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## ► To cite this version:

I. Khelladi, S. Castellano, J. Hobeika, M. Perano, D. Rutambuka. Customer Knowledge Hiding Behavior in Service Multi-Sided Platforms. *Journal of Business Research*, 2022, 140, pp.482-490. <10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.11.017>. <hal-04445044>

**HAL Id: hal-04445044**

**<https://normandie-univ.hal.science/hal-04445044v1>**

Submitted on 22 Jul 2024

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## **Customer knowledge hiding behavior in service multi-sided platforms**

Special issue on  
“Special Issue on Knowledge hiding in organization: What make people hide knowledge?”

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# Customer knowledge hiding behavior in service multi-sided platforms

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, knowledge sharing and hiding within organizations have been of great interest in the knowledge management literature (Chaudhuri et al., 2020), although the underlying motivations are different (Connelly & Zweig, 2015; Ma et al., 2020). Knowledge hiding is defined as “an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person” (Connelly et al., 2012, p. 65). Such behavior is not necessarily harmful but is “a common response to a given situation” (Connelly & Zweig, 2015, p. 480). Nevertheless, knowledge hiding can engender economic losses for firms (Zhao et al., 2016). People tend to believe that knowledge is a scarce resource that should be hidden (Singh, 2019).

Knowledge management scholars and practitioners have also emphasized the increasing importance of external sources, especially customer knowledge (Chua & Banerjee, 2013; Taherparvar et al., 2014). The nature and quality of the dialogues that firms have with their customers is a core capability (Smith & McKeen, 2005). Customer knowledge management (CKM) is about “gaining, sharing, and expanding the knowledge residing in customers, to both customer and corporate benefit” (Gibbert et al., 2002, p. 460). CKM’s major focus is the exploitation of customer knowledge (Rowley, 2002), which firms operate through three strategies: managing knowledge (1) for customers, (2) from customers, and (3) about customers. This paper focuses on the second strategy in which companies manage knowledge acquired from customers (i.e., what customers know, their thoughts and insights and ‘lived’ experience, Jaziri, 2019) regarded as valuable for product and service quality enhancement, innovation generation, and crisis management (Chua & Banerjee, 2013). Firms still need to nurture their capabilities by extracting, monitoring, analyzing, and summarizing the knowledge generated from their customers (Del Vecchio et al., 2020). CKM provides opportunities for firms to remain informed about customers’ needs and issues (Taherparvar et al., 2014). Thus, CKM is an important strategy for firms to strengthen their knowledge realms and to sustain innovations and performance (Scuotto et al., 2017).

Multi-sided Internet platforms (MSPs), also known as multi-sided markets, have become popular in the business world with the spread of digital technologies. This business of transactional platforms encompasses world-famous companies, such as Airbnb, Uber, and Vinted (Trabucchi & Buganza, 2020). MSPs are platforms that bring together “two distinct but interdependent groups of customers [...] create value as intermediaries by connecting these

groups” (Muzellec et al., 2015, p. 139). MSPs use ecosystems of users and suppliers to provide products and services (Hein et al., 2019). They usually encompass a business side (B2B) and an end-user side (B2C), providing each other with network benefits (Muzellec et al., 2015). MSPs challenged the knowledge flows and interactions among peers (Trabucchi & Magistretti, 2020). Thus, MSPs’ performance relies mainly on customers’ sharing and integrating of resources (i.e., skills and knowledge) with suppliers; both co-create the value (Muzellec et al., 2015). These knowledge flows are part of customers’ service (‘lived’) experience and thus, nurture customer knowledge (Jaziri, 2019).

CKM is key for service performance and innovation (Zhao et al., 2016). Knowledge hiding is widespread in services contexts impairing knowledge sharing and transfer (Connelly et al., 2012). Firms need to display their capabilities to integrate the knowledge-based customer experience to reach performance goals (Jaziri, 2019).

Research investigating knowledge hiding in the service setting is scarce (Butt, 2021; Wang et al., 2019). Apart from Chaker et al. (2020), studies examining knowledge hiding seldom consider customers’ perceptions. Drawing on the social exchange theory (SET hereafter) (Blau, 1964; Singh, 2019) and customer experience theory (CET hereafter) (Jaziri, 2019), we investigate knowledge hiding events and their motivations in the CKM context and service setting, while adopting a bottom-up customer perspective (i.e., from customer lived experience). More specifically, we uncover what type of knowledge content is hidden in the service setting and unveil motivations for customers to hide knowledge on MSPs. The research questions are as follows: *What is the content of tacit hidden knowledge, and what are the motivations for end-users in the multi-sided platforms context to hide knowledge?* Using the narrative inquiry approach combined with the critical incident technique, we collected an original dataset of 51 narrative accounts. Through these contextualized data, we obtain a complete narrative of participants’ experience on MSPs and we unveil the drivers of hidden knowledge.

