic Seattle houseboat rental. A professional photographer takes pictures.

The experience strategy is to welcome guests with local delicacies (Piroshky, salmon, apple chips...). The house guide book is created, including coffee testing, hot tub boat rentals, vacation photographer, and oyster shucking classes (Table 2)

**Table 2.** Seattle Lakeside Houseboat

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Seattle Lakeside Houseboat<br>Price: 100 USD per night<br>Current revenue: 0<br>Feature: 630 square feet-1 bed-1 bath<br>Occupation: 2 person | WHAT TO IMPROVE<br><br>Target revenue:<br>250USD*16 nights= 4000                   |
| <b>DESIGN</b>   |  |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>  |  |
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, sleeping)   | Spacious for living areas, bedroom, deck. Reduce the equipment size of the kitchen |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>   |  |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet  | Enlarge the bed numbers, position the bed in the center of the boat.               |
| <b>Art &amp; Depersonalized</b>   |  |
| Local artist and depersonalized   | Native American style door, decorating warm, intellectual, romantic                |
| <b>MARKETING</b>  |  |
| <b>Niche</b>  |  |
| Focus to niche  | Rebranding as Romantic Seattle Gateway   |
| <b>Review &amp; Social Review</b>   |  |
| A positive review, social media   | #RomanticSeattle<br>Houseboat  |
| <b>Pictures</b>   |  |
| Professional photographer   | Photos need to be taken by a professional  |
| <b>EXPERIENCE</b>   |  |
| <b>Welcoming</b>  |  |
| Welcome package   | Bring the local food as a complementary (Piroshky, salmon,...)                     |
| <b>In house activities</b>  |  |

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Things to do inside the house | Inspirational, watch the fantastic view of Seattle harbor from the deck and master room, read books, |
| <b>Local attractive place</b> |  |
| Local place to eat, see, do   | Photographing<br>Hot tubs<br>Coffee testing<br>Dinner fish & mussel<br>Oyster shucking classes       |

**Source:** Gordon and Lorimer, 2018

### **The Beach House On Malibu**

The beachside bungalow locates in Malibu, Southern California. The owner hardly manages the house physically and financially. It is listed as a short-term rental, 1,500 USD per night. However, the owner did not get any rental income yet. It has one bedroom and two baths. The location is luxurious, but the house is lousy. There are 300 residencies in Malibu. The design and marketing experience will differentiate this house from other properties. (Table 3).

In design, they transform property into a deluxe stay. Many items reflect the taste of the owner. Every personal item is removed (depersonalized)

The kitchen gets bigger. The second room is converted into a bedroom, which makes it more affordable for guests. Outdoor will be part of the Malibu experience (Malibu style -casual, contemporary, beach lifestyle, no animal product).

From a marketing perspective, the house can make 33.000 USD per month (1500USD\*22 nights). The photos need to reflect the 5-star experience, especially the fantastic view from the terrace.

Regarding experience, celebrity chefs in gourmet kitchens will be available for the guests. The concept is a communal, artistic way of having hors d'oeuvres. After the design, marketing, and experience changes, The owner may collect 33,000 USD (1500USD\*22 nights) monthly revenue

**Table 3.** The Beach House On Malibu



|  |   |
|--|---|
| The Beach House On Malibu<br>Price: 400 USD per night<br>Current revenue: 0<br>Feature: 450 square feet-1 bed-1 bath<br>Occupation: 2 person | WHAT TO IMPROVE<br><br>Target revenue:<br>1500USD*22 nights= 33,000   |
| <b>DESIGN</b>  |   |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>   |   |
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, sleeping)  | Redesign as a luxurious home, enlarge the kitchen   |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>  |   |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet   | Increase the number of beds, remove the sports equipment in the bedroom, best textile   |
| <b>Art</b>   |   |
| Local artist and depersonalized  | Malibu style -casual, contemporary, beach lifestyle, no animal product).  |
| <b>MARKETING</b>   |   |
| <b>Niche</b>   |   |
| Focus to niche   | Rebranding as Malibu Beach House 5 star experience  |
| <b>Review</b>  |   |
| A positive review, social media  | #Malibubeachhouse   |
| <b>Pictures</b>  |   |
| Professional photographer  | Photos need to be taken by a professional   |
| <b>EXPERIENCE</b>  |   |
| <b>Welcoming</b>   |   |
| Welcome package  | Bring the local food as a complementary (champagne, cheese)<br>Deliver 5-star service/food. A local food firm brings food service to guests |
| <b>In house activities</b>   |   |
| Things to do inside the house  | inspiration, the gorgeous terrace and watch the fantastic view of Malibu beach harbor,  |
| <b>Local attractive place</b>  |   |
| Local place to eat, see, do  | Culinary service<br>Surfing<br>Walking on the beach   |

