

# Customer feedback provision in online labor platforms: an application of the theory of planned behavior

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## ABSTRACT

Customers have been increasingly making use of online labor platforms such as Airbnb, Uber, and Postmates, rising in popularity with the prevalence of online resources, technology, and applications for crowdsourcing. This type of business model results in the need for proper quality management of service providers and adequate information upon which customers base their buying decisions. Online labor platforms thereby rely on feedback from customers to effectively manage their service providers and uphold the platform's community of trust, but this feedback provision is entirely voluntary by customers. This paper provides an application of the theory of planned behavior in attempt to gain an understanding of what drives customers to participate in feedback provision in a setting where a pattern of doing so is crucial to the survival and success of the platform but is simultaneously completely voluntary. A survey of 142 Airbnb users was analyzed to test three hypotheses related to posited effects within the theory of planned behavior, including the prediction that attitudes toward feedback provision would have the greatest effect on intention to provide feedback. Findings show that the theory of planned behavior is insufficient in predicting customer feedback provision behavior in the context of online labor platforms in that hedonic attitudes were the only significant predictor of intention to provide feedback, and subjective norms were the only significant predictor of actual feedback provision.

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## Keywords

Online labor platforms, platform economies, collaborative consumption, theory of planned behavior, customer feedback provision, customer review

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years a new form of business has emerged which presents a unique way to connect customers looking for a service with service providers who are willing to offer one. Online labor platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, and Airbnb have created an ecosystem in which users voluntarily exchange a service such as a car ride, food delivery, or accommodation for financial compensation arranged and conducted over an online platform (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). This sharing and distribution of resources is enabled by the ever-increasing actuality of our digital lives, enabling a system in which users can coordinate an exchange of resources or services over an online marketplace in moments.

Online labor platforms differ from traditional businesses in the way that service providers do not follow a traditional hiring/selection process. Users sign up to 'work' for the platform of their own will and can choose when they would like to be active. The platform firm cannot guarantee a quality service due to the distance between the firm and its service providers – for this, they must rely on customers to provide performance evaluation in the form of feedback. For example, the properties listed by Airbnb hosts are typically online and available for rent within six hours, with no evaluation or verification process of the listing by Airbnb itself (Airbnb, Inc., 2018). When users choose to stay at an Airbnb accommodation, they rely on reviews left by other users since the platform has no way of verifying each listing. The customer contribution plays a key role in the success of online labor platforms by ensuring a quality service and enabling trust with the service provider, who would otherwise be a stranger with no form of verification. This creates a community of trust, as customers must rely on the experiences of others to make an informed purchase. This trust, in turn, creates an influence for customers to similarly contribute to feedback mechanisms to fulfil the cycle.

Consequently, the introduction of this new business form brings along with it unconventional roles for the involved actors, in particular, customers (Benoit, Baker, Bolton, Gruber, & Kandampully, 2017). Customers are expected to act as managers, providing performance evaluation and feedback of their service, thereby allowing the platform to maintain standards of employee performance. This performance evaluation by customers is crucial to the employment relationship structure because of the unusual disconnect between the 'employer' and the employee. On an online labor platform, it would be infeasible for the platform firm itself to conduct individual performance appraisal of all employees. The increased distance between the platform firm and employee, in coordination with the direct interaction between the service provider user and customer, leads to the customer's responsibility in contributing to what would typically be considered human resource management.

Due to the relative novelty of this form of business, there is little in the way of existing literature and/or research regarding the topic of online labor platforms and the mechanisms which enable them to succeed. These platform firms are different from traditional businesses and therefore have different needs – one being the need for platform firms to receive customer feedback and performance evaluation of service providers. The survival and success of online labor platforms are contingent on this contribution by customers in a way that traditional firms are not. If this feedback is so intrinsically important to online labor platforms, the question then is why customers fulfil this duty as voluntary participants who can choose whether or not they participate in customer feedback provision. To gain a better

understanding of why customers participate in this performance evaluation, the theory of planned behavior is applied.

The theory of planned behavior describes how human behaviors are shaped by "attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms with respect to the behavior, and perceived control over the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 206). Application of the theory of planned behavior is an attempt to better understand why customers exhibit the behavior of engaging in performance evaluation, by targeting their attitude toward providing feedback, subjective norms regarding providing feedback, and perceived behavioral control over providing feedback. The theory of planned behavior is the chosen method of analysis because of its widespread validation and reinforcement in the social sciences field. In this context, the variables which make up the theory of planned behavior may result in varying relations due to the novelty of online labor platforms and their unique implications, including the potential of customer behavior to differ online compared to typical patterns of behavior which will be further discussed.

Due to the aforementioned factors and the newness of the online labor platform environment, it is reasonable to propose that the theory of planned behavior may exhibit different relationships in this application. The theory of planned behavior provides a framework which helps to generally understand what impacts the intentions to perform a behavior, but online labor platforms present distinctive features which build the assumption that some variables may have a weaker effect than others. These considerations lead to the following research question:

*Which variable in the theory of planned behavior has the greatest effect size on customer feedback provision in online labor platforms?*

The following section will define and conceptualize the variables of the theory of planned behavior in the context of online labor platforms and develop hypotheses based on their expectations. Section 3 will describe the methodology behind the data collection used for hypothesis testing. Further, results are presented in Section 4 and discussed in Section 5. Section 6 concludes the research as well as sharing limitations of this study.

## 2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 Conceptualization of behavior: customer feedback provision

In applying the theory of planned behavior to the case at hand it is necessary to first conceptualize the outcome variable of the framework: customer feedback provision. Customer feedback provision is analyzed as a behavior that users of online labor platform may or may not perform as a way they conduct themselves within the platform. Generally, there are various types of feedback depending on its purpose and its form. Lepak and Gowan (2010) describe two types of feedback differentiated based on its purpose: either administrative or developmental (Lepak & Gowan, 2010, p. 274). Another dimension of feedback is its form – whether it is structured or unstructured.