The paper contributes to literature in four distinct ways. First, through adopting a bottom-up approach starting from the customer lived experience and perceptions as sources of tacit knowledge (Jaziri, 2019), we aim to expand the knowledge hiding literature by focusing on understanding why and when customers hide knowledge (Singh, 2019). Second, through investigating the context of MSPs, we address the calls to further unveil the causes and consequences of knowledge hiding behavior in broader contexts (Connelly et al., 2019), and in the service setting (Zhao & Xia, 2016). Third, we consider the influence of interpersonal negative events on knowledge hiding (Yao et al., 2020), as well as other factors contributing to

individuals' decisions to hide knowledge (Connelly et al., 2019). Fourth, because customers are key assets of MSPs, by acknowledging customers' hiding behaviors, these platforms can maintain their managerial capabilities and competitive edge (Hänninen et al., 2018).

The paper is structured as follows. In the literature review section, we present perspectives on knowledge hiding, and we contextualize it in the light of CKM and MSPs. In the empirical section, we present the narrative inquiry and the critical incident techniques in the research design, followed by the data collection, data analysis, and the results. We conclude the paper with the discussion, implications, and future research avenues.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Perspectives on knowledge hiding*

Knowledge hiding is recognized as part of counterproductive knowledge behaviors impeding firms' performance and success (Serenko & Bontis, 2016). Drawing on the SET (Blau, 1964), researchers in workplace behavior identified three types of knowledge hiding in organizations: playing dumb (i.e., the hider pretends to be ignorant about the requested knowledge), evasive hiding (i.e., the hider provides incorrect or misleading information), and rationalized hiding (i.e., the hider fails to provide the requested knowledge and justifies by saying that he or she is unable to do so or by blaming someone else; Connelly et al., 2012). Therefore, knowledge hiding behavior is a deliberate intention to withhold or conceal the requested knowledge (Serenko & Bontis, 2016), and can be situational and impacted by external and internal motivations (Anand et al., 2020).

Knowledge hiding can be found in numerous situations, such as knowledge requests made by one employee to another (Connelly et al., 2012), or managers hiding knowledge during their business interaction, jeopardizing their brainstorming session and business communication (Butt et al., 2020). Overall, an individual may hide his/her knowledge depending on "his/her willingness and intention from one individual to another, from an individual to a group, from a group/organization to an individual, or from a group/organization to another group/organization" (Anand et al., 2020, p. 380). Previous studies showed that knowledge hiding negatively impacts coworkers' interpersonal relationship dynamics, creativity, and innovation (Černej et al., 2017), as well as task performance, but positively influences work (i.e., interpersonal and organizational) deviance (Singh, 2019). Knowledge hiding also negatively influences organizational and team performance (Peng, 2013), reducing interpersonal trust and mutual loyalty in buyer-supplier relationships (Butt et al., 2020).

Knowledge hiding has mainly been investigated in intraorganizational (Serenko & Bontis, 2016), coworker dyads (Connelly et al., 2012), and triads (Singh, 2019) contexts, through the relationship with enterprise social media (Ma et al., 2020), and in competitive (Want et al., 2019) and high distrust (Hernaus et al., 2019) settings. Researchers identified situational factors, such as interpersonal distrust, knowledge complexity, and knowledge-sharing climate (Connelly et al., 2012), psychological ownership feeling over knowledge (Peng, 2013), job insecurity (Serenko & Bontis, 2016), time pressure, prosocial motivation and perspective taking (Škerlavaj et al., 2018), trait competitiveness (Hernaus et al., 2019), workplace ostracism (Zhao et al., 2016), territoriality (Singh, 2019), and organizational injustice and dis-identification (Jahanzeb et al., 2020) as predictors of knowledge hiding. Previous studies also investigated the effects of knowledge hiding in the top-down management context (Arain et al., 2019), and in buyer–supplier relationships in supply chain settings (Butt et al., 2020). Knowledge hiding was also examined in several fields such academia (Hernaus et al., 2019), financial institutions (Škerlavaj et al., 2018), R&D (Xiong et al., 2021; Yao et al., 2020), team projects (Chatterjee et al., 2021), and the manufacturing industry (Yuan et al., 2020).

Adoption of knowledge hiding behavior is context specific, ranging from overt to covert actions, and depends on individuals' perceptions of that context (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). Individuals may adopt such behavior because they feel the knowledge is their personal psychological property (Peng, 2013), or because they feel high emotional exhaustion (Yao et al., 2020). Such behavior decreases cooperation and support among knowledge seekers and perpetrators, with the risk of ending interactions and business relations (Butt et al., 2020). Furthermore, knowledge hiding involves subjective evaluations and ambiguous situations, as individuals cannot recognize the extent of the hidden knowledge (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). Individuals (for instance, customers) may choose to hide knowledge to regain personal control over the environment (Zhao et al., 2016) and to protect themselves (Connelly et al., 2012), especially when they feel threatened by their environment.

