

# Psychological contract breach and opportunism in the sharing economy: Examining the platform-provider relationship

Barbara Culiberg<sup>a,\*</sup>, Ibrahim Abosag<sup>b,c</sup>, Barbara Čater<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business, Kardeljeva ploscad 17, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

<sup>b</sup> SOAS University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK

<sup>c</sup> Alfaisal University, P.O. Box 50927, Riyadh, 11533, Saudi Arabia

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## ABSTRACT

In the sharing economy market, B2B relationships between service providers and sharing economy platforms are largely built on the platforms' promise of ensuring a successful sharing experience, which is not always delivered. Moreover, platforms have the opportunity to take advantage of their dominant positions in the market. Despite the growing number of studies on the dark side of the sharing economy, little is known about psychological contract breach and opportunism in the context of B2B platforms. Building on these notions, this study set out to examine the determinants of individual service providers' relationship with a sharing economy platform using psychological contract theory. The study was conducted in the UK on a sample of 252 Airbnb hosts who were recruited through an online consumer panel. The results show that psychological contract breach is an important construct within platform B2B relationships which increases feelings of violation and reduces trust. Furthermore, perceived opportunism was found to be negatively related to feelings of violation. These feelings contribute positively to negative word-of-mouth, while trust leads to continuance intentions. In addition, the indirect effects of opportunism on negative word-of-mouth and of psychological contract breach on continuance intentions were confirmed.

## 1. Introduction

The sharing economy has given rise to platform-based B2B relationships between online platforms such as Airbnb and Uber and the numerous associated providers who are willing to share their resources with their peers, by enabling them to participate with low cost and less capital (Davis, 2016). The exchange process in the sharing economy actually occurs among service providers, online platforms and customers who create a triadic platform-based B2B2C relationship (Kumar, Lahiri, & Dogan, 2018), which connects pairs of parties or the entire triad in a relationship. This triadic business model faces the challenge of building and maintaining lasting relationships (Guenther and Guenther, 2019). Platform-based B2B relationships between service providers and online platforms are particularly unique due to the multiple roles of service providers who are simultaneously entrepreneurs, informal employees, partners, and prosumers (i.e. both providers and consumers) of the sharing economy platform (Cheng, Zhang, and Wong, 2020; Eckhardt et al., 2019).

While B2B interactions and relationships tend to be more

cooperative and long-term in nature compared to B2C markets (Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic, and Kaporcic, 2020), they can succumb to growing tensions among the actors involved. In the context of platform-based B2B relationships, many service providers have raised concerns about how they are treated by major platforms, with Uber accused of “lying” to its drivers (Millen, 2022) and Airbnb of making “hollow and broken promises” regarding the protection of guests and hosts (Rokou, 2019). As Köbis, Soraperra, and Shalvi (2021) report, there are many ambiguities about responsibilities that make it difficult to distinguish between “fake” and “real” assurances in the sharing economy. In addition, even though a platform may not be the party that causes a negative incident, it is perceived as responsible for such incidents as it facilitates peer-to-peer transactions (Moon, Miao, Hanks, and Line, 2019). Part of the challenge is rooted in the complex nature of trust within the triadic B2B platform relationship. A potential barrier to building trust between sharing economy participants is the perception that an organization has broken its promise, which is known as *psychological contract breach* (DiFonzo, Alongi, and Wiele, 2020). Sundararajan (2016) argues that there is little trust embedded in the exchange process, while the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [barbara.culiberg@ef.uni-lj.si](mailto:barbara.culiberg@ef.uni-lj.si) (B. Culiberg), [ia9@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ia9@soas.ac.uk) (I. Abosag), [barbara.cater@ef.uni-lj.si](mailto:barbara.cater@ef.uni-lj.si) (B. Čater).

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prevailing view on trust is that it is essential for long-term relationships between B2B platform organizations (e.g., [Alsaad, Mohamad, and Ismail, 2017](#); [Chong and Bai, 2014](#)). Trust in the sharing economy comes in various forms, depending on the target (i.e. platforms, peers, other products) ([Hawlichek, Notheisen, & Teubner, 2018](#)). [Lwin, Wirtz, & Williams \(2007\)](#) noted that ensuring an environment of trust and confidence is the responsibility of the more powerful partner in a relationship. The power in the sharing economy market lies in the hands of platforms, suggesting providers' trust in platforms plays an important role in relationship development. If a sharing economy platform as the more powerful player in the market does not fulfil its promises toward a provider then the trusting relationship is compromised. Not only that, but the power imbalance between numerous competing individuals offering their services through a single, dominant sharing economy platform means that the former may fall victim to the platform's opportunistic behaviour, which can take various forms, such as lying, cheating, calculated efforts to mislead, distort, disguise, obfuscate, or otherwise confuse ([Ertimur and Venkatesh, 2010](#)). Opportunism has been embedded in social exchange theory to explain B2B relationships, successfully predicting relational constructs (see [Hawkins, Wittmann, and Beyerlein, 2008](#)) such as trust and commitment ([Morgan and Hunt, 1994](#)). Although most knowledge and understanding of the concept of opportunism comes from traditional B2B studies (e.g., [Doney and Cannon, 1997](#); [Hawkins, Pohlen, and Prybutok, 2013](#); [Heide, Wathne, and Rokkan, 2007](#)), opportunism in the context of platform-based B2B relationships has not been studied in depth. Therefore, we are guided in our study by the following research questions: What influences an individual service provider's relationship with a sharing economy platform? More specifically, what is the role of psychological contract breach and opportunism? And what are the relevant behavioural outcomes?

The relationship formation among the participating actors in the sharing economy has been studied through diverse theories and approaches. Using actor-network theory, [Da Silveira, Hoppen, and De Camillis \(2022\)](#) explained how the flattening of consumption relations occurs in the sharing economy, while [Goodchild and Ferrari \(2021\)](#) examined the different effects and roles of platforms in facilitating interactions among their users. Other scholars used S—D logic, by drawing on the ideas of co-creation and co-destruction ([Breibach and Brodie, 2017](#); [Buhalis, Andreu, and Gnoth, 2000](#); [Camilleri & Neuhof, 2017](#)). In examining platform-provider relationships in the gig economy, [Behl, Jayawardena, Ishizaka, Gupta, and Shankar \(2022\)](#) connected three theoretical frameworks, i.e. the knowledge-based view theory, employee engagement theory, and self-determination theory, while [Pereira et al. \(2022\)](#) combined the swift trust theory and psychological contract theory. As for the dark side of the triadic relationship in the sharing economy, it has been emerging at the forefront of research agendas (see [Benoit, Baker, Bolton, Gruber, and Kandampully, 2017](#), [Eckhardt et al., 2019](#); [Etter, Fieseler, & Whelan, 2019](#)). Research on the difficulties service providers face has captured diverse issues, such as exploitation of providers ([Van Doorn, 2017](#)), poor labour conditions and inequality ([Schor and Attwood-Charles, 2017](#)), the lack of physical privacy ([Ranzini, Etter, and Vermeulen, 2020](#)), breaches of online privacy ([Lutz, Hoffmann, Bucher, and Fieseler, 2018](#)) and the problematic use of algorithms ([Cheng and Foley, 2019](#); [Möhlmann and Henfridsson, 2019](#)). While these studies provide valuable insights into the issues arising between service providers and platforms, the previously mentioned opportunism and broken promises, and their consequences in the sharing economy, remain an under-researched area of investigation.