**Source:** Gordon and Lorimer, 2018

### **3BR SoCo Pool Oasis in Austin**

Austin is a live music scene, convention, and festival place. There are 6200 rental apartments. South Congress is one of the most desirable neighborhoods. The city is filled with artwork and murals.

The property has a short-rental house with two bedrooms and two bathrooms. Only three rentals have a pool (low competition). The owner charges 250 USD with a 60% occupation. The cost of the property is 4500USD, including mortgage, repair, and taxes.

In design, Texas-style is implemented: Boots, horns, barbecues, and murals. They remove personal items. They convert the office room into the living room to increase the occupancy. A pool, hot tub, patio arena, cabana, and pool house are renewed. When people walk in, a game room with Pac Man welcomes them. A full outdoor kitchen and barbecue service are designed. The furniture is updated.

In marketing, they make this home perfect for festivalgoers and travelers looking for the local vibe. The goal is to reach 80% occupancy and 420USD per night. Vertical Aztec murals on the pool house, cabana, and pool attract people to take pictures and social media posts. The branding is switched from "two bedrooms Victorian pool house" to "three-bedroom pool oasis steps from trendy South Congress" in Austin

In customer experience, the guidebook is organized to inform the favorite restaurants, activities, and authentic Texas barbecue. They offer guests a master barbecue class for brisket style. The monthly revenue has increased from 4500 USD to 10,080 USD (Table 4).

**Table 4.** 3BR SoCo Pool Oasis

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Texas- Austin<br>Price: 250 USD per night<br>Current revenue: 250 USD*18: 4500 USD<br>Feature: 2 beds and 2 baths<br>Occupation: 4 person | WHAT TO IMPROVE<br>Target revenue:<br>420 USD*24: 10,080 USD |
| DESIGN  |  |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>  |  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, sleeping) | Living & fun space larger kitchen<br>Hot tub, patio arena, cabana, pool house<br>Cover machine in the pool area<br>Barbecue place |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>                       |   |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet                    | Office room converted to a bedroom and purchase the best textile  |
| <b>Art</b>  |   |
| Local artist and depersonalized                           | Design for reminding people of Austin (Mural design, horns)   |
| <b>MARKETING</b>  |   |
| <b>Niche</b>  |   |
| Focus to niche  | Rebranding as three bedroom pool oasis steps from trendy South Congress in Austin   |
| <b>Review</b>   |   |
| Positive review, social media                             | Many hashtags, capturing special movements, awesome reviews   |
| <b>Pictures</b>   |   |
| Professional photographer                                 | Photos need to be taken by a professional   |
| <b>EXPERIENCE</b>   |   |
| <b>Welcoming</b>  |   |
| Welcome package   | Bring the local food as a complimentary   |
| <b>In house activities</b>                                |   |
| Things to do inside the house                             | Table play, barbecue, swimming pool   |
| <b>Local attractive place</b>                             |   |
| Local place to eat, see, do                               | Barbecue service<br>Artwork   |

**Source:** Gordon and Lorimer, 2018

### **Yellow Block BnB Brooklyn**

The property locates in Brooklyn, New York. Brooklyn is a source of creativity, from music to restaurants. There are 14,000 properties, which indicates intense competition in the market.

The house has seven bedrooms and five bathrooms with 2700 square feet and was built in 1899.

The entrance is very squeezed. It feels like a youth hostel. In design, they enlarge the entrance. Here, they make an exception and reduce the number of beds but gain a large lobby and dining area. They expand the squeezed access and make it a beautiful and warm common area. They convert the old kitchen into the laundry room since it is a necessity for the large group. They refurbish the house.

In marketing, they brand quality accommodation for a large group who wants to explore Brooklyn and New York City. They believe that great photographs are the most essential tools to sell short term rentals and beat the competition.