## *2.2. Customer knowledge management and multi-sided platforms in the service sector*

CKM is a process that is designed to “dynamically capture, create and integrate knowledge about and for customers” (Smith & McKeen, 2005, p. 744). It is an organizational approach to “capturing, sharing, and using the information, knowledge, experience and ideas related to customers” (Taherparvar et al., 2014, p. 592). CKM allows information and

knowledge sharing and transfer within firms, among customers, and between firms and customers who become partners in the value creation process (Gibbert et al., 2002).

CKM manages knowledge from customers. Such knowledge (i.e., insights ideas, thoughts, needs, feelings, emotional and functional drivers, and lived experiences, as in Jaziri, 2019) is used to develop new products and services addressing customers' needs (Taherparvar et al., 2014). CKM is a learning process in which customers and firms share their knowledge and experience; they learn from each other to solve their issues (du Plessis, 2007). Through CKM, firms encourage customers to share their experiences that can be used by workers to extract useful and innovation ideas (Taherparvar et al., 2014). Individuals share explicit and trivial knowledge and hide tacit and important knowledge at the same time (Peng, 2013). In complex and implicit knowledge, people tend to judge the level of interpersonal trust and distrust, anticipating the outcomes before deciding whether to share or hide knowledge (Yuan et al., 2020).

Customer knowledge is tacit knowledge that is deeply embedded in customers' minds (Taherparvar et al., 2014). Individuals hide tacit knowledge more easily than explicit knowledge (Peng, 2013). When facing psychological distress and emotionally exhausting situations, individuals consider self-protection behaviors, such as knowledge hiding (Yao et al., 2020). Transforming customers' tacit knowledge (i.e., experiences, ideas, information, problems, needs) into explicit knowledge (i.e., useful and helpful ideas for solving customers' issues, improving service provision, and providing innovative solutions) is a complex process (Taherparvar et al., 2014). Nevertheless, to gain competitive advantage firms need to convert customer experiential knowledge into explicit knowledge (Jaziri, 2019).

Situational mechanisms influence individuals' behavioral decisions, such as knowledge hiding (Peng, 2013). Therefore, CKM and customers' tendency to share their knowledge and experience is influenced by the type of industry and the CKM context (Taherparvar et al., 2014). MSPs are usually online platforms providing mainly services (Hänninen et al., 2018), allowing interactions between customers (B2C) and business (B2B) audiences (Muzellec et al., 2015). They put together "multiple customers through indirect network externalities" (Trabucchi & Magistretti, 2020, p. 1884). MSPs provide different value propositions for the business and end-user sides, where end-users contribute to the value proposition for business customers (Muzellec et al., 2015). MSPs form knowledge management systems in which users play multiples roles by providing and exchanging data (Hänninen et al., 2018). Such platforms capture and use data and create knowledge for third parties (Trabucchi & Buganza, 2019). Thus, although customer knowledge is not directly connected to firm knowledge (Taherparvar et al.,

2014), MSPs in the service sector display customer service experience that can be transformed into knowledge through a combination of customers' interactions with other suppliers and platform players (Trabucchi & Buganza, 2019) and knowledge-based feedback loops (Trabucchi & Buganza, 2020). This customer lived experience is a source of tacit knowledge (Jaziri, 2019), intertwining knowledge sharing and creation (Berezhnoy et al., 2021). This experience may display several knowledge hiding situations (Škerlavaj et al., 2018), and other counterproductive knowledge behavior (Afshar-Jalili et al., 2020) in the service sector, which might be explained by the MSPs' matchmaking loopholes (Trabucchi & Buganza, 2020).

To summarize, according to the SET (Blau, 1964), actors' interdependencies (i.e., between the platform, the service provider, and the customer) within MSPs call for social relationships through which one actor need to take care of the other (i.e., sense of mutual reciprocity) in order to engender beneficial consequences and hence mitigate knowledge hiding situations (Singh, 2019). Additionally, customer knowledge (i.e., knowledge from the customer) and more specifically its tacit dimension relies on the customer lived experience (Jaziri, 2019) in which a nurtured reciprocity and interpersonal trust (Yuan et al., 2020) may also mitigate knowledge hiding situations. Overall figure 1 displays how the SET and the CET are integrated in an MSP context.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

### **3. Empirical section**

#### *3.1. Research design*

We combine the complementary narrative inquiry method and the critical incident technique. As these methods obtain thick descriptions of contextual details and social interactions, they are appropriate for SET (Blau, 1964; Singh, 2019) and CET (Jaziri, 2019).

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method for collecting the experience of participants as whole narratives. A narrative is an account of an experience told in a sequenced way, indicating a flow of related events that, taken together, are significant for the narrator, and convey meaning to the researcher (Dezin and Lincoln, 2011). The goal is to obtain a complete narrative of their lived experience, to preserve the chronological connections of events described by the participant, and to enrich the understanding and analysis of these events.

The critical incident technique offers a convenient approach for collecting contextualized data, and for analyzing information reflecting lived experiences (Hughes et al., 2007) in social exchange settings. This technique documents the different actions taken

following similar contexts (i.e., critical incidents), and explains why and the inherent outcomes. An incident is

*“any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects”* (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327).