The purpose of administrative feedback is to aid managers in making decisions regarding aspects such as the salaries and incentives of employees, whereas developmental feedback is used to improve employee performance (Lepak & Gowan, 2010). Online platforms may use their customer feedback for both purposes to varying extents, but in this context, customer feedback provision exists mainly as an administrative feedback

mechanism. These platforms can use algorithms to manage their service providers by setting certain thresholds for performance, as well as simply allowing customers to read reviews left by others which provide guidance on which service provider to make use of. In the case of algorithmic maintenance, minimum rating levels must be met in order to continue providing the service on the platform, therefore enabling the administrative purpose of feedback. Uber drivers must maintain an average star rating above a minimum average rating varying in each city, otherwise they risk account deactivation (Uber Technologies Inc., 2018). This ensures accountability and maintenance of a standard of performance, allowing service providers of poor quality to be improved or terminated. Similarly, Airbnb users are prompted to write reviews for the other user involved in their interaction. Though these ratings are not used to deactivate listings below a certain standard, they provide a basis upon which potential customers can judge which listing they would like to book or for hosts to judge whether or not they would like to rent to a certain guest, thereby enabling a sort of administrative function of selection (Airbnb, Inc., 2018).

The form of feedback is another important distinction, differing between structured and unstructured. Structured feedback includes the customer feedback provision which is prompted by the online labor platforms as a step in the process of making use of the platform. For example, after a guest has completed a stay at an Airbnb listing, he/she is prompted via email and/or the Airbnb smartphone application to review his/her stay. In exchange for giving feedback regarding the host and the accommodation, the guest would receive a review written by the host. These reviews are what build the community of trust in online labor platforms, allowing future customers to set suitable expectations of the service. Unstructured feedback may include more informal measures which are not prompted or solicited by the platform, such as customer posts to online media outlets. This study is representative of the structured form of feedback (see Table 1) as it is so closely tied to the survival of online platforms and their service quality assurance since these structured forms of feedback are what make online labor platforms so different from traditional businesses.

**Table 1. Focus of this study.**

		<i>Form of feedback</i>	
		Structured	Unstructured
<i>Purpose of feedback</i>	Administrative	Focus of this study	
	Developmental		

## 2.2 Antecedent of behavior: intention

The three independent variables of the theory of planned behavior are not said to directly dictate behavior itself, but instead they form an individual's behavioral intention. An individual cannot perform a given behavior without first having the intention to do so. This intention represents an "indication[] of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). In order to predict a specific behavior, the assessment of intentions must also be specific to the exact context of the behavior. The theory of planned behavior generally accepts that an individual's intention to perform a given behavior is likely to lead to the performance of said behavior, so long as the individual has a sufficient degree of actual control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1985).

## 2.3 Conceptualization of independent variables

### 2.3.1 Attitude toward customer feedback provision

The theory of planned behavior defines an individual's attitude toward the behavior as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). Simply this can be reviewed by identifying the costs and benefits of performing the relevant behavior. At a basic level, online labor platform customers benefit directly from customer feedback provision by receiving personal feedback from their service provider in exchange for their feedback regarding the service. This exchange creates an incentive for customers due to the curiosity to receive feedback in return. Costs incurred may include the time and effort expended in providing customer feedback. Further costs and benefits – both direct and indirect – may arise which vary between customers depending upon their personal perceptions. For example, some customers may consider themselves to be contributing to the overall betterment of the platform's service as a benefit of providing feedback, while others may not encounter this belief.

### 2.3.2 Subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision

Subjective norms in the context of the theory of planned behavior is defined as "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). This variable is typically judged by first identifying 'important others' such as family and close friends, then predicting the extent to which these actors would approve or disapprove of the relevant behavior. In practice this variable may prove to be less visible than in other applications of this theory due to the relative anonymity of providing feedback on an online platform. The behavior of customer feedback provision is not outwardly visible; therefore, it is less likely that important others would specifically approve or disapprove. Further, due to the newness of online labor platforms, it is likely that social norms have not yet been institutionalized.

### 2.3.3 Perceived behavioral control over customer feedback provision

The theory of planned behavior defines perceived behavioral control (PBC) as "the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). Perceived behavioral control is partly derived from an individual's resource availability in the face of the relevant behavior. An individual will feel greater perceived behavioral control over providing feedback in the case that he/she possesses the necessary resources, such as time or an easily navigable application or website. The past experience of an individual lends itself to perceived control by creating a basis upon which he/she has already been introduced to the behavior, thereby increasing ease of performing the behavior. In the case of online labor platforms, providing feedback after a transaction is designed in an efficient manner in order to encourage users to routinely participate at a high rate. Therefore, the process is typically as unobtrusive as possible and can be fulfilled relatively quickly. For example, Uber's feedback system is based on a five-star scale, which prompts customers immediately after the ride ends to rate their driver with essentially one tap on the mobile application. Airbnb prompts customers by email to leave a brief review of their stay, also including a rating from one to five stars, which customers are given two weeks to complete. These feedback mechanisms are standardized and designed with ease of use in mind, requiring

little from the customer and allowing a great amount of standard control.

## 2.4 The theory of planned behavior framework

To analyze the motivation behind customers' provision of feedback in online labor platforms, the theory of planned behavior provides a framework which connects an individual's actual behavior with their intentions to perform said behavior. Intention can be reasonably predicted with a positive relation from the independent variables of: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms regarding the behavior, and perceived behavioral control over the behavior. In the case of customer feedback provision on online labor platforms, the theory of planned behavior holds because customers can decide at will whether or not to perform this behavior, as the theory can only be applied in situations of a voluntary behavior.

## 2.5 Hypotheses

Despite the new context of online labor platforms and their implications which may affect the expected effect sizes within the framework of the theory of planned behavior, it is still expected that the general relations will hold. In order to establish these relations, each of the three independent variables will be explored. First, attitude toward providing feedback is discussed. It is reasonable to expect that if a customer of an online labor platform has a positive evaluation of providing feedback, he/she is more likely to have a positive intention to provide feedback. Those who see the benefit of participating in feedback provision as discussed in Section 2.3.1 may exhibit a stronger intention to provide feedback because they would like to reap these benefits of, for example, receiving feedback in return or contributing to the community of trust enabling online labor platforms to survive. Conversely, if a customer has a negative attitude toward providing feedback, he/she is likely to have a negative intention to provide feedback. If he/she does not see the value or does not deem its costs worthy of its benefits, he/she is less likely to exhibit the intention to provide feedback.