To date, the concept of psychological contract breach has been mainly used in literature examining employer-employee relationships (see [Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, and Bravo, 2007](#)) or traditional B2B markets (e.g., [Blessley, Mir, Zacharia, and Aloysius, 2018](#); [Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020](#)). Nonetheless, triadic platform-based B2B relationships in the sharing economy market ([Kumar et al., 1995](#)) offer fruitful opportunities for empirical investigation due to the unique

position of service providers (i.e. hosts, drivers) – who offer their services to their peers, but in relation to a sharing economy platform they are users of the platform. In this complex relationship, the platform has the role of a matchmaker whose paramount goal is to instil and manage trust, becoming the messenger and problem solver in cases when an issue arises ([Moon et al., 2019](#); [Perren and Kozinets, 2018](#)). If a sharing economy platform fails to fulfil its promises and/or obligations, this may be seen as psychological contract breach ([Robinson and Rousseau, 1994](#)), which may cause the relationship between the platform and service provider to turn sour. In this study, we use psychological contract theory and extend it with additional constructs to provide a solid theoretical background for understanding the determinants of the relationships that service providers have with a sharing economy platform in the context of accommodation rental. We integrate the literature on the sharing economy ([Eckhardt et al., 2019](#); [Nadeem, Juntunen, Hajli, and Tajvidi, 2019](#)) and psychological contract breach, its antecedents and consequences (e.g., [Guo, Gruen, and Tang, 2017](#); [Zhao et al., 2007](#); [Gillani, Kutaula, & Budhwar, 2021](#); [Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020](#)) to contribute to the earlier findings by (1) introducing psychological contract theory into the sharing economy setting; (2) extending this theory with a novel behavioural outcome variable in the form of negative word-of-mouth (WOM); and (3) enriching the understanding of relationship determinants in psychological contract theory with perceived opportunism.

To begin with, we respond to calls for more studies on the issues faced by providers in the sharing economy ([Benoit et al., 2017](#); [Eckhardt et al., 2019](#)) and introduce psychological contract theory in order to examine breaches in the relationship between service providers and platforms. As [Etter et al. \(2019\)](#) noted, this relationship is subject to oscillations in power and responsibility, therefore requiring further research attention. In this way, we consider the proposals by [Guo et al. \(2017\)](#) who suggested expanding the research beyond traditional service settings. There is an opportunity here to study the behavioural ([Wang, Asaad and Filieri, 2020](#)) and emotional effects of the conflicts arising among the actors in the sharing economy ([Moon et al., 2019](#)). Therefore, consistent with psychological contract theory, psychological contract breach is positioned as an antecedent to hosts' feelings of violation and trust (see [Zhao et al., 2007](#)). In addition, while attention has been paid to behavioural outcome measures, using [Hirschman's \(1970\)](#) exit, voice, and loyalty model (e.g. [Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020](#)), [Ferguson and Johnston \(2011\)](#) stressed the importance of also considering negative WOM. In line with this reasoning and stemming from the unique position of service providers, who are also the platform's users, it was necessary to include not only continuance intentions as behavioural outcomes, but also negative WOM, with the latter primarily being considered in the business-to-consumer (B2C) setting (see [De Matos and Rossi, 2008](#)), but which could also be applied to providers' behaviour in B2B relationships ([Wang, Asaad, and Filieri, 2020](#)).

Further, according to [Perren and Kozinets \(2018\)](#) another overlooked area in need of further exploration is the challenges related to the threat of opportunism in the sharing economy. Some hosts have claimed to be hostages of Airbnb, due to its predominant position in the market ([Farmaki and Kaniadakis, 2020](#)). As such, their increasing dependence on the platform may lead to the fear of opportunistic behaviour ([Laaksonen, Pajunen, & Kulmala, 2008](#)) by the platform. As [Corten \(2019, p. 278\)](#) argues "the ubiquitous emphasis on trust suggests a general acknowledgement of the risk of opportunistic behaviour in sharing economy exchanges". While researchers have acknowledged that trust helps individuals overcome the risks of opportunism and leads to engagement in mutually beneficial economic exchanges (e.g. [Dupont & Karpoff, 2020](#)), this line of reasoning has yet to be linked to psychological contract theory. We contribute to psychological contract theory by positioning opportunism alongside psychological contract breach as a determinant of hosts' trust and feelings of violation.

In the next section of this article we present the theoretical background and hypotheses. This is followed by a description of the

methodology and presentation of our findings. We then conclude with a discussion, and provide implications for the relevant parties, as well as opportunities for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

### 2.1. Psychological contract theory

An essential part of buyer–seller relationships is contracts, which include two key elements, i.e. legal and psychological, with the latter being a much broader concept, as it comprises several perceptual aspects that cannot be formally incorporated into legal contracts (Malhotra, Sahadev, and Purani, 2017) and are also much more subjective (Zhao et al., 2007). It needs to be noted that psychological contract theory was first used in the organizational behaviour literature and initially referred to employees’ perceptions of what they owe to their employers and what their employers owe to them. The building blocks of the psychological contract are obligations that arise from the exchange of promises (Rousseau, 1998). Psychological contracts represent “the individual’s belief in mutual obligations between that person and another party such as an employer ... This belief is predicated on the perception that a promise has been made (e.g., of employment or career opportunities) and a consideration offered in exchange for it (e.g., accepting a position, foregoing other job offers), binding the parties to some set of reciprocal obligations” (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998, p. 679). The main premise behind psychological contracts is that they “operate according to a number of general principles, one of the most fundamental being that the purpose of a contract is the production of mutual benefits” (O’Donohue and Nelson, 2009, p. 253).

When applied to relationships between service consumers and providers, Mason and Simmons (2012) explained that a psychological contract between them exists when consumers believe that their purchase obligates the provider to honour the promises which can be implicitly or explicitly perceived by consumers. In the branding literature, psychological contracts refer to consumers’ perceptions about the promises made by a brand which are often unspoken and surpass the tangible and intangible products involved in the exchange. Even more importantly, these features of the agreement are not necessarily shared by the organization, but are merely the consumer’s perceptions (Montgomery, Raju, Desai, and Unnava, 2018). They are developed through repeated interactions with the products, services, brands, or employees of the company (Funches, 2016).

Previous marketing studies, examining psychological contract theory in B2C and B2B markets are scarce and quite recent. Scholars have proposed various antecedents and outcomes to demonstrate the role it has in the formation of relationships in the market. For example, in the B2C market, Funches (2016) studied the effects of psychological contract fulfilment on anger and continuance intentions and reported that psychological contract fulfilment reduced anger and increased continuance intentions. In addition, Malhotra et al. (2017) consumer study

proposed a model examining the relationships between psychological contract breach, trust, and satisfaction in the context of online retailers. While these studies underpin established constructs from the B2C domain, such as emotions and satisfaction, in the B2B domain, psychological contract breach in buyer-supplier relationships has also been shown to influence neglect, voice, and loyalty (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020), as well as fairness perceptions and switching intentions (Blessley et al., 2018). Psychological contract breach has been considered as an antecedent to commitment by Lövblad, Hyder, and Lönnstedt (2012), while Montgomery et al. (2018) approached psychological contract breach as an outcome variable of commitment. To summarize, existing studies have captured an abundance of relevant outcomes in psychological contract theory, but left opportunities to introduce additional constructs to extend the field further. Below we present the main constructs and the hypothesized relationships in our proposed conceptual model (see Fig. 1).