In the service industry, this technique has become a tool for reflecting customer-perceived quality and customer dis/satisfaction based on positive and negative critical incidents (Friman et al., 2001).

### *3.2. Data collection*

The narrative interview is designed to generate story accounts among participants (“narrative accounts”). Critical incidents can be gathered in various ways, but the narrative approach generally asks respondents to tell a story about an experience. A narrative is a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters (Dezin and Lincoln, 2011). The knowledge from customers is gathered from customers through interaction, and because the customer lived experience is part of the knowledge from customer which is a tacit form knowledge (Jaziri, 2019), respondents were asked to recall events during the interview using their own terms and language (Gremier, 2004). In addition to describing what happened, narratives also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations (Dezin and Lincoln, 2011), which is of utmost important in knowledge hiding behaviors, especially because narrators not only explain, inform, confirm, but they also defend and complain (Dezin and Lincoln, 2011) about their experience on MSPs. As narrative is retrospective meaning making (Dezin and Lincoln, 2011), the interview guideline was built using the following structure (Saunders et al., 2019): (1) identify what the story is about, (2) document what happened, to who, and why, (3) present the consequences, (4) uncover the significance of these events for the participant, and (5) depict the final outcome. As knowledge hiding behavior is a deliberate intention to withhold or conceal knowledge (Serenko & Bontis, 2016), and because it is context specific (Connelly & Zweig, 2015), particular attention was paid to the sequence of the events and the context of the themes identified (Saunders et al., 2019). The participants’ stories were transcribed by the researchers, and they became part of the narrative record (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Negative incidents about poor service experienced on MSPs – as new business models – have not yet been sufficiently exploited by academic researchers to analyze and unveil hidden

knowledge, although media incidents are reported regularly. In May 2019, the *New York Times*<sup>1</sup> revealed that 3,045 sexual assaults had been reported in relation to the Uber platform in the United States in 2018. In 2018, the website “palais de la voiture.com” ranked the top 20 incidents observed during carpooling,<sup>2</sup> where the following comments were found: “bad driver, loud music, dog in the front, passengers in the back, insults.” Incidents experienced by consumers of services provided on MSPs were collected using the narrative technique through stories of negative experiences. Different platforms were selected – Uber, Airbnb, and BlaBlaCar – as they cover different needs, and they are leaders in their own sector: short trips (intra-urban), medium or long trips (across cities), and accommodation for overnight stays.

### 3.3. Data analysis

The narrative data were preserved within their narrative context and analyzed as a whole unit (narrative sequence). We collected 51 narrative accounts (i.e., interview transcripts and observation notes) using a snowball approach, with diverse profiles reflecting the clientele of these platforms in France according to the levels of customer experience (see Table 1), the social context (type of vacation) and the geographic context (location) (see Table 2). To compare accounts, incidents were collected using face-to-face and over-the-phone techniques until redundancy occurred, when no new critical behaviors appeared (Gremier, 2004).

[Insert Table 1 here]

[Insert Table 2 here]

## 4. Results

As the MSP context can create unfavorable social exchanges, ultimately leading actors to hide knowledge, the first step aims to identify a typology of critical incidents (see Table 3). It includes 10 categories defined and illustrated by verbatim with a typical example in parentheses: degraded service conditions (discomfort), partial non-performance (delay), cancellation of the service, non-compliant service (change of destination), endangering the life of others, lack of hygiene, lack of assistance, and inappropriate or discriminatory behavior.

[Insert Table 3 here]

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/05/technology/uber-sexual-assaults-murders-deaths-safety.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.palais-de-la-voiture.com/2017/08/quand-ca-part-en-clash-sur-blablacar-notre-top-20.html>

To suggest a hierarchy of categories that might differ across platforms, we counted each category identified in the narratives (Table 4). Degraded service conditions and lack of hygiene were the most frequently cited causes of critical incidents for Airbnb. For Uber, the incidents focused on cancellations before service delivery. For BlaBlaCar, the carpooling platform, degraded service conditions and partial service delivery, and delays were the most cited critical incidents. From the BlaBlaCar analysis, 39 critical incidents were identified within 21 narrative accounts, meaning that respondents cited several incidents in each narrative.

[Insert Table 4 here]

The second step of the analysis focused on hidden knowledge. Many incidents are not reported on the platforms. Even if incidents are considered critical, none of the parties communicate about such accounts. Table 5 presents the MSP users' motivations for hiding knowledge in the different stages of the service delivery.

[Insert Table 5 here]

Although MSPs mainly rely on sharing knowledge (i.e., comments on the platform), several factors were emphasized in the narrative accounts as reasons for hiding knowledge, and not reporting it on the platform: stress inherent in the service delivery, fear of retaliations, fear of negative comments on the platform, impossible to share knowledge on the platform as the service was cancelled before the service delivery, and lenience toward the situation and/or compassion toward the service provider.