As discussed in Section 2.3.2, subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision play an interesting role in the context of online labor platforms due to the relative anonymity and lack of power that important others have to influence this feedback behavior. Though seemingly less relevant, subjective norms are still expected to hold a positive relation to intention to provide feedback due to typical human behavior patterns; if a customer feels a strong social pressure to provide feedback, it is likely that he/she would intend to do so in order to comply with social norms and expectations of important others. On the contrary, feeling a social pressure to not provide feedback may put a customer under the assumption that it is unnecessary or unneeded, resulting in a negative intention to provide feedback.

Further, it is expected that perceived behavioral control has a positive effect on intention to provide feedback through enabling customers with the initiative (or lack thereof) to do so. Though this concept is dependent upon each individual's perceptions, online labor platforms have a great amount of influence over how much behavioral control customers have through the design of their feedback mechanisms. A customer would report high perceived behavioral control if providing feedback was easy, routine, and incurred few obstacles. If this was the case, a customer would be more likely to participate than if he/she had difficulty with the platform's feedback mechanisms.

Finally, the role of intention to provide feedback must be evaluated in relation to feedback provision behavior to establish

the full model. Attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control regarding customer feedback provision cannot directly affect feedback provision behavior without first shaping one's intention to exhibit the behavior. These three independent variables must drive something to finally result in behavior. Intentions are imperative because attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control cannot directly impact one's feedback behavior without first motivating them to do so, thereby contributing to an intention. Having a positive attitude toward feedback provision will not directly result in frequent feedback provision without creating a motivation, an intention, to perform said behavior. This is because attitudes alone do not contribute to behavior unless an individual has a want to engage in the behavior. Similarly, in a case in which subjective norms are present, these norms cannot influence one's behavior unless he/she feels a motivation to comply, creating an intention. Perceived behavioral control gives one power over performing a behavior but cannot directly result in the performance of behavior unless coupled with an intention to do so. Therefore, these variables alone cannot result in customer feedback provision directly without the mediating variable of intention to provide feedback. The above arguments all lead to the hypothesis that in online labor platforms:

*Hypothesis 1:* Attitude toward providing feedback (H1a), subjective norms regarding providing feedback (H1b), and perceived behavioral control over providing feedback (H1c) are positively related to customer feedback provision through the mediating role of intention to provide feedback.

Though all independent variables are still expected to have a positive relationship with intention to provide customer feedback, the context of online labor platforms and the atmosphere in which they operate deviates from the past applications of the theory of planned behavior, thereby creating the potential for differing relations between variables. Evaluating the independent variables in practice reveals how exactly this new context provides for some relations in the framework to be stronger than others. In order to establish these relations, subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision in online labor platforms shall first be evaluated. Being that the theory of planned behavior defines subjective norms as a social pressure to perform a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991), it is likely that an individual would feel a greater social pressure from their important others to perform a certain behavior if the given behavior had a large impact on these peers or the individual's relationship with them. In the context of providing customer feedback on online labor platforms, this variable nearly fails to materialize because in virtually all cases, providing feedback will not impact these important others in any way. Further, even if one's important others disagree with providing customer feedback, they do not have the power to influence his/her behavior as they have no control over someone else's feedback provision. Finally, due to the relative novelty of online labor platforms, social norms regarding participation in customer feedback provision have not yet been standardized, thereby creating a situation in which it is unlikely for important others to have a great influence on whether or not an individual chooses to engage in this behavior. These arguments lead to the conclusion that subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision in online labor platforms will have a relatively small effect on an individual's intention to provide customer feedback.

Secondly, perceived behavioral control over customer feedback provision in practice must be evaluated to determine its effect on intention to provide feedback. Online labor platforms present their feedback prompts in the same standardized way to each customer, designed intentionally with great ease of use to

encourage all customers to take part. For example, customers can take part in Uber’s feedback system by simply rating their driver instantly from one to five stars with the option to leave specific comments. Customers are prompted with the rating request immediately once the ride has ended and are given seven days to rate their driver on the Uber mobile application, allowing ample opportunity to provide feedback (Uber Technologies Inc., 2018). Similarly, Airbnb customers are prompted via email and the Airbnb mobile application after they check out of the accommodation and have 14 days to complete a review. Customers are also allowed to edit reviews within 48 hours of submission (Airbnb, Inc., 2018). This goes to show that online labor platforms intentionally aim for a high level of control for all customers in providing feedback, in addition to customer feedback provision being entirely voluntary. Therefore, nearly all customers are expected to display high levels of perceived behavioral control. Slight variation may be accounted for due to the fact that each individual will face different circumstances which may or may not limit his/her resources in providing customer feedback. If perceived behavioral control is high for all customers, yet actual customer feedback provision still varies greatly, perceived behavioral control must have a relatively low impact on an individual’s intention to provide feedback.