In my experience, they ask a famous bagel baker to produce a special colorful bagel. They prepare the guidebook for the top attraction places, restaurants, and bars. They increase in bookings from 13 nights to 20 nights (a monthly increase of 7000 USD) (table 5).

**Table 5.** Yellow Block BnB Brooklyn

|  |  |
|--|--|
| New York-Brooklyn<br>Price: 900 USD per night<br>Feature: 7 beds and 5 baths<br>Occupation: 4 person | WHAT TO IMPROVE<br>900 USD*20: 18.000 USD<br>(the owner wants to keep affordable)  |
| DESIGN   |  |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>   |  |
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, sleeping)  | Living & fun space<br>Enlarging the living space and food area<br>Warm welcoming<br>Warm feeling<br>Books<br>Phone charges |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>  |  |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet   | Redesign food and best textile   |
| <b>Art</b>   |  |
| Local artist and depersonalized  | Design for reminding people of New York City images/pillow   |
| MARKETING  |  |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Niche</b>                       |  |
| Focus to niche                     | Quality accommodation for a large group who wants to explore Brooklyn and N.Y.C.   |
| <b>Review &amp; social reviews</b> |  |
| A positive review, social media    | Many hashtags, capturing special movements, awesome reviews  |
| <b>Pictures</b>                    |  |
| Professional photographer          | Photos need to be taken by a professional  |
| EXPERIENCE                         |  |
| <b>Welcoming</b>                   |  |
| Welcome package                    | Bring the local food as complimentary colorful bagels  |
| <b>In house activities</b>         |  |
| Things to do inside the house      | Table play, relaxing place, eating   |
| <b>Local attractive place</b>      |  |
| Local place to eat, see, do        | Creating guidebook of N.Y.C.- online<br>List to do/eat in N.Y.C.<br>Hip hop culture, The notorious B.I.G.<br>Colorful bagel shop |

**Source:** Gordon and Lorimer, 2018

### **Paso Robles Vintage Ranch**

In Paso Robles, South California, Vintage Ranch has a 66-acre grapevine and wedding venue with a farmhouse and a 250-year-old oak tree (Linn, 2018). It is 300 square feet, one bedroom and one bath. The decoration is outdated. They organize weddings ceremony, and the occupancy rate is only 25%.

In design, they transform their outdated guest house with custom furniture, a deck, a fire pit, stunning views of vineyards, and oak trees (Linn, 2018). They create an indoor-outdoor living. The bedroom (a big mirror for the bride), kitchen (counter space and refrigerator), bathroom, and windows are renewed. They build an outdoor space with a big deck platform for entertaining all the guests.

In marketing, they brand into a romantic cottage. They promote a rustic lifestyle. A professional blogger will run websites. The hashtag #VintageRanch is introduced.

In my experience, this will be a vacation rental for wine lovers. Two of the top 25 wines in Wine Spectator magazine are from Paso Robles. They design vintage and wine tours. They organize wine testing under the old oak tree. The owners teach how to prune wine. Ziplines, helicopter tours, and outside games are available.

They convert to a rural resort that people will book again and again. The occupancy rate has jumped to 75%. The monthly revenue has increased from 2,000 USD to 4,000 USD (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Paso Robles Vintage Ranch

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Paso Robles Vintage Ranch-California<br>Price: 250 USD per night<br>Feature: Seven beds and five baths<br>Occupation: 4 person | WHAT TO IMPROVE<br>Target: 250 USD per night<br>16 Nights: 4,000 USD  |
| DESIGN   |   |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>   |   |
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, sleeping)  | Custom furniture, a deck, fire pit.<br>The bedroom (a big mirror for the bride), kitchen (counter space and refrigerator), bathroom, and windows are renewed. They build an outdoor space with a big deck platform for entertaining all the guests. |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>  |   |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet   | Redesign bedroom and best textile   |
| <b>Art</b>   |   |
| Local artist and depersonalized  | Design for reminding people of the rustic style.<br>Wood table<br>Horseshoes  |
| MARKETING  |   |
| <b>Niche</b>   |   |
| Focus to niche   | Rustic lifestyle. Romantic getaway. Wedding. Wine tasting.  |