#### *4.1. Discussion*

##### *4.1.1. Typology of critical incidents and knowledge hiding in service settings*

Table 3 highlights external situational factors (Anand et al., 2020) that represent antecedents of knowledge hiding. By associating customers in the knowledge hiding literature (Connelly et al., 2012), the critical incidents identified extend previous work on the CET (Jaziri, 2019) within MSPs in the service sector (Trabucchi & Buganza, 2019). Service settings are complex, which may explain some incidents observed. Because services are intangible and include inseparability, they create voids for the players involved to hide knowledge on multiple layers. The present results show that MSPs users hide knowledge during all stages—before, during, and after—of the service delivery.

The MSP context also questions some SET assumptions. Indeed, in the SET, “social exchange entails no specific obligations” (Blau, 1964, p. 93), relationships usually refer to an association between two interacting partners (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), and in a “reciprocal exchange”, interdependence reduces risk and fosters cooperation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In an MSP setting, we find that individuals endorse reciprocity differently, and that interdependence can lead customers to hide knowledge.

Still, MSPs could limit knowledge hiding behavior. Employees’ failure in service delivery are the main sources of incidents (Bitner et al., 1990). Thus, as the end-user has a direct interaction with the service provider only (Uber driver, BlaBlaCar car pooler, Airbnb room renter), platforms need to pay particular attention and promote policies to hamper knowledge hiding. Finally, the present results show that some respondents cited several incidents in their narratives. Friman et al. (2001) found that the frequency of memorized negative critical incidents negatively affects users’ cumulative satisfaction. Thus, MSPs should create conditions and narrative tools that limit such cumulations and accumulation of negative experiences, as they have negative long-term consequences. For instance, a knowledge-sharing platform could provide an interactive environment (Taherparvar et al., 2014). Customers feel engaged, and are more willing to share knowledge, to restrict negative reciprocity behaviors, and to hamper knowledge hiding, as they consider that their comments will be taken seriously.

#### *4.1.2. Passive and active motivations for hiding knowledge*

From the results, we identified five motivations for hiding knowledge: stress inherent to the service delivery, fear of reprisals, fear of negative comments on the platform, impossible to share knowledge on the platform as the service was cancelled before the service delivery, and lenience toward the situation and/or compassion toward the service provider. These factors can be grouped into two main broader categories: passive and active motivations. Active motivations are related to defense mechanisms (fear, stress) pushing individuals to hide knowledge on MSPs. Hiding knowledge is a means of returning negative treatment for negative treatment: negative reciprocity (Arain et al., 2020). Hiding behaviors imply willingness to end the business relation with the service provider. Passive motivations (lenience, compassion) for hiding knowledge are related to collaboration and support for potential ongoing business relation with the service provider and/or the platform user. Based on specific circumstances, positive intentions may push customers to hide knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012).

We therefore identified two facets of hidden knowledge behaviors. Hiding knowledge can represent a form of altruistic behavior (avoiding conflicts on the platform to maintain the

relationship) or a form of competitive, even revenge behavior (providing no positive feedback on the platform to end the relationship). Whatever the behavior, hiding knowledge can be explained by unbalanced social exchange (Blau, 1964).

Whether active or passive, knowledge hiding implies that the end-user was not satisfied. Although a request can be sent to the customer (i.e., satisfaction survey), the platform might not be aware of some issues inherent in the service delivery (with the platform and/or with the service provider). Narrative accounts study the ways humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Thus, in line with the lived experience in the CKM approach (Jaziri, 2019), one advantage of the narrative approach using the critical incident technique is to uncover hiding knowledge and to identify their sources, motivations, and consequences.

#### *4.1.3. Prevent knowledge hiding*

Although active and passive motivations to hide knowledge reflect different situations, the platform and the service provider can interpret this “silence” in similar ways, which can be detrimental and have negative long-term consequences. Thus, to address each motivation category for hiding tacit knowledge, platforms can create different solutions to prevent knowledge hiding that are alternatives to traditional means for requesting knowledge (i.e., customer survey, ranking, feedback, and comments on the platform). Such solutions invite users to share their thoughts and experience, even negative.

One avenue is through prevention by adopting best practices and/or a knowledge-sharing policy. Indeed, firms encourage customers to share their experiences through CKM (Taherparvar et al., 2014). Another avenue is the platform’s customer service which would serve as a mediator between all parties using narrative motivational tools to hamper knowledge hiding. An alternative solution to impede customers from hiding knowledge is to provide possible reparations when the incident cannot be resolved by mediation. These incentives motivate customers not to hide knowledge when critical incidents occur.

Finally, previous studies showed that in a dyadic relationship, ethical behavior by one party leads to lower knowledge hiding by the other party (Anser et al., 2020). If both parties (service provider and end-user) perceive some elements of ethical behaviors (i.e., HR practices, cancellation policies, pricing policies, etc.), they are more willing to share knowledge.

#### *4.2. Theoretical contributions*

Based on the SET (Blau, 1964; Singh, 2019) and the CET (Jaziri, 2019), this research makes theoretical contributions to different important knowledge and management-related areas.