It has now been established that subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are likely to have a relatively small effect on intention to provide feedback. Therefore the theory of planned behavior says that an individual’s attitude toward customer feedback provision must account for the greatest variance in customer feedback provision. If subjective norms are not yet established and/or do not have much bearing on one’s intention to provide feedback, and all individuals have nearly the same level of control over customer feedback provision, it is likely that one’s intention to provide feedback is strongly related to his/her attitudes toward providing feedback. This is reinforced by the likeliness that in the case stated above, an individual is expected to have a strong intention to provide feedback if he/she holds a positive evaluation of the behavior of customer feedback provision (i.e. he/she finds providing feedback to be good, useful, beneficial, etc.). This leads to the hypothesis that in online labor platforms:

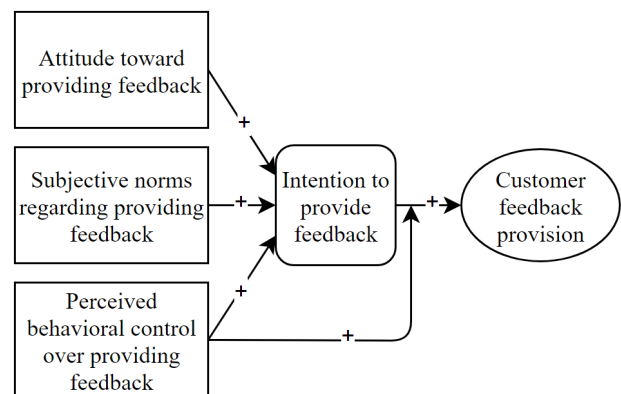
*Hypothesis 2:* Attitude toward customer feedback provision will have the greatest impact on intention to provide feedback in comparison to subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

Despite a customer’s intentions, it is not expected that intentions to provide feedback will always result in actually doing so. This may be due to lack of resources (time, Internet connectivity, phone/computer battery, etc.) or a difficult-to-navigate feedback mechanism, among other potential deterrents which influence customers against providing feedback. These barriers would be covered by measures of perceived behavioral control. Though the feedback mechanisms of online labor platforms are standardized and routine per customer, the perceptions of individual customers regarding how much control they have over providing feedback may vary, potentially explaining the failure of intention to result in actual feedback provision. Despite the fact that the general purpose of customer feedback provision is virtually the same in all online labor platforms, not all feedback mechanisms were created equal, nor do they present the same level of functionality, ease, and/or control; for example, Airbnb’s main form of feedback provision being written reviews compared to Uber’s five-star rating system. Platforms with a mechanism which allows customers to feel a great amount of control are more likely to enable their customers’ intentions to translate into actual behavior. This

might include the form of feedback provision being easily-navigable, quick to complete, and difficult to obstruct. It would then follow that those who feel a greater sense of control over providing feedback, as a result of a platform’s individual feedback mechanism’s characteristics, would be more likely and able to follow through with their intentions to do so, proposing that perceived behavioral control moderates the relationship between intention to provide feedback and customer feedback provision. These considerations lead to the hypothesis that in online labor platforms:

*Hypothesis 3:* The effect of the intention to perform customer feedback provision is stronger when perceived behavioral control is high.

Figure 1 displays the expected framework of the theory of planned behavior in customer feedback provision as predicted by the above hypotheses.



**Figure 1. Expectation of theory of planned behavior framework for customer feedback provision.**

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the aforementioned research question, three hypotheses have been built as a basis for hypothesis testing. The main form of data collection in contribution to this hypothesis testing was an online survey of customers of Airbnb. A survey was chosen as a form of primary data collection in order to gain a quantitative firsthand understanding of the motivation behind individuals to perform the given behavior of providing feedback on online labor platforms. This survey was used to gauge user perceptions regarding feedback provision on online labor platforms with items designed to test the aforementioned three hypotheses. The three independent variables as well as ‘intention’ in the theory of planned behavior framework were operationalized by adapting scales first used in “A Comparison of the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Theory of Reasoned Action” (Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992) in order to ensure that survey items were validated in previous studies. These specific scales were chosen due to their application by Icek Ajzen, the original proponent of the theory of planned behavior. All included scales in full can be found in Appendix A.

After data collection, a principal component analysis (PCA) was carried out for each of the variables. Varimax orthogonal rotation was used in attempt to reduce the many correlated variables into fewer variables composed of strongly related components. When items loaded on more than one component, the general rule was used that loadings greater than .4 represent substantive values (Field, 2009, p. 666). If the PCA resulted in multiple components, each component was computed as its own variable being the mean of relevant items. Separate analyses were conducted to test each of the three hypotheses, as will be detailed in Section 3.3.

### 3.1 Sampling procedure

A survey was chosen as the main data collection method in order to gather quantitative data needed to measure effect sizes of the three independent variables on intention to provide feedback and customer feedback provision. Participants were asked about only one platform, Airbnb, in order to control for differences among platforms which may influence customers regarding their feedback provision behavior. Airbnb was chosen because of its globally widespread presence, offering listings in over 191 countries with over 300 million guest arrivals (Airbnb, Inc., 2018). This popularity thereby allowed a greater pool of potential participants compared to a platform such as Uber, which is present in only 65 countries and not accessible in many small cities (Uber Technologies Inc., 2018).

The survey data were collected from 142 participants who had booked and fulfilled at least one Airbnb stay. Participants had an average age of 29 years ( $SD = 15$ ) and were from 22 different countries. On average the participants had been users of Airbnb for 2 years ( $SD = 1.6$ ). Airbnb does not publicly share guest demographics so it cannot be ascertained whether this is representative of the Airbnb population. These participants were contacted through the personal networks of the research team and online social media postings via Facebook, LinkedIn, and Reddit. All survey participants were customers of Airbnb who had booked at least one stay on their own account, therefore ensuring they were the individuals prompted for customer feedback from Airbnb after a stay. No further inclusion criteria were used. Participants were incentivized to complete the survey with the offer of a 50-euro Airbnb voucher giveaway and were given the opportunity to opt out at any time.

### 3.2 Measurement/operationalization

Attitudes toward customer feedback provision, subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision, perceived behavioral control over customer feedback provision, and intention to provide feedback were each measured with items adapted from the aforementioned existing scales used to test the theory of planned behavior. For these variables, items were evaluated using response options of a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The measures for each variable will now be detailed further, in addition to the full list which can be found in Appendix A.

#### 3.2.1 Measures: Attitude toward customer feedback provision

The variable of attitudes toward customer feedback provision was defined as “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of providing feedback after a stay on Airbnb”. Both favorable and unfavorable evaluations were of focus in order to analyze their effect on whether or not a customer provided feedback. This variable was measured with five items, each item being an attitude which the participant may or may not experience regarding customer feedback provision in the context of Airbnb. Participants were asked to respond with the extent to which he/she agreed that he/she experienced this attitude, for example: “Providing customer feedback/review after a stay in an Airbnb accommodation would be ... *Good, Pleasant, etc.*” (*strongly disagree – strongly agree*).

