

Understanding Predictors of Continued Usage Intention Toward Online Food Delivery Services Among Malaysian University Students: A Technology Acceptance Model Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the predictors influencing continued usage intention of Online Food Delivery Services (OFDS) among Malaysian university students. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the research explores the effects of perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), variety of food choices (VFC), and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on behavioral intentions. Data were collected from 150 students through an online survey and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results reveal that PU, PEOU, and e-WOM significantly influence continued usage intention, whereas VFC does not show a statistically significant impact. These findings offer theoretical and practical implications for service providers aiming to retain younger digital consumers in a competitive food delivery market. The study highlights the importance of system usability and social influence in fostering long-term engagement with OFDS platforms.

Keywords: Online food delivery, Technology Acceptance Model, Continued usage intention, University students, Malaysia, e-WOM, Perceived usefulness

INTRODUCTION

Online Food Delivery Services (OFDS) have transformed the food consumption landscape globally, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly altered consumer habits. In Malaysia, the proliferation of mobile-based OFDS platforms such as GrabFood, Foodpanda, and ShopeeFood has reshaped how consumers, especially digital-native youth, access food in urban and semi-urban areas. Malaysia's OFDS market is forecasted to reach USD 719.15 million in 2025 and expected to grow to US\$996.11 million by 2030 (Statista, 2025). While considerable academic attention has been paid to the adoption of OFDS in developed markets, studies in developing countries like Malaysia remain limited, particularly regarding continued usage

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rather than initial adoption. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis (1989), has been extensively used to explain technology adoption behavior through two key constructs: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) (Abdullah et al., 2017, 2018; Bahari et al., 2018; Marzuki et al., 2016). Numerous studies have confirmed the relevance of TAM in understanding initial OFDS adoption (Troise et al., 2021; Waris et al., 2022), yet relatively few have examined whether these constructs adequately predict users' intention to continue using such services over time. Continued usage intention is critical for ensuring customer retention and long-term platform viability in an increasingly competitive market.

Moreover, behavioral intention in digital platforms may also be shaped by factors beyond perceived efficiency or usability. In particular, the availability of diverse food options and peer-driven influence mechanisms such as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) are gaining attention in contemporary research. Variety in food offerings caters to diverse consumer preferences and cultural expectations, which is particularly important in multicultural societies like Malaysia (Wang & Scrimgeour, 2022). At the same time, e-WOM such as online reviews, ratings, and social media recommendations serve as social proof that can reinforce user trust and influence digital consumption behaviors, particularly among youth (Alghamdi et al., 2023). Although both constructs have been recognized as potentially significant in OFDS contexts, their influence on continued usage intention has not been systematically tested within the TAM framework in Malaysia.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the predictors of continued usage intention of OFDS among Malaysian university students. Specifically, it examines the influence of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, variety of food choices, and electronic word of mouth. By extending the TAM with two relevant constructs, VFC and e-WOM, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive sustained engagement with OFDS platforms in a Malaysian context. The findings of this study offer theoretical contributions by validating and extending TAM in the domain of OFDS and provide practical implications for platform developers, marketers, and policymakers seeking to enhance user retention among younger consumers in the digital economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), introduced by Davis (1989), is one of the most widely utilized frameworks for understanding user acceptance of new technologies. The model posits that two key beliefs, perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). PU and PEOU predict an individual's behavioral intention to adopt and continue using a technology. PU refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a system will enhance their task performance, while PEOU relates to the extent to which the user perceives the system as effortless and user-friendly. Over the years, TAM has been successfully applied across various domains, including mobile hotel booking, e-commerce, e-learning, modular construction, drone, and online food delivery platforms (Mohamad et al., 2021; Nonis, 2022; Shin et al., 2022; Waris et al., 2022). However, despite its robustness, the original TAM does not account for social or experiential variables that may be critical in consumer-oriented digital services such as OFDS.

In the context of online food delivery, perceived usefulness has been shown to significantly influence consumer behavior. Users tend to repeatedly use OFDS platforms if they believe that these platforms provide practical benefits such as time savings, convenience, and enhanced efficiency in acquiring meals (Hong et al., 2021; Troise et al., 2021). For instance, Troise et al. (2021) found that users in Italy continued using OFDS during the COVID-19 pandemic primarily because they perceived these services as essential and effective tools for maintaining food access. Similarly, studies in other developing markets such as Pakistan and Indonesia confirm that PU significantly affects users' intention to reuse food delivery apps (Ali et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Perceived usefulness has a positive influence on continued usage intention toward online food delivery services.