The first contribution is to knowledge hiding literature. We address the call in previous work which stated that future research should pay more attention to tacit knowledge hiding (Peng, 2013). We advance understanding of the motivations for tacit knowledge hiding. As previously stated, “there is the utmost need to understand, control and predict those factors that contribute to knowledge hiding” (Singh, 2019). Previous researchers showed that stress, expected loss, frustration, harm, and distrust can be observed as consequences of knowledge hiding (Singh, 2019), the same factors can also represent antecedents. Results show that these five motivations can be grouped into two broader categories (passive and active mechanisms) that platform owners can address differently to uncover tacit knowledge that can be detrimental to their success (Zhao et al., 2016). This study also contributes to literature on knowledge hiding in service-sector firms (Anser et al., 2020). We enrich previous studies regarding the prevalence of knowledge hiding in service organizations and how it impairs knowledge transfer (Connelly et al., 2012). Because services are intangible and include inseparability, they create voids in each stage of the service delivery that also represent opportunities for the players involved to hide knowledge, intentionally or not. In the MSP context, users hide knowledge before, during, and after the service delivery.

The second contribution is to enrich the understanding of knowledge hiding by integrating the customer as a valuable player in the current academic debate on the antecedents and consequences of knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding. The hiding behavior of stakeholders outside the firm provides a greater understanding of hiding behaviors in general. Previous work differentiated knowledge hiding from related concepts such as knowledge sabotage (Serenko, 2020) and counterproductive knowledge behaviors (Afshar-Jalili et al., 2020). We complement such understanding by expanding the scope of analysis outside the borders of the organization. We extend the initial views of knowledge hiding which occurs among individuals (Zhao et al., 2016), analyzing workplace interactions at the intraorganizational level (Connelly et al., 2012). To a broader extent, we contend that knowledge hiding can be intentionally withheld by customers outside the organization while requested by members within the firm. The present study complements previous studies that acknowledged the role of customers in organizational processes (Castellano et al., 2018). Results show that in virtual environments such as MSPs, customers and users represent a major

source of information and knowledge that ultimately influence organizational performance and success. Knowledge hiding crosses the boundaries of the organization.

For the third contribution, to the best of our knowledge, this article is the first to bring together knowledge hiding (Connelly et al., 2012), CKM (Chua & Banerjee, 2013), and MSPs (Hagiu & Wright, 2015) literatures in one study. This trifecta provides a greater understanding of the phenomenon under study and enriches previous work conducted separately. This study complements previous studies that examined knowledge hiding as a dyadic relationship in the workplace (Anser et al., 2020). Adopting knowledge hiding behavior is context specific (Connelly & Zweig, 2015), and we contend that in the context of MSPs, analyzing knowledge hiding is more complex as it involves triadic interactions between the platform owner (organization), external players, namely, the service provider (Uber driver, BlaBlaCar car pooler, Airbnb room renter), and the end-user. The present results show that willingness to share and/or hide knowledge depends on the context of complete, partial, or cancelled service delivery by the platform and by the service provider. Results also show that users hide knowledge either to end the interactions and business relations with the other player (competition) or to maintain cooperation and support (altruistic) among knowledge seekers and perpetrators (ranking systems and comments on platforms), which is in line with previous SET studies (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). By expanding the setting and the scope of the concept, the present findings complement previous work on the motivations and typologies of knowledge hiding, such as retaliation (Singh, 2019), negative reciprocity beliefs, or workplace ostracism (Zhao et al., 2016).

On a methodological level, the present article uses a pertinent means of uncovering tacit hidden knowledge in service the context. Previous studies mainly used self-reported methods in quantitative studies. Narrative inquiry combined with the critical incident technique were found to be useful for participants to share their negative experience on MSPs, and to express their motivations to hide knowledge. The main advantage of these combined approaches is that narrative inquiry helps to analyze the links, relationships, and socially constructed explanations that occur in the narrative accounts and to unveil lived experiences and make sense of the participants realities, while the critical incident technique (Hughes et al., 2007) also provides an opportunity for participants to provide their interpretations of the events when using MSPs.

#### *4.3. Practical implications*

The present study has practical implications. First, from a CKM perspective and within CET (Jaziri, 2019), the results are of managerial interest by identifying the categories of

incidents experienced by customers and the strategies implemented by individuals. From a firm viewpoint, the findings also highlight the interest that platforms have in adopting practices to reduce the impact of knowledge hiding. Some critical incidents are beyond the knowledge of the platforms because they go unreported, which can, ultimately and greatly, damage service delivery and organizational performance (Černe et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2016). Second, this study has implications at the ethical level. Displaying ethical behaviors has been shown to decrease knowledge hiding activities (Anser et al., 2020). Platform owners need to create a positive spiral by taking better care of the needs of the other players (service provider and service user). Third, the evolution of MSPs finally has some regulatory—not to say legal in the case of cancellation policy or pricing policy—implications, thus creating considerable uncertainty. It appears difficult with the existing void to define the level of responsibility and accountability (Hathaway, 2015; Todolí-Signes, 2017) among the players in the platform in case of critical incidents, to identify who would provide the appropriate solution in the event of incidents, and to restore knowledge sharing. Along the same lines, some policy implications exist. Organizations may engage in knowledge sharing. Thus, platforms can create the conditions for players involved to consider the benefits of not hiding knowledge when tacit knowledge is requested (i.e., through customer survey, through ratings and feedback platforms, etc.) on the platform. Overall, to extend SET (Blau, 1964), when appropriate knowledge policies are in place, platforms users are less likely to hide their knowledge (Serenko & Bontis, 2016).