### 2.2. Psychological contract breach

Psychological contract breach is a subjective experience, referring to one’s perception that another party has failed to fulfil adequately the promised obligations of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1998). In examining relationships in organizations, studies have delved into the link between psychological contract breach and employee trust. This trust is an expression of confidence, willingness to rely on another individual/party, and belief that no exploitation of vulnerability will occur (e.g., Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987). In their meta-analysis, Zhao et al. (2007) found a strong effect between psychological contract breach and mistrust. Furthermore, a study of customer service representatives demonstrated that psychological contract breach was associated with lower trust (Deery, Iverson, and Walsh, 2006). A similar finding was drawn from a sample of Indian online shoppers, as psychological contract breach was found to have a negative and significant relationship with trust (Malhotra et al., 2017). In the sharing economy, the platforms decide which actors deserve to be included and which trust signals are important (Martin, 2019). The brokerage role of sharing economy platforms, such as Airbnb, requires them to mediate the triadic relationships by ensuring that the “trust digital system” functions as promised (Sundararajan, 2019). Failing to do so may diminish trust in the platform. In other words, if there is a perception that the psychological contract was breached, then this can result in a reduction of trust. Based on these findings, we hypothesize that the more service providers perceived a sharing economy platform did not deliver what it promised, the lower their trust in it.

**H1.** Psychological contract breach is negatively related to trust.

When individuals (employees, consumers, etc.) evaluate an organization’s actions vis-à-vis the promises they perceive should be delivered, they may notice a discrepancy has arisen which becomes a breach if they find it unacceptable. Furthermore, this psychological contract breach

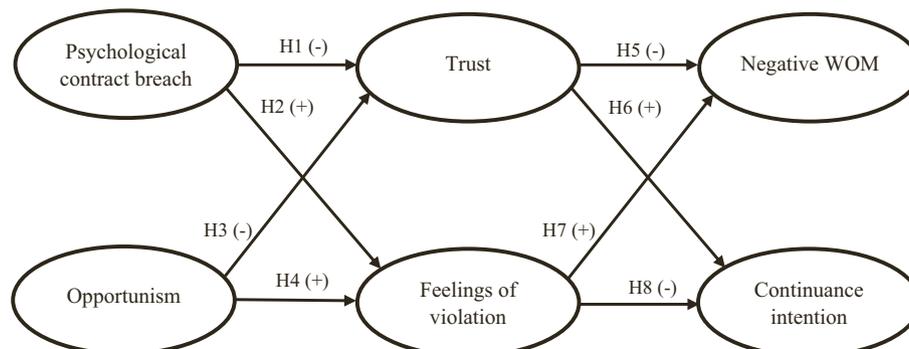


Fig. 1. Hypothesized relationships among the study variables.

may lead to an affective response, i.e. a feeling of violation (O'Donohue and Nelson, 2009) which represents “an emotional state of anger, distrust, and betrayal arising from realisation of a contract breach, which refers to the cognitive and calculative realisation of a broken promise on the part of the organisation” (Raja, Johns, and Bilgrami, 2011, p. 400). Although some researchers have used psychological contract breach and feelings of violation as synonyms in the past, more recent studies acknowledge the conceptual distinction between the concept of breach (i.e., perceived discrepancy) and feelings of violation (i.e., emotional reactions) (Zhao et al., 2007), proposed by Morrison & Robinson (1997), who explicitly indicated that such feelings are an immediate consequence of breach. Accordingly, it was confirmed in an organizational setting that employees who perceive a breach in their psychological contract had a more intense feeling of violation (Robinson and Morrison, 2000). This link was also reported in Zhao et al. (2007) meta-analysis of work-related outcomes, showing that breach increases feelings of violation. Although the sharing economy is a different setting, we believe that this link will also hold. Sharing economy platforms promise participants that they will not suffer any loss by engaging on them (Etzioni, 2019). This is done by developing a system that promotes trust, in which platforms act as gatekeepers that determine access to the market and legitimize participating actors (Martin, 2019). However, when transgressions occur and promises are not kept, participants may feel anger or betrayal, which has been documented online (see Airbnbhell, 2021). In line with this reasoning, we propose that service providers who perceive that the psychological contract with a platform has been breached will be more likely to experience feelings of violation.

**H2.** Psychological contract breach is positively related to feelings of violation.

### 2.3. Opportunism

In their study on the dark side of business relationships, Abosag, Yen, and Barnes (2016) determined that opportunism is the most important dark component of these relationships, reportedly having a negative impact on them (e.g., Heide et al., 2007; Huo, Tian, Tian, and Zhang, 2019). Opportunism has mostly been defined as a behaviour of seeking self-interests with guile (Williamson, 1975), which includes exploitation of opportunities with little or no regard for one's own values, principles or consequences (Mooi and Frambach, 2012). Such opportunistic behaviour could include dishonesty, hiding information, cheating, deception, breach of contract and disguising of truth for one's own interests (Hawkins et al., 2008). In explaining B2B relationships through social exchange theory, opportunism has been previously acknowledged as an antecedent to trust, commitment, terminated relationships, conflict and other relational outcomes (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). When an exchange partner acts opportunistically, the social (and perhaps economic) benefits are diminished over time, explaining why parties to such exchange may choose to sever the relationship (Hawkins, Gravier, & Muir, 2020). Once opportunistic behaviour appears within business relationships it has almost an immediate impact on the level of trust. Opportunism and trust can coexist within some relationships (Nooteboom, 1996; Lado, Dant, & Tekleab, 2008), but in most business relationships the existence of opportunism is seen to seriously undermine the level of trust (Heide et al., 2007). A high level of trust is generally understood to protect relationships from the threat of opportunism (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and, vice versa, opportunistic behaviour tends to reduce trust in relationships (e.g., Doney and Cannon, 1997; Low, 1996). If sharing economy providers perceive that platforms behave opportunistically, using their power to exploit them (Perren and Koziets, 2018), they may stop trusting them. The recent literature on opportunism has focused on the impact of technology in partners' opportunism. Orlandi, Zardini, and Rossignoli (2020) found a positive and significant relationship between the use of social media platforms and technological opportunism. Other studies have found that some

leading sharing economy brands manipulate partners, hosts, and consumers for their own benefit, which affects trust in their relationships (e.g., Martinez-Lopez, Anaya-Sanchez, Molinillo, Aguilar-Illescas, and Esteban-Millat, 2017; Mundel and Yang, 2021; Yang and Mundel, 2021). We therefore suggest that service providers who perceive a particular behaviour of a sharing economy platform as opportunistic (for example, Airbnb delaying payments to their hosts – see Killoran, 2015) may reduce their trust in their relationship with the company.