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
|                                   | Writing a story based on specialties of property such as a vineyard, mountain biking, hiking     |
| <b>Review &amp; social review</b> |  |
| A positive review, social media   | Reviews and social media: S.O.E., picture, and hashtag, wedding blogging, wine tasting.          |
| <b>Pictures</b>                   |  |
| Professional photographer         | Photos need to be taken by a professional  |
| EXPERIENCE                        |  |
| <b>Welcoming</b>                  |  |
| Welcome package                   | Bring the local food as a complimentary colorful bagel   |
| <b>In house activities</b>        |  |
| Things to do inside the house     |  |
| <b>Local attractive place</b>     |  |
| Local place to eat, see, do       | Private vine testing<br>Ziplines<br>Helicopter tours<br>Learn how to prune wine<br>Game outdoors |

**Source:**Gordon and Lorimer, 2018

### **Tyranny of Distance**

Gordon-Lorimer's heuristic evaluation implicitly put many responsibilities on the owners' shoulders to work with a team to improve the location in terms of design, marketing, and experience.

However, some scholars argue that the most salient topic is labeled "distance" and highlights a prevailing pedestrian scale of short/walking distances from the listing to tourist attractions and, secondarily, transport facilities in their research about the short-term rental market in *Florence* (Celata, Capineri, Romano, 2020). The topics such as "feel at home," "welcome gift," the quality of the "apartment," and "host performance

(kindness and guidance)" are secondary and sometimes irrelevant for booking (Celata et al., 2020). They conclude that short-term rentals are relatively closer to the city's main attractions than traditional accommodation facilities. The notions of life like a local and exploring less touristic neighborhoods do not affect the booking. The dominant factor is a convenient location for the city's main touristic center (Celata et al., 2020). They call this preference for tourists a "tyranny of distance" and shrinking of the tourist city into a few privileged neighborhoods (Celata et al., 2020)

However, G.L.'s heuristic evaluation predicts that their properties may become very competitive if they improve the design, marketing, and experience. For the sake of argument, we check if there is any house that charges a higher price outside of Florence's center.

Our first property is Casine al Sole La Loggia, outside of the central old Florence city circle but attracts guests with a charming apartment with design, terrace, and parking facilities (table 7).

The center location price ranges from 25 USD to 113 USD, and the average cost is approximately 60 USD. Given the disadvantage of the distance, our property charges 79 USD for the night and 71 USD for the night if guests stay at least one week (14-21st September 2020). In the meantime, there are many opportunities to improve design, marketing, and experience (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Glamorous Apt With Garage Next To The Florence Center

|   |  |
|---|--|
| HEURISTIC EVALUATION OF SHORT-TERM RENTAL<br>Price: 79 USD per night<br><b>Glamorous Apt with garage next to the center</b> | What to Improve                          |
| DESIGN  |  |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>  |  |
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, sleeping)   | Attractive design, very clean, organized |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>   |  |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet  |  |
| <b>Art</b>  |  |



|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Local artist and depersonalized | More picture, ornaments to Florence can be added                                      |
| <b>MAREKTING</b>                |   |
| <b>Niche</b>                    |   |
| Focus to niche                  | People with cars looking for a nicely decorated house and not too much far to center. |
| <b>Review</b>                   |   |
| Positive review, social media   | Highly recommended.   |
| <b>Pictures</b>                 |   |
| Professional photographer       | High-quality picture  |
| <b>EXPERIENCE</b>               |   |
| <b>Welcoming</b>                |   |
| Welcome package                 |   |
| <b>In house activities</b>      |   |
| Things to do inside the house   | The breakfast is eating on the terrace but needs to expand activities.                |
| <b>Local attractive place</b>   |   |
| Local place to eat, see, do     | Florence is a lovely city but no information available on where to eat, see...        |

**Source:** Airbnb, 2020

Our research goes further, far away from Florence; we check another location charging a higher price than the centrally located place and whether they implement the three main categories (design, marketing, and experience).

This property is in the Tuscan hills in the Chianti region, about 30 minutes south of Florence by drive. As we notice, the house's exterior design comprises the local traditional stone house, and the interior design is attractive. Many ornaments reflect the characteristics of the region.