## **5. Conclusion and future research directions**

The present study addressed the growing calls to study the phenomenon of knowledge hiding in service-sector firms (Anser et al., 2020), considering the customer perspective in the context of MSPs. The results revealed the major hidden knowledge categories perceived by customers as well as their motivations for hiding knowledge.

This study has some limitations that constitute avenues for future research. First, the present study used SET and CET in the particular MSPs setting to enrich the literature on hidden knowledge. New perspectives could provide complementary and/or contradicting views on the dynamics that surround hidden knowledge. For instance, it would be interesting to further examine factors that push individuals to hide knowledge in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments.

Second, we used qualitative methods to study critical incidents experienced by service end-users of MSPs who interact with homeowners on Airbnb and drivers on BlaBlaCar and

Uber. New research could analyze service providers' perspectives using quantitative methods. For instance, new studies could analyze incidents available on the Internet through *machine learning*, or through experiments to control for some specific variables and their impact on hidden knowledge.

Finally, the analysis focused on consumers based in France. Even if they present an international openness by including trips and overnight stays located in Europe and the United States, this international openness remains limited. Future studies could examine hidden knowledge in new cultural settings (Chaker et al., 2020), through respondents with different lifestyles. A more complete analysis would involve alternative means of capturing the differences in terms of narrative accounts and incident management on MSPs.

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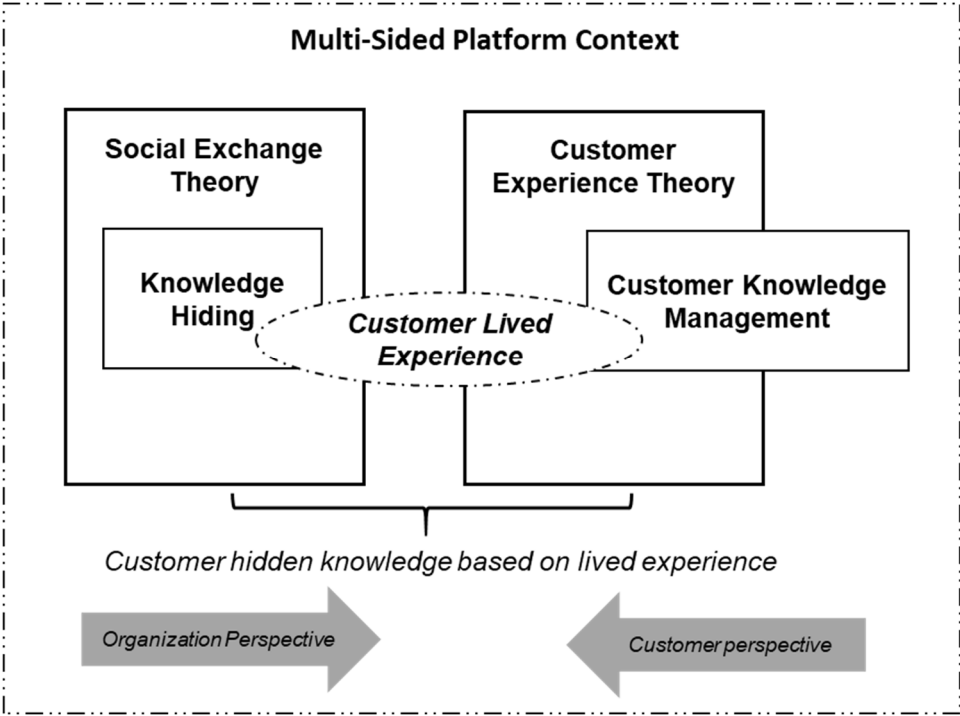
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**Figure 1** – Integrating SET and CET in an MSP context



**Table 1 - Distribution of respondents (Gender, age)**

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>18–25 years old</b>	<b>26–35 years old</b>
Airbnb	10	6	4	3	7
Uber	20	11	9	14	6
BlaBlaCar	21	9	12	14	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>

**Table 2 - Social and geographic contexts**

<b>Airbnb</b>	Social context	Family holidays	3
		Holidays with friends	6
	Geographic context	France	5
		Europe	3
		US	2
<b>Uber</b>	Social context	Trip alone	5
		Trip with acquaintance	10
		Trip with strangers	5
	Geographic context	Paris	12
		Ile-de-France	5
		Europe	3
<b>BlaBlaCar</b>	Social context	Trip alone	3
		Trip with acquaintance	16
		Trip with strangers	2
	Geographic context	Paris-other parts of France	5
		Within France (Not Paris)	9
		Europe	2