**H3.** Perceived opportunism is negatively related to trust.

The above-mentioned argument about opportunism undermining the level of trust within business relationships can be extended to another notion, as opportunism can also enrage relational partners, leading to a feeling of violation at a personal level. Because opportunism is a form of aggressive selfishness (Williamson, 1975) where one party acts in order to advance their own interests at the expense of the other, the relational partners will experience a variety of feelings of violation. These include being undermined, unpleasant feelings, destruction of agreements, relational governance and predictability, plus increasing feelings of vulnerability and lack of morality (e.g., Heide et al., 2007; John, 1984). In addition, opportunism has a “more adverse effect” on the perception of business performance (Hernández-Espallardo, Arcas-Lario, Sánchez-Navarro, and Marcos-Matás, 2020), weak coordination (Pathak, Ashok, and Tan, 2020), and undermines future investment in the relationship (Sarkees, 2011). The relational party that behaves opportunistically typically does not consider the possible inconvenience or damage to the other party in the relationship, thereby hindering the attainment of a mutually beneficial relationship. Such opportunistic behaviour could easily cause feelings of violation, increasing the chance for conflict to occur at the emotional and functional levels in the relationship (Rose and Shoham, 2004). Lin, Huang and Chiang (2018, p. 311) also argued that platform providers can behave opportunistically when users of the platform “do not consider mutual obligations to be important” leading to greater perception of the breach of psychological contract and feeling of violation. Thus the occurrence of opportunistic behaviour is expected to increase the feeling of violation within the platform-provider relationship, undermine contractual agreements and relational norms, and lead to the break of certain obligations (Li, Huang and Chiang, 2018). This is because the individual service provider is likely to perceive that there is no safeguard that hedges against opportunism in the relationship, leading to further feelings of violation, as stated in the following hypothesis.

**H4.** Perceived opportunism is positively related to feelings of violation.

### 2.4. Trust

Trust is essential in establishing collaborative relationships (Handfield and Bechtel, 2002). For trust to develop, parties must be vulnerable (O'Malley and Tynan, 1997). Vulnerability is created through a high degree of interdependence between the relational parties (Kumar et al., 1995). Trusting other parties provides the basis for assessing the predictability of future behaviour based on past interactions and promises (Doney and Cannon, 1997), thus reducing uncertainty (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust in business relationships therefore encourages positivity, including positive WOM. However, negative WOM usually arises as a result of low trust and high relationship dissatisfaction, as broken trust may cause consumers to retaliate against an untrustworthy company. In contrast, individuals typically feel a lower desire to retaliate against a company they trust (Grégoire and Fisher, 2006). Negative WOM, as a form of retaliation, refers to the willingness to share unfavourable personal communications with others regarding the services and products offered by a company (Lacey and Morgan, 2009). Negative information tends to lead to greater attention and over-emphasis of that information (Wright, 1974).

Moreover, negative WOM tends to be exchanged by more people than positive WOM, and will also travel further (Richins, 1983). The early literature on negative WOM tended to focus on the level of dissatisfaction within relational exchanges (e.g., Hansen, Swan, and Powers, 1996; Johnston and Hewa, 1997), whereas the more recent literature focuses on more relational variables such as trust, loyalty, opportunism, and so on in relation to negative WOM (e.g., He, Haiyang, and Wu, 2018; Ng, David, and Dagger, 2011). Previous studies have found that trust reduces negative WOM (Kim, Han, and Lee, 2001; Kim, Kim, and Kim, 2009), while a more recent study confirms this relationship in the context of food delivery apps (Talwar, Dhir, Scuotto, & Kaur, 2021). A positive disposition in terms of trust causes consumers to refrain from criticising a company or spreading unfavourable feedback (Talwar et al., 2021). The sharing economy is built on trust, while it also relies heavily on WOM to attract and retain participants (WARC, 2020). We can expect that sharing economy participants which trust the platform, have no reason to bad-mouth it to other people. However, if trust is broken, then people may start conveying their bad experience to others. Thus, we propose that service providers who have high trust in a sharing economy platform are likely to avoid spreading negative WOM.

##### H5. Trust is negatively related to negative WOM.

Trust plays an important role in stimulating relational parties to develop intentions to engage in more collaborative behaviour, and as such has almost always been found to be an important antecedent of continuance intentions (Agag, 2019; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Trust provides relational parties with confidence with regard to the belief that the other party will behave with high integrity, reliability and honesty (Nicholson, Compeau, and Sethi, 2001; Perry, Sengupta, and Krapfel, 2004). In this way, trust increases the intention to behave more positively in the relationship (Andaleeb, 1996). (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992) (p. 315) distinguished between confidence and behavioural intention/willingness, and argued that confidence without willingness means “trust is limited”. Morgan and Hunt (1994) argued that confidence implies behavioural intention to rely on that party. According to McKnight et al. (1998, pp. 479/480) “if one believes that the other party is benevolent, competent, honest, and predictable, one is likely to form a trusting intention toward that person. Therefore, trusting beliefs will positively impact trusting intention”. Within the sharing economy, a high level of trust means that the service provider is confident that the sharing economy platform has established effective mechanisms to protect them from unexpected negative events (Wang, Lin, & Abdullat, 2021). Wang, Lin and Abdullat (2021) empirically confirmed that a service provider who has a high level of trust toward the sharing economy platform will be more likely to continue using the platform over time, as stated in the following hypothesis.

##### H6. Trust is positively related to continuance intentions.

### 2.5. Feelings of violation

When promises are not kept, expectations are not met, mutuality is not respected, and psychological contracts are breached, then this will lead to feelings of violation because emotional attachment and emotional experience are damaged (Raja et al., 2011). The negative effect of psychological contract breach tends to trigger the feeling of violation, which has negative impacts on the relationship (Raja, Johns, and Ntalianis, 2004). One important consequence of feelings of violation is the spreading of negative WOM by those who are affected. Managers who feel violated tend to develop feelings of animosity, anger, bitterness and disappointment (Hill, Eckerd, Wilson, and Greer, 2009; Rousseau, 2004), and thus negatively describe the relational partner and the relationship itself. In short, feelings of violation often lead to negative WOM. Service providers who experience negative feelings toward a sharing economy platform, such as anger or betrayal, may therefore act as disgruntled customers and share their bad experiences vociferously

with other people, as demonstrated on [Airbnb's website \(2021\)](#). Accordingly, we propose that any feeling of violation in the relationship between a sharing economy platform and its service providers will lead to negative WOM.

##### H7. Feelings of violation are positively related to negative WOM.

Once the interaction within a business relationship triggers feelings of violation, meaning service providers experience the feeling of betrayal and psychological distress, as a result of a platform's action, the future of the relationship will be uncertain and ambiguous. This is mainly because feelings of violation undermine the relationship, blurring the predictability of future behaviour. Feelings of violation typically affect reactions, attitudes and behaviours in the relationship (Zhao et al., 2007). Within social exchange theory, feelings of violation reduce the perceptions of fairness and mutuality in the relationship, and encourage switching intentions (Blessley et al., 2018; Eckerd, Hill, Boyer, Donohue, and Ward, 2013; Mir, Aloysius, and Eckerd, 2017). More importantly, feelings of violation will significantly weaken collaborative behaviour within business relationships (Hill et al., 2009). If the negative feelings of service providers accumulate, it may come to a point where they no longer want to be associated with the platform, so they stop operating and look for other options (e.g., alternative platforms, their own social media channels). We thus propose that feelings of violation within platform-provider relationships have a negative impact on continuance intentions.

##### H8. Feelings of violation are negatively related to continuance intentions.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Data collection and sample

The population for the research was Airbnb hosts based in the United Kingdom. The Airbnb online platform enables people to list, discover and book unique properties, which are made available by other peers. It is currently the most popular way for people to earn money from their extra space and offer it to an audience of millions (European Commission, 2013). The downsides of renting through Airbnb, on the other hand, are documented on the website [Airnbhell \(2021\)](#), which provides extensive evidence of the negative experiences of hosts who describe their “horror stories.” These include examples of Airbnb's psychological contract breach, such as overriding the providers' cancellation policies, withholding customer service support, and generally abandoning them in difficult situations ([Airnbhell, 2021](#)). Airbnb was chosen as our study setting due to its dominant position in the market and the increasing complaints against its business practises.