Perceived ease of use is another critical determinant within the TAM framework. A system that is intuitive, easy to navigate, and efficient reduces cognitive effort, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeated usage. In the OFDS context, ease of placing orders, customizing food options, and completing secure payments are all aspects

that contribute to positive user experiences (Francioni et al., 2022; Jun et al., 2022). Hong et al. (2021) emphasized that when users found OFDS platforms easy to use, their intention to continue using the service significantly increased. Francioni et al. (2022) further demonstrated that PEOU had a stronger influence on continued usage among female users, highlighting its potential demographic implications. Given these findings, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived ease of use has a positive influence on continued usage intention toward online food delivery services.

While TAM focuses on technology-related perceptions, modern digital consumers are also influenced by variety and personalization in service offerings. Variety of food choices refers to the availability of diverse cuisines, dietary options, and vendors that can cater to the heterogeneous preferences of users. Previous research indicates that food variety contributes to user satisfaction and enhances the perceived value of OFDS platforms (Bao & Zhu, 2022; Wang & Scrimgeour, 2022). Consumers are more likely to continue using platforms that offer a wide array of options, especially when these options align with cultural or dietary preferences (Wang et al., 2020). However, the direct influence of food variety on continued usage intention remains underexplored. Some researchers argue that variety may enhance satisfaction and retention indirectly, while others suggest it could be a decisive factor in platform stickiness. This study empirically tests its direct effect through the following hypothesis:

H3: Variety of food choices has a positive influence on continued usage intention toward online food delivery services.

Another influential factor, particularly in digital environments, is electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Defined as user-generated content shared through online platforms such as reviews, ratings, and social media posts, e-WOM plays a crucial role in influencing trust, perceived credibility, and behavioral intentions (Abdullah et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008). Alghamdi et al. (2023) found that e-WOM was a significant predictor of continued usage intention in OFDS platforms, often more influential than traditional marketing channels. The social validation derived from peers' positive experiences encourages new users to adopt the service and existing users to remain loyal. Given the increasing reliance of university students on digital peer recommendations, especially in post-pandemic scenarios where health and service quality concerns are paramount, e-WOM is likely to exert a strong influence on continued usage. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Electronic word of mouth has a positive influence on continued usage intention toward online food delivery services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the influence of selected predictors, inclusive of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, variety of food choices, and electronic word of mouth on the continued usage intention of online food delivery services (OFDS) among Malaysian university students. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey approach using a structured online questionnaire, which was distributed through social media platforms. This methodology was appropriate for capturing self-reported perceptions and behavioral intentions from a geographically dispersed youth population in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of Malaysian public university students aged between 18 and 30 years who had used OFDS within the past 12 months. This population segment was selected due to their high digital engagement and growing reliance on OFDS for daily food consumption. Given the absence of a publicly available sampling frame for this population, a non-probability purposive sampling method was adopted. Screening questions were incorporated at the beginning of the survey to ensure that only eligible respondents who met the inclusion criteria

were able to proceed. These criteria required that respondents be Malaysian nationals, enrolled in public universities, and have used OFDS at least once in the preceding year.

To determine the minimum required sample size, G*Power 3.1 software was used to perform an a priori power analysis for multiple regression with four predictors (Faul et al., 2009). Setting the significance level (α) at 0.05, power ($1-\beta$) at 0.95, and a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), the minimum sample size required was calculated to be 129. To accommodate potential unusable responses, a total of 150 completed questionnaires were collected, meeting the requirements for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis using SmartPLS software (Ringle et al., 2024).

Instrument Development and Measures

The instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire adapted from established and validated measurement scales in prior research (Table 1). Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use were measured using items adapted from Davis (1989) and Troise et al. (2021). Variety of food choices was adapted from Wang et al. (2020), while electronic word of mouth items were adapted from Alghamdi et al. (2023). Continued usage intention was also measured based on items developed by Alghamdi et al. (2023). All constructs were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Item Codes	Items	Sources
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	PU1	Using OFDS app addresses my needs.	Davis (1989)
	PU2	Using OFDS app saves me time.	
	PU3	Using an OFDSs app is an efficient way to order my meals.	
	PU4	Using an OFDS app makes my life easier.	
	PU5	Overall, using an OFDS app is a useful way to order meals.	
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	PEOU1	It is easy to use OFDS app.	Troise et al. (2021)
	PEOU2	OFDS app is understandable and clear.	
	PEOU3	Using OFDS app requires minimum effort.	
	PEOU4	Learning to use OFDS app is easy.	
Variety of Food Choices (VFC)	VFC1	The OFDS app offers a variety of restaurant choices.	Wang et al. (2020)
	VFC2	The OFDS app offers a variety of food choices.	
	VFC3	I can order food with a wide range of prices through the OFDS app.	
E-Word of Mouth (EWOM)	EWOM1	I always read reviews that are presented on the OFDS app.	Alghamdi et al. (2023)