The PCA for attitude toward customer feedback provision resulted in two components (Table 2) which will further be distinguished as two separate measures of attitude, each being the mean of its items’ values. Items for attitudes ‘useful’, ‘beneficial’, and ‘good’ loaded strongly on component 1, suggesting that this component represented instrumental attitudes. The second component showed strong loadings from

items for attitudes ‘enjoyable’ and ‘pleasant’, suggesting that this component indicated hedonic attitudes. Ajzen and Driver (1991) had similar findings in their application of the theory of planned behavior in leisure participation, distinguishing between instrumental beliefs – being the costs and benefits of performing the behavior – and affective beliefs – the positive or negative feelings associated with performing the behavior. Table 2 shows loadings after rotation for attitudes toward customer feedback provision sorted by size. Though ‘pleasant’ also resulted in a substantive loading on component 1, its loading for component 2 was significantly higher, hence its final association with hedonic attitudes. The Cronbach’s Alpha for items within instrumental attitudes and hedonic attitudes were .84 and .71 respectively.

**Table 2. Rotated component loadings for items representing attitude toward customer feedback provision.**

Item	Component	
	1 (Instrumental attitudes)	2 (Hedonic attitudes)
<i>Attitude – Useful</i>	<b>.89</b>	.095
<i>Attitude – Beneficial</i>	<b>.88</b>	.16
<i>Attitude – Good</i>	<b>.75</b>	.35
<i>Attitude – Enjoyable</i>	.05	<b>.92</b>
<i>Attitude – Pleasant</i>	.41	<b>.77</b>

#### 3.2.2 Measures: Subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision

The variable of subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision was defined as “the perceived social pressure to provide or not to provide customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb”. Two items were used to measure this variable: “Most people who are important to me think I should provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb” and “When it comes to providing feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb, I want to do what most people who are important to me want me to do” (*strongly disagree – strongly agree*).

The PCA for items surveying subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision resulted in one component, each of the two items loading strongly with .82. Despite these high loadings, items for subjective norms had low reliability with Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .51$ , which is lower than the typical minimum for acceptance of .7 according to the rule of thumb of Nunnally (1978). However, the context of customer feedback provision on Airbnb might theoretically explain why participant scores may vary between items used to assess subjective norms. In this case, it is reasonable that participants may respond with a high score that most important others think one should provide feedback, but still respond low on their motivation to comply with this belief because of the lack of power and influence others have over one’s feedback behavior. Therefore, the variable of subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision was still computed as the mean of these two items.

#### 3.2.3 Measures: Perceived behavioral control over customer feedback provision

Perceived behavioral control over customer feedback provision was defined as “the perceived ease or difficulty of providing customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb”. This variable was measured using four items, for example: “For me to provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb would be very easy” and “There are numerous events outside of my control which could prevent me from providing feedback/review after a stay on

Airbnb” (*strongly disagree – strongly agree*). Values for the latter example were reverse scored due to its negative phrasing.

This variable resulted in two components after its PCA (Table 3). The items associated with component 1 suggest the overarching concept of convenience due to the themes of ease and control. The remaining item refers to preventative factors which, when reverse scored, may be representing the notion of availability to provide feedback. This led to the creation of two variables representing perceived behavioral control, convenience being the mean of values from its three related items, and availability being the fourth remaining item alone. Cronbach’s Alpha for items associated with convenience was .76.

**Table 3. Rotated component loadings for items representing PBC over customer feedback provision.**

Item	Component	
	1 (Convenience)	2 (Availability)
<i>For me to ... would be very easy.</i>	<b>.90</b>	-.078
<i>If I wanted to, I could easily ....</i>	<b>.89</b>	.068
<i>I have complete control over ....</i>	<b>.64</b>	.38
<i>There are numerous events outside of my control which could prevent me from ....</i> (reverse scored)	.034	<b>.96</b>

### 3.2.4 Measure: Intention to provide customer feedback

Intention to provide customer feedback was defined as “an indication of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to provide customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb”. This variable was measured with two items: “I intend to provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb” and “I will make an effort to provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb” (*strongly disagree – strongly agree*).

Intention to provide feedback underwent PCA which resulted in one component with strong loadings of .95 for both items. These items had high reliability with Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$ , and their mean was used as the final measure for intention to provide feedback.

### 3.2.5 Measure: Customer feedback provision (behavior)

Customer feedback provision behavior was operationalized as “the frequency with which an individual provides customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb”. This behavior was measured with two items. The first item requested the participant to share how many bookings he/she had made on Airbnb in the past two years, and the second asked how many times he/she had left feedback in the past 2 years. This was then used to determine a frequency in the form of a percentage demonstrating each participant’s feedback provision behavior as a ratio of times feedback was given to Airbnb stays.

### 3.2.6 Control variables

The survey additionally controlled for two user characteristics which may affect one’s perceptions and use of the customer feedback mechanisms of Airbnb. Control variables included age

and experience using Airbnb (in years), each treated as continuous numerical values. Age was included because of the potential differences in technological fluency between younger and older participants. This may affect customer feedback provision in this context due to its online/digital nature. Similarly, experience using Airbnb may influence customer feedback provision due to the possible implications of being a well-experienced user compared to those of one new to the platform. Age was measured by asking respondents to share their year of birth, which was then computed into age by subtracting the measure from 2018. The measure for experience on Airbnb resulted from asking respondents the year they began using Airbnb, and again finding the difference from 2018.