The study was conducted in the UK in the end of January and beginning of February 2020 on a sample of Airbnb hosts that were recruited through the Qualtrics online consumer panel. According to [Baker et al. \(2010\)](#) panels of this type offer an acceptable sampling frame for testing the relationships between variables. We screened the respondents at the beginning of the questionnaire with a question about being an Airbnb host. Our study included only those respondents that had used Airbnb as a host in the previous two years. According to the panel provider's report, 986 participants were screened out because they were not Airbnb hosts, and another 45 for various reasons (lack of consent, not residing in the UK, not having a valid GeoIP). Several respondents (209 in total) were additionally screened out by the panel provider after survey completion for poor quality due to speeding. In accordance with the agreement with the panel provider, to ensure data quality, only respondents who had completed the survey and passed the speed test were included in the final sample.

The final sample included 252 respondents, of whom 52.8% were female, 46.4% were male, while 0.4% chose the answers other or prefer not to say. Most of them (31.7%) were 18–29 years old, followed by

those aged 30–39 (29.8%), 40–49 (21.0%) and 50–59 (8.7%), while 8.7% were 60 or older. The respondents were well educated, with 45.2% having completed a university undergraduate programme, 29.8% secondary school, 23.4% a university post-graduate programme and 1.6% a doctoral degree. Regarding their business with Airbnb, most of the respondents (43.3%) list one room on Airbnb, followed by those who list two rooms (25%) and those who list an entire property (17.5%); 11.5% of respondents list three rooms or more, while there are not many hosts acting as entrepreneurs listing several properties (2.8%). Consistent with this is the distribution of how much they had earned (before tax) as a host in the last year (2019). Most (31.3%) indicated they earned 751 to 3750 pounds, followed by those who earned 3751 to 7500 pounds (16.3%) and up to 750 pounds (15.9%). Those who earned more are in the minority: 7501 to 15,000 pounds (12.3%), 15,001 to 30,000 (6.7%) and >30,000 pounds (4.8%), while 12.7% preferred not to say. Most respondents had been Airbnb hosts for less than a year (36.9% less than six months and 29.4% for six to 12 months), followed by those who had been Airbnb hosts for one to two years (23.8%), three to four years (7.5%) or more than four years (2.4%). At the time of the survey, 32.9% had Superhost status, which means they were experienced hosts who had obtained a badge for providing outstanding hospitality (Airbnb, 2020a).

3.2. Measures

We based the scale items on existing measurement scales from the literature. Psychological contract breach and feelings of violation were evaluated on the scale from Robinson and Morrison (2000), items for trust were based on Hong and Cho (2011), while opportunism was measured in line with Rokkan, Heide, and Wathne (2003). We assessed negative WOM according to Antonetti and Maklan (2016), and continuance intentions in line with Malazizi, Alipour, and Olya (2018). All variables were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree).

Three additional variables, i.e. gender, how much they had earned (before tax) as a host in the last year, and Superhost status, were used as control variables because they may explain differences in negative WOM and continuance intentions. Some past studies have shown the effect of these variables on negative WOM and continuance intentions. For example, gender has been shown to have an effect in terms of negative WOM in previous research (Zhang, Feick, and Mittal, 2014). In addition, we expect that Superhost status implicitly encompasses greater involvement of the host, and so might enhance continuance intentions and lessen negative WOM. We also propose that how much they have earned as a host implicitly reflects dependence, which will have an effect on the outcome variables. The control variables were dummy coded and used as covariates of the outcome constructs in the structural equation modelling.

3.3. Common method bias (CMB)

Our data originate from a single study, therefore the possibility of common method bias (CMB) arises. We attempted to reduce the causes of this using the procedural remedies suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff (2012). We included proximal separation between the predictor and criterion variables, did not reveal the conceptual framework of our study, and mixed the constructs in a way that reduced the possibility of respondents guessing how the researchers wanted them to respond. We used established scales but still tested them to eliminate any possible ambiguities. We also controlled for CMB with statistical remedies. We inspected the eigenvalues of an unrotated EFA solution, where the first eigenvalue accounted for 39.6% of all the data variance, specifically <40%, which according to Babin, Griffin, & Hair (2016) means that there is little concern regarding CMB. Therefore, the relationships in the model are unlikely to be inflated by common method variance.

4. Analysis and results

Before conducting the SEM analyses we checked the sampling adequacy (the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is 0.90) and examined the data for possible data anomalies (three cases were detected but left in the analysis because of the very low variable impact). We also inspected the scales for skewness and kurtosis and found no significant departures from a normal distribution. Therefore, we decided to use a maximum likelihood (ML) estimation. Analyses were conducted using MPlus version 8.5.

4.1. Measurement model

First, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis to test the measurement model. From the original scales we had to remove two items for psychological contract breach (measured in reverse manner to the first three) and one for continuance intentions that were measured in a reverse manner and did not load with the rest of the items from the same constructs, so this should be approached with caution. The measurement model (Table 1) has a statistically significant value of the chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 377.87, df = 174, p = 0.000$ ), but the proportion between the chi-square value and degrees of freedom is within an acceptable range ( $\chi^2/df = 2.17$ ). Other relevant measures (RMSEA = 0.068; SRMR = 0.042; TLI = 0.95; CFI = 0.96) are also within an acceptable range. Therefore, we can conclude that the fit of the measurement model is acceptable (Hair Jr., Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010).

The results of the reliability analysis (Table 1) show that all values for composite reliability (CR) are above 0.70 and, according to a complementary measure for construct reliability – average variance extracted (AVE), all the constructs have good reliability. We tested the model for convergent and discriminant validity. All t-values of the loadings of the measurement variables on the respective latent variables are statistically significant, providing support for convergent validity

Table 1  
Measurement items.

Constructs and items	SFL <sup>a</sup>
Psychological contract breach (CR = 0.90, AVE = 0.75)	
Almost all the promises made by Airbnb at the start of my hosting have been kept so far (R).	0.81
I feel that Airbnb has fulfilled the promises made to me when I started hosting (R).	0.92
So far Airbnb has done an excellent job of fulfilling its promises to me (R).	0.87
Opportunism (CR = 0.93, AVE = 0.77)	
On occasion, Airbnb lies about certain things in order to protect its interests.	0.82
Airbnb sometimes promises to do things without actually doing them later.	0.90
Airbnb does not always act in accordance with our contract.	0.88
Airbnb will try to take advantage of “holes” in our contract to further its own interests.	0.90
Trust (CR = 0.90, AVE = 0.76)	
Even if not monitored, I'd trust Airbnb to do the job right.	0.74
I trust Airbnb.	0.94
I believe that Airbnb is trustworthy.	0.92
Feelings of violation (CR = 0.96, AVE = 0.87)	
I feel a great deal of anger toward Airbnb.	0.88
I feel betrayed by Airbnb.	0.94
I feel that Airbnb has violated the contract between us.	0.96
I feel extremely frustrated by how I have been treated by Airbnb.	0.95
Negative WOM (CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.76)	
I would be likely to complain about Airbnb to other people.	0.78
I intend to say negative things about Airbnb to people I know.	0.91
I would be likely to bad-mouth Airbnb to other people.	0.92
Continuance intentions (CR = 0.93, AVE = 0.77)	
I intend to continue using Airbnb as a host in the future	0.90
I will continue using Airbnb as a host as much as possible in the future	0.93
I will continue using Airbnb as a host as a priority for my business in the future	0.83
My intentions are to continue using Airbnb rather than use any alternative service.	0.84

<sup>a</sup> SFL – Standardized factor loading.

(Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). To assess discriminant validity, we used the procedures suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981). For all pairs of latent variables, the values of the square root of AVE were greater than the correlations between the latent variables (Table 2), thus supporting discriminant validity.

4.2. Structural model

Like the measurement model, the value of the chi-square of the structural model is also statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 506.18, df = 236, p < 0.001$ ), with the proportion between the chi-square value and degrees of freedom within an acceptable range ( $\chi^2/df = 2.14$ ). Other fit indices, such as RMSEA (0.067; 90% CI is 0.059–0.075), SRMR (0.068), CFI (0.95) and TLI (0.94), all indicate a good model fit (Hair Jr. et al., 2010).

The independent variables explain the dependent variables well ( $R^2 = 0.55$  for trust;  $R^2 = 0.40$  for feelings of violation;  $R^2 = 0.54$  for negative WOM and  $R^2 = 0.63$  for continuance intentions). The results (see Table 3 and Fig. 2) are in line with the proposed relationships of psychological contract breach with trust (H1) and feelings of violation (H2), while regarding perceived opportunism the results do not support the relationship with trust (H3), but only with feelings of violation (H4). When testing for relationships between trust and the outcomes, the hypothesis is supported for the relationship of trust with continuance intentions (H6), while not for the relationship with negative WOM (H5). In contrast, feelings of violation are significantly related to negative WOM (H7), but not with continuance intentions (H8).

Regarding the control variables (gender, revenues from Airbnb, Superhost status), there were no significant relationships of the control variables with negative WOM, while only Superhost status was positively related to continuance intentions ( $0.12, p < 0.05$ ). To shed more light on the possible differences between hosts with Superhost status and those without it, we ran a post-hoc analysis. The results of the independent-samples *t*-test show that Superhosts on average expressed higher agreement with statements measuring feelings of violation and perceived opportunism of Airbnb compared to hosts without this status, while there were no statistically significant differences in the level of agreement with other statements between the two groups. One explanation could be that Superhosts – due to their greater efforts in hosting for Airbnb, since this status is awarded for providing outstanding hospitality – expect that the company is not going to act opportunistically in their relationship, and because of their high expectations also feel more frustrated or betrayed (feelings of violation) when a breach occurs.

4.3. Mediation

In addition, we tested the indirect effects of opportunism and psychological contract breach on negative WOM and continuance intentions using bias-corrected (BC) bootstrap confidence intervals analysis, as proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Resampling 5000 times and using a 95% confidence interval (CI) for the parameter estimates, the results suggest an indirect total effect of opportunism on negative WOM (indirect  $\beta = 0.445, 95\% \text{ BC CI} = [0.292, 0.613]$ ), which is primarily due to the indirect effect of opportunism through feelings of violation on negative WOM (indirect  $\beta = 0.444, 95\% \text{ BC CI} = [0.287,$

Table 3  
Structural model estimation results.

Hypothesis	Proposed direction	Standardized path coefficient (t-test)	Result
H1: Psychological contract breach → Trust	–	–0.73 (–19.24, $p < 0.01$ )	Supported
H2: Psychological contract breach → Feelings of violation	+	0.11 (2.08, $p < 0.05$ )	Supported
H3: Perceived opportunism → Trust	–	–0.05 (–1.03, $p > 0.05$ )	Not supported
H4: Perceived opportunism → Feelings of violation	+	0.60 (13.36, $p < 0.01$ )	Supported
H5: Trust → Negative WOM	–	–0.03 (–0.54, $p > 0.05$ )	Not supported
H6: Trust → Continuance intentions	+	0.79 (25.69, $p < 0.01$ )	Supported
H7: Feelings of violation → Negative WOM	+	0.73 (20.94, $p < 0.01$ )	Supported
H8: Feelings of violation → Continuance intentions	–	0.00 (0.02, $p > 0.05$ )	Not supported

0.613]). There is also a total indirect effect of psychological contract breach on negative WOM (indirect  $\beta = 0.163, 95\% \text{ BC CI} = [0.006, 0.326]$ ), while the results provide no support for specific indirect effects of psychological contract breach through trust and feelings of violation on negative WOM. There is a total indirect effect of psychological contract breach on continuance intentions (indirect  $\beta = –0.798, 95\% \text{ BC CI} = [–0.993, –0.640]$ ), which is predominantly channelled through trust (indirect  $\beta = –0.789, 95\% \text{ BC CI} = [–0.997, –0.612]$ ). The indirect effect from opportunism to continuance intentions is not statistically significant. We can conclude that there is a complementary mediation of feelings of violation in the relationship between opportunism and negative WOM and trust in the case of the relationship between psychological contract and continuance intention, which means that both an indirect effect and a direct effect exist and point in the same direction (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen, 2010).

5. Discussion

The sharing economy provides an exciting study background due to rising tensions among the participating actors. A particularly relevant group for investigation, due to their unique position and reliance on the platform, are providers, i.e. Airbnb hosts, acting at the same time as entrepreneurs, informal employees, partners, and users of the sharing economy platform (Cheng et al., 2020). Based on these outlines, the aim of this study was to explain the complex relationships between actors in the sharing economy through psychological contract theory. More specifically, a conceptual model which included psychological contract breach and opportunism as the main antecedents, and continuance intentions and negative WOM as the main outcomes of trust and feelings of violation, was proposed and tested from the providers’ point of view.

The results of our study confirmed H1, i.e., the influence of psychological breach on trust, and showed that service providers’ trust in a sharing economy platform depends on psychological contract breach. This echoes the findings of studies on employees (Zhao et al., 2007) and

Table 2  
Means, standard deviations (SD), and correlations.

Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Psychological contract breach	2.59	1.14	<b>0.87</b>					
2 Opportunism	3.96	1.61	0.21**	<b>0.88</b>				
3 Trust	5.35	1.17	–0.72**	–0.20**	<b>0.87</b>			
4 Feelings of violation	3.10	1.84	0.24**	0.61**	–0.20	<b>0.93</b>		
5 Negative WOM	3.43	1.75	0.19**	0.71**	–0.17*	0.73	<b>0.88</b>	
6 Continuance intentions	5.14	1.30	–0.69**	–0.17*	0.77	–0.13*	–0.14*	<b>0.90</b>

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

Below the diagonal: zero-order correlations. On the diagonal: square root of AVE.

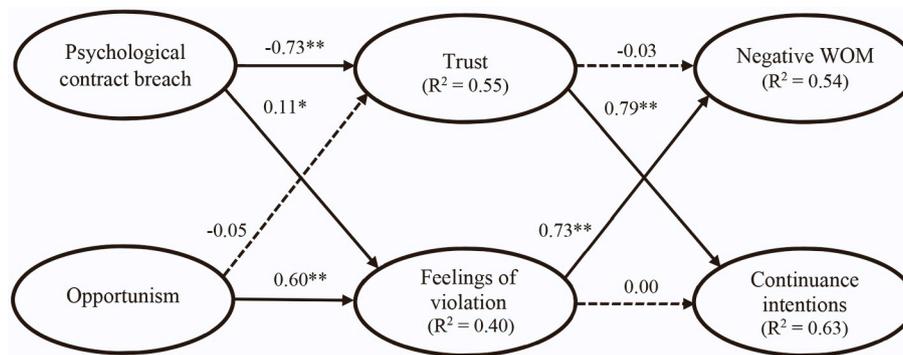


Fig. 2. The final model with results.