They focus on families with kids who want to swim in a gorgeous swimming pool and devote themselves to a day visiting Florence. They serve wine, cheese, and cookies to their guests (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Tuscan hills in the Chianti region in Florence

| HEURISTIC EVALUATION OF SHORT-TERM RENTAL                 | COMMENTS & WHAT TO IMPROVE  |
|---|---|
| Tuscan hills in the Chianti region in Florence            |   |
| <b>DESIGN</b>   |   |
| <b>Interior Architecture</b>                              |   |
| Is the place attractive (living space, kitchen, sleeping) | Stone house and beautifully decorated                               |
| <b>Quantity and Quality of Beds</b>                       |   |
| Number of beds and quality cover sheet                    |   |
| <b>Art and depersonalized</b>                             |   |
| Local artist and depersonalized                           | Artistic regional works are reflecting on the house.                |
| <b>MARKETING</b>  |   |
| <b>Niche</b>  |   |
| Focus to niche  | Family vacation and couples love nature and wine.                   |
| <b>Review</b>   |   |
| A positive review, social media                           | Very positive about the owner and his property.                     |
| <b>Pictures</b>   |   |
| Professional photographer                                 |   |
| <b>EXPERIENCE</b>   |   |
| <b>Welcoming</b>  |   |
| Welcome package   | They serve wine, cookies, and cheese.                               |
| <b>In house activities</b>                                |   |
| Things to do inside the house                             | Pool, walking, view of the vineyard.                                |
| <b>Local attractive place</b>                             |   |
| Local place to eat, see, do                               | local advice on attractions, wineries, and restaurants and guidance |

**Source:** Airbnb, 2020

### **Airbnb Review and Gordon-Lorimer Heuristic Review**

In Airbnb, ratings give a grade of the perceived quality of the accommodation based on six evaluation criteria:

- ✓ cleanliness (was the space clean and tidy?);
- ✓ accuracy (how accurately did the listing page represent the space?);

- ✓ value (did the listing provide good value for money?);
- ✓ communication (how well did the host communicate with the guest?);
- ✓ arrival (how smoothly did the check-in go?);
- ✓ location (how did the guest feel about the listing's neighborhood?).

These criteria are mostly operational and fundamental. These do not add value to property much or increase competitiveness against other home rentals.

In G.L.'s analysis, the design partly covers cleanliness but does not represent the stage such as furniture, deck, pool, cabana, or the quality of materials such as the bedsheets.

The marketing includes accuracy, value, and location but is beyond the basic needs. It is choosing a niche market that caters to all needs. According to G.L., professional photographs show the quality of property and service.

The experience covers communication. However, the experience makes what guests book again and again. It brings motivation, joy, and energy. It creates a social environment to share.

The only part that crosses Gorder-Lorimer's heuristic evaluation and Airbnb is the review. However, Airbnb allows written commentaries of a maximum of 1,000 words submitted four days after check-out (Fradkin, Grewal & Holtz, 2018).

Online ratings and reviews are essential information sources in accommodation decisions (Zhu et al., 2019; Prayag and Ozanne, 2018; Sainaghi and Baggio, 2019; Belarmino and Koh, 2020). They also facilitate favorable word of mouth and reputation mechanisms (Ert et al., 2016). Martin-Fuentes et al. (2018) indicate the price and rating score are the two most important indicators. Price and rating scores are mutually crucial in the hospitality industry and sharing economy. The rating scores and branded

affiliations are widely used in the hospitality industry as a quality signal to support pricing decisions (Abrate et al., 2011; Thrane, 2005).

Even though these review contents have an enormous impact on consumers' purchasing decisions (Liang et al., 2020), **they are an effect and not a cause**. The benefit of heuristic evaluation is setting the stage, value proposition, and experience to make great comments.

The social appearance in G.L. is considerably taking account. The hashtags, Instagram posting, YouTube videos, and blog writings on property specialties such as view, mountain biking, hiking, and vine testing. They develop Instagram hashtags for each property. They design specific locations at home to inspire guests to take pictures and post them.

## CONCLUSION

In the heuristic evaluation, design, marketing, and experience should be aligned. These improvements in these categories help owners set the stage for positive reviews and social media (S.O.E., picture and hashtag, blogging) appearance, which are tremendously crucial for short-term rentals. Owners should turn all possibilities that guests post them and add their hashtags.

Almost in most cases, experts demolish the house to shape the needs of short-term rentals. They mainly focus on the bedroom and the unique feature of the house. Cozy beds with the super quality of textiles are a must. The history and culture of the region (art) are incorporated into the design to distinguish the house from others. They consider homes not only a place to stay but fun. They build a play section with different activities in the living room or platform.

