

# Luxury lost in translation: The flaws in Airbnb's badge system

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The global rise of peer-to-peer accommodation platforms such as Airbnb has reshaped the lodging landscape. The platforms offer everything from budget stays to luxury escapes relying on the 'Superhost' badge to indicate hosting excellence. However, in November 2023, Airbnb introduced a new recognition system - 'Guest Favourites'- and removed the 'Superhost' filter [1]. This shift has raised questions as to how effectively these designations reflect guest satisfaction, particularly in the luxury segment, where service quality and property features are critical. On the one hand, the 'Superhost' status is host-centric, based on consistent performance indicators such as high ratings, responsiveness (90%+), low cancellations, and minimum booking counts [2]. In contrast, 'Guest Favourites' highlights the appeal of the accommodation itself, emphasising high review scores, frequent bookings, and overall guest popularity [3]. This latter designation shifts the emphasis from the intangibility of host behaviour to the tangible attributes of the property (e.g., décor, cleanliness, amenities or location).

## Evolution of Airbnb and Luxury Expansion

Launched in 2008, Airbnb evolved from a budget-friendly platform into a global force, which by 2024, offered over 7 million listings across 220+ countries. Airbnb now serves diverse traveller preferences—from treehouses to castles and everything in between [2, 4]. With the launch of Airbnb Luxe in 2019, the platform entered the luxury sector, targeting high-end travellers seeking premium experiences [5]. Airbnb introduced the 'Superhost' programme three years earlier to bolster host reputation [6]. At that time, guests were primarily influenced by host-related attributes such as responsiveness and profile ratings. The 'Superhost' status demanded ongoing effort to maintain, with hosts evaluated quarterly [1, 7]. While this built trust through consistent host performance, critics flagged limitations in verifying overall service quality [8]. To counteract this, Airbnb launched the 'Guest Favourites' badge; however, concerns were raised that its criteria may be biased by race, gender, or host background [9]. While guest-generated content can influence booking decisions, it may also skew perceptions, highlighting the need for more reliable and objective evaluation metrics [10].

Despite the luxury segment's growth, few studies have explored the interplay between Airbnb's quality indicators and guest satisfaction in this market [11]. Guest reviews of high-end listings offer insights

into loyalty and booking decisions. As Airbnb continues to refine its recognition systems, understanding how the indicators and satisfaction scores interact - especially in premium contexts—is essential [12]. This research investigated the correlation between ‘Superhost’ and ‘Guest Favourite’ statuses in luxury Airbnb listings. It also assessed whether these labels accurately reflect guest expectations in the high-end market.

### **Methodology**

A mixed-method approach was adopted. From a purposive selection of reviews (3,820) of 42 global luxury Airbnb properties, a percentage sampling method was applied, resulting in 382 reviews for analysis [13]. Reviews were sourced from the Luxe category between June and November 2024. Quantitative analysis focused on word frequency, while content analysis was conducted on the qualitative data (via NVivo 15 and manually) [14].

### **Key Findings**

A significant insight emerged: 41 of the 42 luxury properties held ‘Superhost’ status, but none were labelled ‘Guest Favourites’. Despite consistent 4.9+ star ratings, these properties failed to meet the requirements of the Guest Favourite algorithm. This indicates that high guest satisfaction alone is insufficient for the newer designation, providing evidence of a mismatch between algorithmic recognition and premium hospitality performance. The findings suggest a disconnect between Airbnb’s recognition programmes. ‘Superhost’ status rewards consistent hosting standards—especially vital in the luxury segment where expectations are higher [1]. ‘Guest Favourites’, however, seem tailored to properties with high turnover and affordability, characteristics not typical of luxury listings.

Luxury properties often accommodate fewer guests for longer stays and at higher rates. As a result, they tend to generate fewer—but more detailed—reviews, making them less likely to meet the volume-based criteria required for ‘Guest Favourite’ status. Moreover, luxury listings often emphasise amenities such as private chefs or event hosting—elements the algorithm may not sufficiently value. The algorithm currently prioritises value for money and booking volume, inadvertently rewarding mid-tier properties while overlooking bespoke, premium experiences. This highlights how platform algorithms may unintentionally marginalise high-end offerings, despite high performance. For practitioners in the luxury hosting sector, these findings highlight a need to re-evaluate how success is measured and recognised on short-term rental platforms. It also calls attention for platform designers to consider more inclusive metrics that reflect different hosting models.

### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings the following recommendations are proposed:

- Refine the ‘Guest Favourite’ algorithm: Ensure metrics reflect luxury-specific indicators such as length of stay, premium amenities, and average nightly rate.
- Introduce a luxury-specific badge: A ‘Luxury Guest Favourite’ designation could better capture quality in the premium segment.
- Enhance visibility of luxury Superhosts: Consider personalised filters or targeted marketing strategies for high-end travellers.
- Address algorithmic bias: The current model favours affordability and booking volume, which misaligns with luxury market realities. Refinements are needed to ensure fair recognition.

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