## 3.3 Analysis

To test Hypothesis 1, the four-step mediation analysis by Baron and Kenny (1986) was applied to establish that attitudes (now instrumental and hedonic), subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (now convenience and availability) were positively related to customer feedback provision through the mediation of intention to provide feedback. This process uses multiple regression to estimate the validity of four paths within the proposed mediational model which serve as requirements for mediation. The first step is to establish that there exists a causal model which may be mediated by regressing the five predictor variables on the outcome variable of feedback behavior. If these relations are significant, the test continues to step two. At that point, it must be established that the predictor variables are correlated with the mediator of intention to provide feedback. This is done by demonstrating significant relations via regressing the five predictor variables onto intention to provide feedback. The third step is to establish that the mediator of intention to provide feedback actually affects feedback provision. This is established by finding significant relations while controlling the predictor variables in a regression of intention on feedback provision. The final step is to establish that the relation between the predictor variables on feedback provision is completely moderated by intention to provide feedback. This can be established by showing that the effect of the predictor variables on feedback provision is zero when controlling the mediator of intention to provide feedback. Meeting the requirements of all four steps would indicate that intention to provide feedback completely moderates the relations between the five predictor variables and feedback behavior.

To test Hypothesis 2, Steiger’s (1980) Z-test would be used to determine if statistically significant differences exist between effect sizes of the relations of the five independent variables on intention to provide feedback. This test is used to compare correlation coefficients by applying Fisher’s *r*-to-*z* transformation in order to make use of a significance test formula. Once  $r_{12}$  and  $r_{13}$  are converted by Fisher’s Z-transformation into  $z_{12}$  and  $z_{13}$  respectively, the test is as follows:

$$z = \frac{(z_{12} - z_{13})\sqrt{n-3}}{\sqrt{2(1-r_{23})h}} \quad (1)$$

where

$$h = \frac{1 - (f \times rm^2)}{1 - rm^2} \quad (2)$$

where

$$f = \frac{1 - r_{23}}{2(1 - rm^2)} \quad (3)$$

where

$$rm^2 = \frac{r_{12}^2 + r_{13}^2}{2} \quad (4)$$

The resulting *z*-score can then be compared to the *z*-distribution table to find the relevant significance level. This test would be run to compare the effect sizes of instrumental and hedonic attitudes on intention to provide feedback against the effect sizes of subjective norms, convenience, and availability on intention to provide feedback.

To test Hypothesis 3, the moderation model of Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to investigate the effect of perceived behavioral control as a moderator on the relation of intention to provide feedback and actual feedback provision. The interaction effect was computed by multiplying the variables of intention and perceived behavioral control (as the mean of its two components). A multiple regression was then run on the dependent variable of feedback provision with the independent variables of intention to provide feedback, perceived behavioral control, and their interaction. The moderation is said to be supported if the interaction variable is significant in this regression.

## 4. RESULTS

Aside from hypothesis testing, Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of surveyed variables. The average participant provided feedback after 70% of his/her Airbnb stays. As predicted, convenience resulted in a high mean of 4.3 (*SD* = .70), confirming that most customers find providing feedback to be easy and under their control. Instrumental attitudes shares the high mean of 4.3 (*SD* = .72), demonstrating that most participants generally do find feedback provision to be valuable. Instrumental attitudes showed a moderate positive relationship with hedonic attitudes and convenience (both with  $r = .45, p < .01$ ). Age resulted in a weak positive relationship with intention to provide feedback ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ) and feedback provision ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ). Model 5 (Table 5) confirms that feedback provision can be significantly predicted by intention to provide feedback ( $\beta = .64, p < .01$ ).

For hypothesis testing, Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation analysis was used to test Hypothesis 1 that attitude toward providing feedback, subjective norms regarding providing feedback, and perceived behavioral control over providing feedback are positively related to customer feedback provision through the mediating role of intention to provide feedback.

**Table 4. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of control, independent, and dependent variables.**

Variable	Mean	SD	Age	Airbnb exp.	Instr. att.	Hed. att.	Subj. norms	Convenience	Avail.	Intent.	Feed. prov.
Age	28.6	15.2	1								
Airbnb exp.	2.4	1.6	-.01	1							
Instr. attitudes	4.3	.72	-.03	-.01	1						
Hed. attitudes	3.5	.88	.15*	.08	.45***	1					
Subj. norms	3.0	.89	-.05	-.072	.21**	.36***	1				
Convenience	4.3	.70	-.07	-.10	.45***	.25***	.23***	1			
Availability	3.4	1.3	.00	-.03	.15*	-.05	-.16*	.15*	1		
Intention	4.1	1.0	.20**	.10	.27***	.34***	.27***	.27***	.01	1	
Feedback prov.	.70	.39	.19**	.16*	.22***	.25***	.31***	.22***	.05	.66***	1

\*\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed), \*\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed), \*Significant at  $p < 0.10$  (2-tailed).

**Table 5. Multiple regression analysis.**

Variable	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>	Model 2 <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 <sup>b</sup>	Model 4 <sup>b</sup>	Model 5 <sup>b</sup>	Model 6 <sup>b</sup>
Control: age	.20**		.19**		.06	.08
Control: Airbnb experience	.10		.16*		.09	.09
Instrumental attitudes		.08		.05		
Hedonic attitudes		.21**		.12		
Subjective norms		.15*		.24***		
Convenience		.14		.10		
Availability		.01		.07		
PBC						-.29
PBC * Intention						.79*
Intention					.64***	.01
<i>N</i>	142	142	142	142	142	142
<i>F</i>	3.65**	5.66***	4.45***	4.50***	37.29***	23.69***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.05	.17	.06	.14	.45	.47
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.04	.14	.05	.11	.44	.45

Note. Variable PBC represents the mean of values for convenience and availability.

<sup>a</sup> Dependent variable: intention to provide feedback, <sup>b</sup> Dependent variable: feedback provision.

\*\*\*Significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*Significant at  $p < .05$ , \*Significant at  $p < .10$ .



Model 4 shows the first step of the mediation analysis to establish the causal model between the five independent variables on the outcome variable of feedback behavior, seen in Table 5. The regression resulted in only subjective norms being a significant predictor. The failure of all independent variables to result in a significant relation ends the test and shows that intention to provide feedback is not mediating the five independent variables' effects on feedback behavior, thereby resulting in the rejection of Hypothesis 1.