**Table 3 - Critical incidents: categories, definition, verbatim.**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>
<b>Degraded service conditions</b>	Lack of maintenance/ repairs Lack of comfort Missing space	“During the whole trip, she was rolling her cigarettes on the wheel and dashboard. She kept on smoking, even though it was supposed to be a non-smoking car” (R28, BlaBlaCar)
<b>Partial service delivery, delay</b>	Delay No service to destination Vehicle breakdown Bad traffic conditions	“They stopped every hour, 20 minutes to go to the bathroom, to smoke cigarettes, to change drivers, to enjoy the landscape. At noon, we stopped in a restaurant for 2 hours... I had no budget for the meal. I arrived 3 hours late and I missed my second BlaBlaCar to get to the final destination” (R23, BlaBlaCar)
<b>Cancellation before the service delivery</b>	Driver cancelled before departure Driver does not show up Driver refuses to deliver the service (no justification)	“The driver cancels my trip via the application without any explanation. I reiterate the request 3 to 4 times, all followed by a failure (...) I therefore understand that Uber drivers do not wish to take small trips at very low rates” (R46, Uber)
<b>Service not in line with the initial deal</b>	Modification of the route and the number of carpoolers by the driver during the trip Passengers accepted outside the app	“The driver was late as he took another carpooler that did not go through the application (...) The drivers did not want to take me home as previously agreed the day before” (R17, BlaBlaCar)
<b>Endangering the life of others</b>	Traffic violations (speeding, dangerous driving, cannabis use). Lack of experience (young driver)	“The driver drove like a mad man, he drove very fast, passed other cars on the right, cursing at other drivers who honked” (R24, BlaBlaCar) “I truly believed several times that I was going to die” (R22, BlaBlaCar)
<b>Lack of hygiene</b>	Dirt from previous residents (no cleaning between reservations) or lack of general maintenance	“Someone must have slept in this bed without the owner changing the sheets for us (...) so we reported the apartment and canceled the reservation” (R1, Airbnb)
<b>Cancellation during the service delivery</b>	Customer not acceptor (intoxicated passenger, number of passengers greater than in the reservation, objects not accepted on board)	“I was indeed a little drunk but honestly I was fine, I was not going to throw up, the worst part is that I am a regular customer and that I have a very good rating” (R42, Uber)

<b>Lack of assistance</b>	Owner or driver difficult to reach (key collection, to specify the pick-up location)	“He told us that we would find the keys in a code box. We finally manage to find the location by ringing the bell at almost all the doors of the buildings next door [...] Then we were unable to open it. We tried to call him 5 times. No answer. After an hour of trials to open the code box we finally opened it!” (R3, Airbnb)
<b>Inappropriate behavior</b>	Intrusive discussions (religion, politics) Arguments	“The customer-driver border was clearly broken, and his behavior was completely inappropriate” (R44, Uber)
<b>Discrimination</b>	Homophobia	“When he arrived, we were kissing each other (...) He took us out and said ‘I’m not driving queers’, and he left” (R43, Uber)

**Table 4 - Critical incident count.**

<b>Critical incident categories</b>	<b>Airbnb</b>	<b>Uber</b>	<b>BlaBlaCar</b>	<b>Total</b>
Degraded service conditions	6	2	10	18
Partial service delivery, delay	1	4	11	16
Cancellation before service delivery	0	9	1	10
Service not in line with the initial deal	4	1	5	10
Endangering the life of others	0	1	8	9
Lack of hygiene	5	0	2	7
Cancellation during service delivery	0	3	0	3
Lack of assistance	2	0	1	3
Inappropriate behavior	0	2	1	3
Discrimination	0	1	0	1
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Total number of critical incidents</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>80</i>

**Table 5 - Motivation for not disclosing critical incidents on MSPs**

<b>Causes</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>
Stress inherent in the service delivery	“He was driving very, very dangerously and quickly. I thought several times that I was going to die. I did not post a negative comment on the platform. I was so stressed that I did not even think about it” (R22, BlaBlaCar)
Fear of retaliation	“I immediately thought of giving the driver a bad rating and a negative comment. I did not, however. Indeed, this person did not inspire me confidence, and as I do not know precisely how the comments work (are they visible to the drivers?), I was afraid that this one would take revenge, since in the end, it’s pretty easy to find my address!” (R44, Uber)
Fear of negative comments on the platform	“It’s such a hurdle for them to acknowledge their mistakes [...] And at the end, the service provider may very well leave you an ultra-negative comment anyway” (R6, Airbnb)
Impossible to post the negative comment	“Unfortunately, I couldn’t even rate him or leave negative because I didn’t even have the chance to enter the car. It would be great to find a way to rate them for this kind of issues” (R21, BlaBlaCar)
Lenience	“Even if he didn’t drop us in the right place in Bordeaux, I gave a very good rating because he was very nice and very accommodating” (R29, BlaBlaCar)