The design and culture of the region should be aligned. When Gordon and Lorimer discovered an oak tree in Pablo ranch (California), they developed wine-related activities under the oak tree since it was a world-famous wine region. However, in Austin (Texas), famous for meat, they create a full barbecue set. Based on these activities, learning courses are offered: The brisket lesson in Austin and the Pablo Ranch prude.

We can summarize nine rules based on the Gordon-Lorimer heuristic evaluation

1. Demolish the house catering to the needs of guests for short-term rental
2. Enlarge the bedroom numbers and use the best textile
3. Use local artists and depersonalize
4. Identify the niche
- 5. Improve the review and social media appearance**
6. Hire a professional photographer and discuss the possibilities of design, marketing, and experience while shooting
7. Prepare welcoming packages (10% of first-night expenditure)
8. Enhance in-house activities
9. Advise attractive local places and activities

We present all the properties improved by Gordon-Lorimer with nine rules (Table 9) with the example of Seattle-Houseboat. This rule guideline is the inspiration for a to-do list in preparing houses for the market.

**Table 9.** Pattern and Rules at GL Heuristic Evaluation

|                   | Design   | Marketing   | Experience   |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| Seattle-Houseboat | Rule 1. (demolish) Redesign as a comfortable, cozy tiny home. Spacious for living areas, bedroom, deck. Reduce the equipment size of the kitchen | Rule 4. (Positioning) Rebranding as Romantic Seattle Gateway<br><br>Rule5.(Review & Social media) | Rule7. (Welcoming package-spend 10% for complimentary)<br><br>Bring the local food as a complementary (Piroshky, salmon,.) |

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
|  | <p>Rule 2. (Enlarge the bed numbers &amp; best textile)</p> <p>Position the bed in the center of the boat.</p> <p>Rule 3. (Art &amp; depersonalized)</p> <p>Native American style door, decorating warm, intellectual, romantic</p> | <p>#RomanticSeattle Houseboat</p> <p>Rule 6. (Professional photographer and discuss the possibilities of design, marketing, and experience while shooting)</p> | <p>Rule8. (In house activities)</p> <p>Inspirational, watch the fantastic view of Seattle harbor from the deck and master room, read books</p> <p>Rule9. (Search for local activities)</p> <p>Photographing</p> <p>Hot tubs</p> <p>Coffee testing</p> <p>Dinner fish &amp; mussel</p> <p>Oyster shucking classes</p> |
|--|---|--|--|

The people that owned the properties had invested, and therefore the episodes were not like a T.V. show. They recover their investment soon (Lorimer, 2019). When we check the property rental rate in 2020 (even during Coronavirus), it is impressive. The price in the coronavirus era remains the same as in 2018 (when renovation takes place) or above (table 10).

In the Airbnb platform, when we search these properties, we notice that homeowners signal their quality of homes by referring to Netflix's "stayhere" show. This helps them to increase the occupation and price rates (Airbnb, 2020 and 2021) (Quinn, 2018).

Indeed, the heuristic evaluation can become a market certificate to avoid asymmetric information. A potential market for assuring the quality of homes through the certificates issued by different experts or organizations in the hospitality industry exists. These certificates cover design to hospitality and guarantee service.

**Table 10.** Comparing the Rental Fees of Properties

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | During the episode (USD per night) (2018) | 2020-2021 Listing in AirBnB (USD per night) |
|--|---|---|

|                             |      |           |
|-----------------------------|------|-----------|
| Seattle Lakeside Houseboat  | 250  | 300-300   |
| The Beach House On Malibu   | 1500 | 2000-2000 |
| 3BR SoCo Pool Oasis         | 420  | 637-1100  |
| Yellow Block BnB*           | 900  | 900-1500  |
| Paso Robles Vintage Ranch   | 250  | 250-300   |
| Hudson Carriage House       | 350  | 383-383   |
| Hudson Carriage Studio      | 140  | 150-150   |
| Palm Springs Time Machine   | 1000 | 1000-1000 |
| The Historic DC Firehouse 4 | 500  | 764-714   |

Source: Airbnb (2020, 2021), list link (Elliott, 2018). \*The owner already declared that he would not change the price since he believes that this house is dedicated to the working class.

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