The next test was for Hypothesis 2, that attitude toward customer feedback provision would have the greatest impact on intention to provide feedback in comparison to subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Model 2 (Table 5) showed that that only hedonic attitudes was a significant predictor of intention to provide feedback (with  $p < 0.05$ ). All other independent variables are insignificant in relation to intention to provide feedback. Therefore, there is no reason to test for effect size differences using a Steiger's Z-test. Since hedonic attitudes toward customer feedback provision did have the only significant effect, and therefore the 'greatest', Hypothesis 2 is partially accepted, due to the lack of significance of instrumental attitudes towards predicting intention to provide feedback.

Hypothesis 3, proposing that the effect of the intention to perform customer feedback provision is stronger when perceived behavioral control is high, was tested by Baron and Kenny's (1986) moderation model. The regression of intention to provide feedback, perceived behavioral control, and their interaction onto feedback behavior (Model 6; Table 5) resulted in the interaction being nearly significant with  $p = 0.08$ . This interaction must still be considered insignificant according to the traditional rule of thumb of a minimum acceptable significance level of  $p < .05$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 3 must be rejected.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper was to apply the theory of planned behavior to the new context of online labor platforms in order to gain a deeper understanding of why customers participate in feedback provision, which is simultaneously voluntary, yet crucial to the success of online labor platforms. The two classifications of attitudes resulting from the principal component analysis on attitudes toward customer feedback provision, being instrumental attitudes and hedonic attitudes, highlights the relevance of distinguishing between different types of attitudes when analyzing behavior. Whether a customer interprets providing feedback as valuable (high in instrumental attitudes) or fun (high in hedonic attitudes) bears different effects on their willingness to provide feedback. This is evidence that conceptualizing "attitudes" as one general dimension fails to truly encapsulate the various nuances of attitudes as a construct. Interestingly, hedonic attitudes was the single significant predictor of intention to provide feedback, as seen in Model 2 (Table 5). In simplified terms, this shows that customers' intention to provide feedback can be predicted by how pleasant and enjoyable they find it to be, and not by how beneficial/useful/good they perceive it to be. Therefore, in order to capitalize on this finding, online labor platforms could strengthen intentions to provide feedback by making feedback provision more pleasant and enjoyable for customers. Generally, all online labor platforms could do this by ensuring that their feedback mechanisms are intuitive and straightforward. Making the feedback provision process quick, visually appealing, and well-designed/-distributed should increase how pleasant and enjoyable it is perceived by customers. Further, in order to make feedback provision

positively enjoyable, online labor platforms could add incentives to providing feedback. For example, when a customer leaves a review after a stay at an Airbnb accommodation, he/she could be rewarded by points which could eventually be redeemed for discounts on future bookings. Depending on the platform and its target demographic, other approaches such as gamification and incorporating humor may improve customers' perceptions in this dimension.

Returning to the insignificance of instrumental attitudes in predicting intention to provide feedback, the question then becomes: why do those who report high instrumental attitudes still lack in intention to provide feedback, as well as actual feedback provision? In practice, this could possibly be a reflection of customers understanding that feedback provision is helpful for the *rest* of the community by controlling service quality and aiding the accommodation choices of future customers, but it might not be perceived to personally benefit the initial customer who is providing the feedback. In that case, customers might not be interested in providing feedback because its main value is in supporting the buying decisions of future customers and not for the customer giving the feedback. For the case of Airbnb, this may be explained by the fact that booking an Airbnb for most customers, is likely not a routine, regular occurrence; customers therefore may be less likely to contribute to the 'community of trust' by providing feedback, than they might be in a case of a customer who, for example, is using Uber as a regular service for transportation. Due to this irregular use, Airbnb customers may not see the benefit of feedback provision coming back to them.

It was hypothesized that subjective norms and perceived behavioral control would have a lesser effect on intention to provide feedback than attitude toward feedback provision (Hypothesis 2), but Model 2 (Table 5) showed they actually had no significant effect on intention (as judged by  $p < 0.05$ ). As predicted, the high mean for convenience of 4.3 ( $SD = .70$ ) (Table 4) showed that customers agree that providing feedback is already an easy process, likely due to its standardized nature and simple prompts from the platform, but this still does not predict intention to provide feedback or actual feedback provision. This may lead to the need for a revised framework of the theory of planned behavior which involves more self-serving personal factors to predict participation behavior on online labor platforms. This is based on the assumption that the use of online labor platforms is connected to a self-serving nature initially; 75% of survey participants responded that they choose to use Airbnb because of its cost savings and 41% say because it is fun, hence convenience and hedonic attitudes being important factors. This highlights the personal benefits which come from using online labor platforms, further supporting the idea that the use of online labor platforms stems from personal benefit, as concluded from the insignificant effect of instrumental attitudes on predicting feedback behavior.

On the other hand, an interesting result materialized in Model 4 (Table 5) that subjective norms was the only significant predictor of actual feedback provision behavior, as well as being close to significance in Model 2 predicting intention, contradicting the prediction that subjective norms would be unimportant to the model(s). This may be explained by customers' want to comply with perceptions of a general presence of the norm of reciprocity, in that customers' feedback provision contributes to the community which helped them make their buying decision initially. When customers choose which Airbnb listing they would like to book, they typically rely on reviews left by previous guests in order to ensure a certain standard of quality. Due to the benefit he/she has gained from the reviews of others, one might feel a certain duty to

'repay' the community by also leaving a review. It would be reasonable that this sense of obligation may be experienced by some users and not by others – hence its variance – but it would follow that subjective norms would be a significant predictor of feedback provision behavior if this norm is indeed institutionalized in online labor platforms. Platform firms should then use this finding as evidence that subjective norms regarding feedback provision are present in online labor platforms, and they should make use of its impact on feedback provision by further enforcing and facilitating these norms.