	EWOM2	The reviews presented on the OFDS app make me confident.	
	EWOM3	I am confused if I do not read reviews before using the OFDS app.	
Continued Usage Intention (CUI)	CUI1	I don't want to stop using OFDS app. I intend to keep doing it.	Alghamdi et al. (2023)
	CUI2	Instead of employing any other method, I want to keep using OFDS app.	
	CUI3	I would like to continue using OFDS app as much as I can if I could.	
	CUI4	Overall, I would continue using OFDS app.	

Data Collection

Content validity was ensured through expert review by academics specializing in consumer behavior and digital services. Prior to full deployment, a pilot test was conducted with 30 university students to assess item clarity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients from the pilot study exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 for all constructs, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The final questionnaire was then distributed online via platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, and Facebook, with the assistance of university student networks and group administrators. The data collection process took place over a one-month period following ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using both SPSS version 26.0 and SmartPLS version 4.0 (Ringle et al., 2024). Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize respondent demographics and item distributions. Structural Equation Modeling via the PLS-SEM technique was applied to assess the measurement model and structural relationships among constructs. This two-step approach involved evaluating the reliability and validity of the measurement model before testing the structural model for hypothesis confirmation, following recommendations by Hair et al. (2022). Bootstrapping procedures with 10,000 resamples were used to assess the significance of path coefficients.

FINDINGS

Respondent Demographics

A total of 150 valid responses were collected from Malaysian public university students who had used online food delivery services (OFDS) within the past 12 months. The sample comprised 50.7% male ($n = 76$) and 49.3% female ($n = 74$) respondents. The majority were aged between 21 and 23 years old (48.7%), followed by 24 to 27 years (32.7%), 18 to 20 years (18%), and a small proportion aged 28–30 (0.7%). In terms of ethnicity, Malay respondents represented the majority (64%), followed by Chinese (20%) and Indian (16%). Most respondents were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs (60.7%), with others in diploma (37.3%), master's (1.3%), and pre-diploma (0.7%) programs. The most frequently reported use of OFDS ranged from 1–10 times over the past 12 months, indicating moderate but consistent use of these services among the sampled population.

Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

The descriptive statistics for the study constructs are presented in Table 2. All items had means ranging from 5.13 to 5.77 on a 7-point Likert scale, indicating moderately high agreement with the measured statements. Standard deviations ranged from 0.96 to 1.40, suggesting reasonable variability in responses.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Construct	Item	Mean	SD
Perceived Usefulness	PU1–PU5	5.13–5.63	0.97–1.35
Perceived Ease of Use	PEOU1–PEOU4	5.44–5.62	1.02–1.40
Variety of Food Choices	VFC1–VFC3	5.67–5.77	1.08–1.21
E-Word of Mouth	EWOM1–EWOM3	5.21–5.64	0.96–1.21
Continued Usage Intention	CUI1–CUI4	5.36–5.50	1.05–1.20

Measurement Model Evaluation

The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed through factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 3, all constructs met the recommended thresholds: CR values exceeded 0.70, AVEs were above 0.50, and individual item loadings were greater than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	PU1	0.830	0.846	0.868	0.662
	PU2	0.834			
	PU3	0.835			
	PU4	0.674			
	PU5	0.757			
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	PEOU1	0.827	0.769	0.818	0.599
	PEOU2	0.862			
	PEOU3	0.591			
	PEOU4	0.786			
Variety of Food Choices (VFC)	VFC1	0.871	0.795	0.809	0.710
	VFC2	0.855			
	VFC3	0.801			
E-Word of Mouth (EWOM)	EWOM1	0.823	0.636	0.654	0.581
	EWOM2	0.785			
	EWOM3	0.671			
	CUI1	0.678	0.893	0.843	0.679