Notes: Solid arrows = supported hypotheses. Dashed arrows = unsupported hypotheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

final consumers (Malhotra et al., 2017), and establishes contract breach as an important antecedent of trust in B2B sharing economy relationships. As for the influence of psychological contract breach on feelings of violation (H2), this relationship was supported as well. This finding is important, as it demonstrates that, indeed, we are dealing with two distinct constructs (i.e. breach and feelings of violation) that are significantly positively related. By finding support for their relationship, we extend the findings of previous studies which did not make this distinction in B2B markets (Blessley et al., 2018; Hill et al., 2009), and establish the role of emotions arising from unethically charged situations. Furthermore, in Zhao et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis the relationship between psychological contract breach and (mis)trust was much stronger than between breach and the feeling of violation, which is also reflected in our study. Regarding the outcome variables, we confirmed that when platforms do not honour an unwritten contract, i.e. psychological contract breach, this has negative consequences for the relationship between them and their providers as it affects the intentions to continue the relationship, with the link mediated by trust. While previous studies mostly examined the link between psychological contract breach and turnover intentions of employees (Moquin, Riemenschneider, & Wakefield, 2019; Chen & Wu, 2017), we were able to transfer this proposition to the platform-based B2B setting and additionally extend it to include a mediator. In sum, our study contributes to psychological contract theory by testing the main relationships in a novel setting, distinguishing and confirming the link between psychological contract breach and feelings of violation, and confirming the indirect influence of psychological contract breach on continuance intentions of service providers.

Further, opportunism was an important predictor of feelings of violation (H3), but not of trust (H4). The direct significant effect of opportunism on feelings of violation complements previous findings and shows the supporting role it plays in psychological contract theory. That is, providers trust the platform but actually feel unhappy, angry, and disappointed because of opportunism in their relationships with the company. This is not only an interesting finding, but also a new contribution to the literature, as to our knowledge no previous study has examined the relationship between perceived opportunism and feelings of violation in the context of the sharing economy. In contrast to the findings of existing studies on traditional B2B relationships (e.g., Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Zhang, Zheng, and Li, 2019), strategic alliances (e.g., Das, 2006; Das & Kumar, 2011; Mikami, Ikegami, and Segrestin, 2022) and public-private partnerships (e.g., Ping Ho, Levitt, Tsui, and Hsu, 2015), perceived opportunism does not affect the level of trust in our study within the sharing economy context (H4). While this may seem surprising in business relationships, a recent study by Maurya and Srivastava (2019, p. 1420) shows that “organizations tolerate opportunism as long as they derive some economic value”. Given the fact that service providers are often totally dependent on the platform, as there are not many alternatives in the market, and their overdependence on

the revenues from these relationships, providers clearly tolerate and accept a certain level of opportunistic behaviour. In fact, the literature on B2B has for a long time recognized the need to tolerate some opportunistic behaviour (e.g., Lee, 2022; Seggie, Griffith, and Jap, 2013), especially in what Wathne and Heide (2000) called “lockin” relationships, in which “a party cannot leave a given relationship without incurring economic losses. As a consequence, a lockin situation may require a party to tolerate opportunistic behaviour”. Moreover, it is noteworthy that both psychological contract breach and opportunism influence feelings of violation, demonstrating the complementary nature of both antecedents, with opportunism appearing to exert a much stronger effect in the sharing economy. This extends the findings of previous studies that focused primarily on the relationship between psychological contract breach and feelings of violation (e.g., Blessley et al., 2018; Griep and Vantilborgh, 2018; Robinson and Morrison, 2000), opening the way for a new construct to be added to psychological contract theory. Furthermore, opportunism indirectly drives negative WOM through feelings of violation. While previous research examined behavioural outcomes in psychological contract theory and focused more on loyalty (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020), job-related attitudes and intentions (Hartmann & Rutherford, 2015), and switching intentions (Blessley et al., 2018), we demonstrate the relevance of negative WOM.

Finally, the influence of the central constructs on the outcomes was not as expected. We found support for the influence of trust on intentions (H6), but not on negative WOM (H5). Consistent with the findings of Wang, Asaad, and Filieri (2020), we confirmed that perceptions of trust influence future intentions, implying that providers with high levels of trust in the platform intend to use the platform in the future. However, high levels of trust do not lead to less badmouthing of the platform. This finding is similar to those of other studies that examined trust and negative WOM within the online context (e.g., Jun, Kim, and Tang, 2017). On the other hand, negative emotions (feelings of violation) toward the platform will certainly increase the negative way providers talk about the platform with others, confirming H7, but will not change their own intentions to continue the relationship (H8). One explanation for the significant link between feelings of violation and negative WOM, which has not been widely studied, may be that feelings of violation go beyond cognition, running deep into emotion, leading to reactions by individuals that may be counterproductive for the organization (Raja et al., 2011), such as negative WOM. Since the providers are upset, the outcomes are more conspicuous and hurt the platform more because they talk bad about the platform than because they themselves would use the service less in the future. As for the unsupported hypotheses (H5 & H8), it could be that in the eyes of providers, the feelings of violation may be linked to process failure (was I treated well?), while lack of trust is related to outcome failure (am I getting my money's worth?). Research has found that individuals respond more passionately (i.e., with negative WOM) to process failures than to outcome failures (Wang

& Huff, 2007). This finding contributes to the existing literature and extends psychological contract theory, which previously did not consider what the repercussions of feelings of violation might be, especially not the outcomes from the consumer behaviour literature, such as negative WOM.

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

The study demonstrated how the determinants from the organizational behaviour literature together with the outcomes established in the consumer behaviour literature can be linked and successfully transferred to the chosen sharing economy context, offering several interesting findings that contribute to the B2B sharing economy literature dealing with its dark side.

Focusing on the dark side within the sharing economy, the main implications of this study are related to the fact that the B2B sharing economy literature lacks understanding of how (1) psychological contract breach and (2) opportunism impact the relationships between sharing economy platforms and the engagement of service providers within such platforms. This study has established that psychological contract breach and opportunism are important constructs within B2B relationships in the sharing economy. Firstly, psychological contract breach increases feelings of violation and reduces trust, which proves these relationships are relevant beyond the literature exploring employee-employer relationships (see Zhao et al., 2007). Secondly, the study extends the understanding of opportunistic behaviour from traditional B2B relationships (e.g., Heide et al., 2007; John, 1984) into the sharing economy B2B domain. The new understanding comes in the form of the link between perceived opportunism and feelings of violation.

Finally, by considering the impact of more negatively charged constructs on behavioural outcomes in the sharing economy context, we demonstrate how both psychological contract breach and opportunism have varying indirect effects on negative WOM and continuance intention. An important theoretical contribution to the literature at the intersection of psychological contract theory and sharing economy B2B relationships lies in the finding that psychological contract breach has an indirect effect on continuance intentions (through trust), while opportunism (through feelings of violation) and psychological contract breach (through a combined effect of trust and feelings of violation) indirectly influence negative WOM.