Finally, the rejection of Hypothesis 3 demonstrated that the strength of the relation between intention on feedback provision is hardly contingent on perceived behavioral control. This result suggests that perhaps there are other factors which interrupt the translation from customers' intention to provide feedback into actual feedback provision. The fact that customers have a great amount of control over providing feedback does not influence their behavior; this may be due to the nature of feedback provision being completely voluntary for all users. Therefore, this interaction is invalid in this context because there is virtually no case in which customers do not actually have full control over whether or not they participate. This effect is corroborated by Madden, Ellen, and Ajzen (1992) who stated that the addition of perceived behavioral control was only expected to make a significant contribution to predicting behavior when the behavior is not under complete volitional control. While the reality of providing feedback is that it is completely voluntary, this study showed that not all customers' perceptions are consistent with this fact, with the mean of perceived behavioral control (as the mean of convenience and availability) being 4.1 ( $SD = .65$ ). Perhaps intention is interrupted by a lack of resources as exhibited by the mean of availability being only 3.4 ( $SD = 1.3$ ). This could signal to online labor platforms that customers have a misconception of how much actual control they have over providing feedback. For example, a perceived lack of resources could mean that a customer cannot provide feedback at the time of being prompted due to time constraints, lack of Internet connectivity, phone/computer battery, etc. However, as previously stated, Airbnb provides a 14-day window during which a customer can leave a review, thereby reinstating the assumed complete availability. It may be that customers are unaware of their freedom in providing feedback, resulting in lower reported scores for perceived behavioral control. Regardless of the potential misconceptions, perceived behavioral control did not strengthen the effect of intention on feedback behavior, so it is not prioritized as a factor which could increase feedback provision.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The design of this study presented several limitations which may have impeded its generalizability and limited its findings. The first was a lower than ideal sample size. A future study would benefit from having a larger sample size in order to capture a greater variety in feedback provision behavior which might result in varying effects between the model's variables. It is possible that the findings of insignificant relationships may be due to a small sample size which is not representative of the population. The sample of this study's dataset did not result in a normally distributed outcome variable, which may have impacted its results. Due to the non-normal distribution, findings must be considered with caution as this has the potential to limit their generalizability.

Further, at this time there is a lack of public information regarding the ratio of customers who do and do not leave feedback after an encounter on online labor platforms. This

would be valuable in comparing the dataset of this study to the real population, for there might exist a tendency for those people who provide feedback to be more likely to volunteer to take part in this survey, thereby resulting in a biased and unrepresentative dataset. Generally, the shortage of prior research studies done on online labor platforms and their customers' behavior presents a limitation for this study. A greater amount of resources in that area would have provided a stronger basis upon which conclusions could be drawn, and further studies on this topic can only solidify this exploration that has emerged.

Another limitation of this study may be the exclusive use of the scales of Madden et al. (1992) as survey items. The choice to use these scales was supported due to their brevity and previous validation, but it is possible that a greater number of items, particularly to measure subjective norms and intention to provide feedback, might have generated a more robust overall measure of these variables.

This study was conducted to answer the research question: *Which variable in the theory of planned behavior has the greatest effect size on customer feedback provision in online labor platforms?* In testing the three hypotheses, it was found that the theory of planned behavior is not a suitable model for predicting customer feedback provision in online labor platforms. When predicting intentions to provide feedback, only hedonic attitudes resulted in a significant contribution, and it could not be proven that intention to provide feedback mediated the relationship between instrumental attitudes, hedonic attitudes, subjective norms, convenience, and availability on feedback provision. The findings of this research provide support that customers will have a greater intention to provide feedback if doing so is pleasant and enjoyable, and also that different types of attitudes must be considered in classifying behavioral beliefs. Future research doing a full application and comparison of the theory of planned behavior on customer feedback provision in different online labor platforms might shed more light on explaining behavioral intentions and why they might not translate into behavior. It is also possible that intentions and behavior may differ due to the potential relative inconsequentiality of providing feedback, resulting in a lack of action even when intentions are positive. Further, it may be ineffectual to attempt to predict feedback provision on Airbnb if doing so is not yet regular behavior of the general population. The irregularity of this action may limit the reliability of predicting its motivations. At this stage, it may be left to future research to determine the true relations when online labor platforms become ubiquitous to a level of being able to predict a pattern of behavior regarding their usage and support.

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## 9. APPENDIX A: ITEMS INCLUDED IN SURVEY

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Items in survey</i>
<i>Attitude toward customer feedback provision</i>	the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of providing feedback after a stay on Airbnb	<p><i>Providing customer feedback after a stay in an Airbnb accommodation would be: (Strongly disagree – strongly agree)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Good</li> <li>2. Pleasant</li> <li>3. Beneficial</li> <li>4. Useful</li> <li>5. Enjoyable</li> </ol>
<i>Subjective norms regarding customer feedback provision</i>	the perceived social pressure to provide or not to provide customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb	<p><i>(Strongly disagree – strongly agree)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most people who are important to me think I should provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb.</li> <li>2. When it comes to providing feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb, I want to do what most people who are important to me want me to do.</li> </ol>
<i>Perceived behavioral control over customer feedback provision</i>	the perceived ease or difficulty of providing customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb	<p><i>(Strongly disagree – strongly agree)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For me to provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb would be very easy.</li> <li>2. If I wanted to, I could easily provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb.</li> <li>3. I have complete control over providing feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb.</li> <li>4. There are numerous events outside of my control which could prevent me from providing feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb.</li> </ol>
<i>Intention to provide customer feedback</i>	an indication of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to provide customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb	<p><i>(Strongly disagree – strongly agree)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I intend to provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb.</li> <li>2. I will make an effort to provide feedback/review after a stay on Airbnb.</li> </ol>
<i>Behavior of customer feedback provision</i>	the frequency with which an individual provides customer feedback after a stay on Airbnb	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How many times did you yourself book an Airbnb in the past 2 years?</li> <li>2. How many times did you leave feedback/review after a stay in an Airbnb in the past 2 years?</li> </ol>
<i>Control variables</i>	user characteristics which may affect one's perceptions and use of the customer feedback mechanisms of Airbnb	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In which year were you born?</li> <li>2. In which year did you start using Airbnb?</li> </ol>