Continued Usage Intention (CUI)	CUI2	0.869			
	CUI3	0.883			
	CUI4	0.850			

Notes: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. As shown in Table 4, all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Hair et al., 2022), confirming discriminant validity among constructs.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratios)

Constructs	PU	PEOU	VFC	EWOM	CUI
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	-				
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	0.755	-			
Variety of Food Choices (VFC)	0.664	0.566	-		
E-Word of Mouth (EWOM)	0.883	0.768	0.740	-	
Continued Usage Intention (CUI)	0.703	0.688	0.532	0.813	-

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated to test the hypotheses and determine the strength and significance of the path relationships. As shown in Table 5, three of the four hypothesized relationships were statistically significant. Perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.255$, $p = 0.010$), perceived ease of use ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.018$), and electronic word of mouth ($\beta = 0.277$, $p = 0.002$) had significant positive effects on continued usage intention. However, variety of food choices did not significantly influence continued usage intention ($\beta = 0.064$, $p = 0.446$).

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypo	Path	β	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	95% CI (BC)	Supported
H1	PU → CUI	0.255	2.593	0.010	[0.055, 0.445]	Yes
H2	PEOU → CUI	0.226	2.359	0.018	[0.025, 0.403]	Yes
H3	VFC → CUI	0.064	0.763	0.446	[-0.103, 0.225]	No
H4	EWOM → CUI	0.277	3.165	0.002	[0.109, 0.451]	Yes

Note: Hypo = Hypotheses; PU = Perceived Usefulness; CUI = Continued Usage Intention; PEOU = Perceived Ease of Use; VFC = Variety of Food Choices; EWOM = E-Word of Mouth

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for continued usage intention was 0.523, indicating that the model explains 52.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, which reflects a moderate-to-strong predictive power (Hair et al., 2022). Effect sizes (f^2) were also computed, revealing small to moderate effects for PU (0.049), PEOU (0.047), and EWOM (0.077), while VFC had a negligible effect (0.001). The results of hypothesis testing is illustrated in Figure 1.

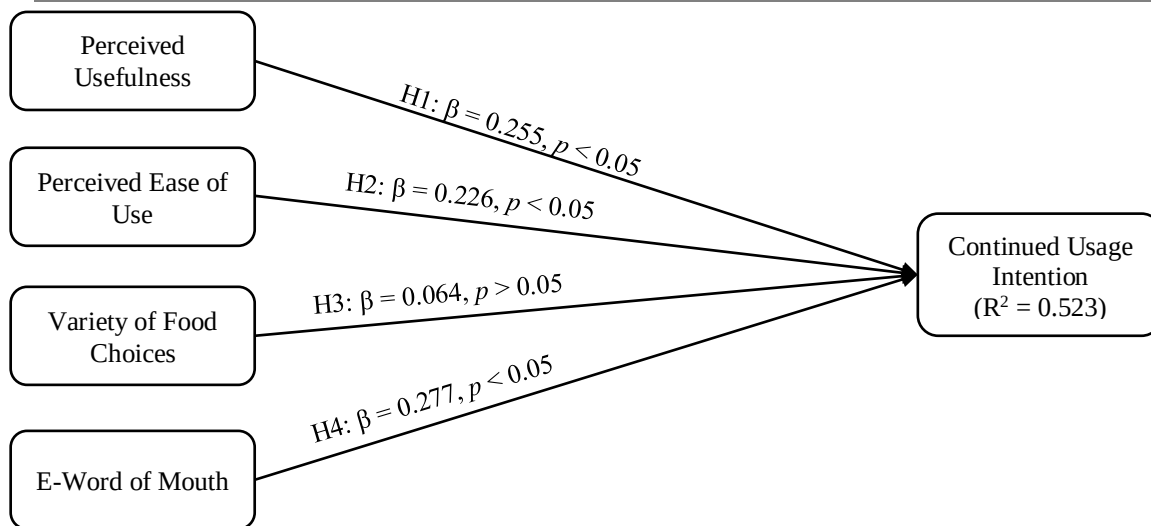


Figure 1. Result of the Structural Model Assessment

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the predictors of continued usage intention toward online food delivery services (OFDS) among Malaysian university students, extending the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with two additional constructs: variety of food choices and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). The findings provide several theoretical and practical insights that contribute to a better understanding of user retention in the context of digital food platforms.