### 5.2. Managerial implications

Some of the constructs that were included in this study have been previously found in more traditional market relationships (e.g. Guo et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017), but have not been conceptualized or examined within the context of B2B platform-provider relationships in the sharing economy. Based on the findings from this study, there are therefore key implications that can be drawn for businesses within the sharing economy market. Given the nature of relationships within the sharing economy, especially where they are centred on one giant platform, such as Airbnb, which is characterized by interdependence and an imbalance of power, as Airbnb has greater weight compared to individual hosts, these relationships have a unique nature that managers need to be aware of.

In contrast to traditional B2B relationships, the platform-based relationship between platforms and their service providers seems to depend on the opportunistic behaviour of the former that the latter perceive. Although service providers, in the case of Airbnb, tolerate such behaviour in their relationships with the platform to some extent, especially in terms of trust in the platform, this perception of opportunism could harm the company in the long run. This is because the perceived opportunistic behaviour reinforces the negative emotions of the providers in their relationship with the platform, which then leads to negative WOM. Such negativity in the relationship can be harmful in the

long run, especially in the ever-changing sharing economy market. Sharing economy platforms therefore need to deal more effectively with providers' perceptions of opportunism by engaging them in more mutually rewarding exchanges and respectful interactions that reduce their negative emotions and feelings of violation. One solution is to raise transparency, which Airbnb is already trying to achieve (Airbnb, 2020b), by working closely with hosts, promoting collaboration and shared learning, and ensuring a transparent business environment. Furthermore, as providers are both integral to the platform's business and not necessarily independent businesses themselves (Sprague, 2020), policymakers could reassess their status as independent contractors and provide them with additional protections through regulatory mechanisms that would prevent platforms from behaving opportunistically.

Moreover, companies in the sharing economy must be careful about how they manage their relationships with their service providers and others on whom they depend not only for holding the market, but for market growth too. Any perception of a breach of the psychological contract with service providers can be damaging to the relationships that platforms need to maintain. The reason is that a breach of the psychological contract significantly and negatively affects trust, and without trust, a business relationship cannot last long. Considering the intermediary role of the platform, it must focus on further developing the mechanisms that filter the actors that can participate in the market and provide enough information that can be used in the trust assessment (Martin, 2019). This will reduce the likelihood of unexpected events occurring and ensure that service providers get the promised experience. Otherwise, platform competitors could claim a share of the market, as it may be easier for service providers who distrust one platform to switch to others. In addition, breach of psychological contract increases negative emotions in the relationship. Platforms like Airbnb therefore need to pay more attention to how they communicate with and manage their providers. Some perceived breaches of psychological contracts may be due to unclear or poor communication between the platform and its providers. Psychological contracts need to be carefully managed through more individualized communication, which would help reduce negative perceptions in the relationship and develop clearer expectations.

Platforms in the sharing economy also need to work hard to maintain a high level of trust in their relationships with service providers and others. Our finding that shows trust significantly increases providers' intentions to continue their relationships with the platform is a very important one. If trust is such a central construct in determining whether providers will keep participating in the sharing economy, then platforms need to monitor trust, be transparent in their dealings with providers, and respond immediately to any negative developments that may occur in this regard. As such, platforms need to keep their promises and not behave opportunistically. This is the only way that they will achieve trust from their users, avoid fostering negative emotions and maintain future intentions to continue the relationship. In addition to the various mechanisms platforms employ to ensure that all users participate in the market in accordance with rules and regulations (Leoni and Parker, 2019), the platforms must make additional efforts to provide appropriate redress for those times when things go wrong.

Finally, feelings of violation generate negative emotions that lead to negative WOM. Sharing economy platforms need to be mindful of their interactions with providers and others on their platforms. Negative emotions in relationships usually lead to undesirable consequences, such as negative WOM, which has been found in the literature as damaging to the reputation of companies. Thus, platforms should avoid engaging service providers and others on their platforms with any negativity, as this will reach other providers and their final customers. Since several cases of lack of customer support by Airbnb have already been reported on the Airbnbhell website (Moon et al., 2019), customer representatives can play a very important role in this regard, so special attention needs to be paid to this area in order to develop appropriate measures to help resolve any issues that the providers encounter.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research opportunities

Although this research has attempted to empirically validate the proposed model, some caution should be taken when interpreting the results. First, while recent B2B studies acknowledge differences stemming from the nature of psychological contract breaches (Gillani, Kutaula, & Budhwar, 2021) and culturally diverse settings (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020, Kingshott, Chung, Putranta, Sharma, & Sima, 2021), we focused on general perceptions of breach in a single country. Since the data was only collected from Airbnb hosts in the UK, the findings fail to include the views from service providers of other platforms and countries. Therefore, the findings from this study may need to be tested on service providers in other business and cultural settings to demonstrate the applicability of the proposed model. Second, we collected data through an online panel, and although this is an acceptable sampling frame for testing relationships between variables (Baker et al., 2010), future research should evaluate the generalizability of our findings combining offline and online samples. Third, the findings do not take into account the views of the platform itself, which is challenging in our context with multiple providers and a central actor (platform) acting as a matchmaker (Perren and Kozinets, 2018). Future research should consider including multiple platforms to examine the other side of the relationships, which may be useful for our understanding of some of the findings around constructs, such as opportunism, psychological contract breach and feelings of violation. Fourth, three hypotheses that could not be supported also require future research. The results indicate that opportunism has no effect on trust, which is contrary to the findings in the literature. To further investigate whether the trust of the service provider is independent of the opportunistic behaviour of the platform, it is recommended that future research collect qualitative data from the field. Fifth, our explanation for the unsupported hypotheses about the effects of trust on negative WOM and feelings of violation on continuance intentions is based on process and outcome failures. Future research, both qualitative and quantitative should gather further evidence to support this explanation. Sixth, it is also possible that there are some other mechanisms in place, so future research could include additional variables in the model. For example, platform stickiness (Laczko, Hullova, Needham, Rossiter, and Battisti, 2019), which refers to the ability of a central actor to unceasingly attract new stakeholders and retain existing stakeholders on the platform through the effective orchestration of value co-creation, could be modelled as a moderator for the relationship between mediators (feelings of violation and trust) and outcomes in our model (negative WOM and continuance intentions). Further, as breach may be related to peers' misbehaviour, constructs capturing providers' perceptions of customers misbehaviours could provide more insights. To get a more comprehensive view of the relationships, the model could be further enriched with constructs from S–D logic, such as value co-creation or value co-destruction (Buhalis et al., 2000).

## 6. Conclusion

To date the dark side of the sharing economy experience has received little attention in the literature. This study was thus developed to crystallize the nature of the negative aspects of the platform-based B2B relationship between service providers and online platforms. To achieve this, we combined insights from the B2B literature on opportunism and the literature on consumer behaviour using psychological contract theory, and specifically psychological contract breach. The conceptual model was tested in the context of Airbnb in the UK. The findings provide very good support for the conceptual model and, more importantly, significant understanding has been obtained on the role of opportunism and psychological contract breach in B2B relationships within the sharing economy. By confirming that psychological contract breach directly influences trust and feelings of violation, and indirectly continuance intentions and negative WOM, we highlight its key role in

the formation of relationships between service providers and sharing economy platforms. Another key finding is that opportunism has a direct effect on feelings of violation and an indirect effect on negative WOM, demonstrating service providers' reactions to platforms' opportunistic behaviour. While researchers of the sharing economy would be well advised to consider these findings when further examining B2B relationships, managers could consider them to develop strategies to avoid certain actions that may harm the company in the long run.

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## Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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