Consistent with the core propositions of TAM, both perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) significantly influenced users' continued usage intention. This aligns with previous findings in both OFDS and other digital service domains, reaffirming that users are more likely to continue using technology when they perceive it to be both beneficial and easy to operate (Davis, 1989; Hong et al., 2021; Troise et al., 2021). Specifically, students in this study valued OFDS platforms that saved time, simplified the food-ordering process, and offered convenience without requiring steep learning curves. These results validate the robustness of TAM even in non-Western, youth-centered, and post-pandemic settings, reinforcing its applicability across varied cultural and technological contexts.

Electronic word of mouth emerged as the most influential factor in the model, exerting a stronger effect on continued usage intention than PU or PEOU. This finding supports prior research indicating that peer recommendations, user-generated content, and online reviews serve as powerful forms of social proof that can significantly shape consumer attitudes and behaviors (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Litvin et al., 2008). In digitally connected communities, especially among students who are frequent social media users, e-WOM provides trust signals that compensate for the lack of face-to-face service interactions. Positive feedback on food quality, delivery speed, and service reliability can encourage repeated use and help OFDS platforms cultivate loyal user bases.

Surprisingly, the study did not find a significant relationship between the variety of food choices and continued usage intention. Although previous research has highlighted the importance of menu diversity and cultural preferences in initial adoption and customer satisfaction (Bao & Zhu, 2022; Wang & Scrimgeour, 2022), the current findings suggest that once users become familiar with a platform, other factors such as convenience and peer validation may outweigh the influence of food variety. This implies that users may prioritize reliability and usability over selection breadth in making repeated purchasing decisions. It is also possible that the baseline expectation of variety is already met across platforms, making it a less distinguishing factor in continued use.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on OFDS usage by extending the TAM framework with relevant contextual variables. The inclusion of e-WOM as a social influence factor enriches the model and reflects the increasing importance of peer-driven information in digital consumer decision-making.

By testing the model in the Malaysian higher education context, this research adds empirical evidence from an emerging market often underrepresented in global e-commerce studies.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer clear implications for OFDS providers and marketers. First, ensuring that platforms are easy to navigate and function efficiently should remain a top priority. Developers should focus on optimizing user interfaces, minimizing loading times, and simplifying the ordering and payment processes. Second, strategies to enhance perceived usefulness such as offering loyalty points, real-time tracking, and personalized promotions can further encourage repeated use. Third, e-WOM should be actively managed and leveraged as a marketing tool. Encouraging satisfied customers to leave reviews, share experiences on social media, and rate services can significantly amplify trust and user engagement. Service providers may also consider integrating in-app prompts or gamified incentives to stimulate user feedback.

Nonetheless, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional design restricts causal inference and fails to capture changes in user perceptions over time. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how continued usage evolves with platform maturity, service quality fluctuations, or life-stage transitions. Second, the sample was limited to university students, which may limit generalizability to other user segments such as working adults or rural populations. Future research should include a broader demographic spectrum to enhance external validity. Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be prone to social desirability bias or common method variance. Employing mixed-method approaches combining surveys with interviews, usage analytics, or experiments could provide a more comprehensive understanding of user behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the predictors of continued usage intention toward online food delivery services (OFDS) among Malaysian university students by extending the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with two additional variables: variety of food choices and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). The results confirm that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and e-WOM significantly influence users' intention to continue using OFDS platforms, while variety of food choices did not emerge as a significant predictor. These findings suggest that technological functionality and social influence outweigh the breadth of product offerings in shaping long-term user engagement with digital food delivery systems.

Theoretically, the study reinforces the validity of TAM in emerging market contexts while highlighting the importance of integrating user-driven constructs such as e-WOM to account for evolving digital consumer behavior. It contributes to the growing literature on OFDS by focusing on post-adoption behavior, an area that remains underexplored, especially in Southeast Asia. Practically, the insights from this research provide guidance for OFDS providers aiming to strengthen user retention. By prioritizing ease of use, emphasizing service utility, and strategically promoting user reviews, service providers can foster sustained engagement among digitally savvy youth consumers.

Looking ahead, future studies should consider longitudinal designs to explore changes in usage patterns over time and across different life stages. Expanding the model to include trust, service quality, pricing, or gamification may yield a more comprehensive understanding of what drives long-term user loyalty in digital food ecosystems. As digital platforms continue to evolve, understanding the nuances of continued usage behavior will be vital for both theory development and service innovation.

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