Consumer Conformity and Continuance Intention: A Study Case Approach of Facebook and WhatsApp

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study aims to explore the phenomenon of consumer conformity and its impact on the continuance and reuse intention of digital communication platforms, particularly in the context of policy changes that force users into making critical decisions. Using the recent case of WhatsApp and Facebook's policy updates as a backdrop, this study examines how consumer conformity influences user behavior and intentions to continue or abandon a service.

Methodology - The research is conceptual in nature, employing an integrative approach based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). A comparative analysis is conducted through two proposed scenarios to understand user decisions following sudden policy changes, emphasizing the psychological factors of conformity, perceived value, trust, and perceived risk.

Findings - The findings suggest that when consumers are faced with limited choices, such as accepting unfavorable terms or discontinuing service, informational and normative conformity significantly influence continuance intention. Factors such as perceived security, service quality, satisfaction, and perceived usefulness are found to moderate the relationship between conformity and continuance intention. Additionally, previous experience, trust, and self-efficacy emerge as strong determinants of users' willingness to reuse or abandon the service after policy disruptions.

Novelty - Unlike previous studies that treat continuance intention purely as a result of satisfaction and usefulness, this study introduces the element of forced conformity and policy-driven decision-making into the behavioral model. It proposes a dynamic framework that incorporates psychological contract violation, trust restoration strategies, and conformity types (informational and normative) in explaining consumer behavior in digital platforms.

Keywords: *Consumer Conformity, Reuse Intention, Continuance Intention, WhatsApp Policy, Technology Acceptance Model, Theory of Planned Behavior*

I. INTRODUCTION

Few weeks before the end of 2019, users of WhatsApp have started to notice a change in the application logo where the word "From Facebook" has been added to the logo. This logo doesn't refer to Facebook as the social network, but to Facebook the tech company that owns both WhatsApp and Instagram. A decision was made by Facebook for its new corporate branding by adding 'from Facebook' to its family products (Parsons, 2019). In 2014, WhatsApp was bought by Mark Zuckerberg's company. At that time, users were told that their data would not be shared with the new parent company and kept private. However, this was revised in 2016 and WhatsApp started sharing data with Facebook and allow the users to opt out. The latest terms and privacy update from WhatsApp earlier this year have pushed the users to agree to these new terms or else banned from the application. These new terms have triggered huge reactions from the users as the issues cover the following. First, Facebook can access the personal data of users. Second, Facebook can display personalized adverts in WhatsApp (Finnis, 2021) (Chakravarti, 2021).

Despite fear of security breach, security concerns and many others, WhatsApp users from all countries except UK are reacting hard to this policy change by considering to migrate to other messaging services, such as Telegram and Signal. This is indicated by the insane increase of Telegram and Signal users in the counting of days, causing Signal application to rush and slows down (Chakravarti, 2021). People are questioning whether they should delete WhatsApp application and what best option they have in exchange (Tiwari, 2021c, 2021a, 2021b). This class action has certainly placed WhatsApp in hot water after its unwise ultimatum of its Facebook or die to the users (Singh, 2021), causing WhatsApp to quickly clarifies the rumors as posted in twitter,

> "*We want to address some rumors and be 100% clear we continue to protect your private messages with end-to-end encryption.*" pic.twitter.com/6qDnzQ98MP

Leaving the truth whether these rumors are true or not, this research examines the current move of WhatsApp with the sudden policy change that creates a severe damage to the company. Previous studies have shown that when one was forced to choose one out of two options, where one causes penalty and punishments and the other one requires compliance, a conformance was expected to happen. In the eyes of the customers, WhatsApp suddenly changed its policy and offers only two options, to take the risks of security and privacy or to find other messaging services. Provided with two options only, WhatsApp is expecting the customers to comply in the process of Consumer Conformity as the company knows the customers would not willingly share data with them. The two alternative companies, Telegram and Signal, are probably not considered equal by WhatsApp with their own private issues unknown to the customers (Chakravarti, 2021; Tiwari, 2021c).

Consumer conformity is a term used in marketing research to influence purchase intention and purchase behavior (Khandelwal, Yadav, Tripathi, & Agrawal, 2018; Princes, Manurung, So, & Abdinagoro, 2020). This research seeks to understand what if a policy change occurs just like what is being done by WhatsApp is added to the model. What will happen to the research model and what would be best to solve this issue. It is very important that the company seeks to understand this first before actually announcing it to the public.

Two scenarios are introduced in this research. First scenario, the users are reluctant to continue using WhatsApp as they are not sure with the quality of other messaging services or they have get accustomed to using WhatsApp features, especially for the older generation who absorbs technology slower than other generations. Second scenario, the customers do not want to take the risks losing privacy and security, and

as a result the users migrate to other messaging services. WhatsApp must prepare for a plan incase after some time the users intend to use the service again.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Related Theories

2.1 Consumer Conformity
Consumer conformity refers to the tendency of individuals to align their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors with those of a group or with prevailing social norms, often to gain acceptance or avoid social rejection (Khandelwal, Yadav, Tripathi, & Agrawal, 2018). In the context of digital platforms, consumer conformity becomes particularly influential when users are forced into decision-making under limited options, such as accepting new policies or abandoning a service. Informational conformity occurs when individuals accept others' views as reality, while normative conformity reflects the pressure to conform for social approval.
Prior studies suggest that conformity significantly influences consumer behavior, including purchase intention and brand loyalty (Princes, Manurung, So, & Abdinagoro, 2020). During abrupt service changes, such as WhatsApp's new privacy terms, both informational and normative conformity can push users toward reluctant acceptance or migration to alternative platforms.

2.2 Continuance Intention
Continuance intention refers to a user's willingness to persist in using a product or service after initial adoption. It is widely recognized as a critical determinant of long-term success for digital service providers (Li & Shang, 2020). Key factors influencing continuance intention include perceived usefulness, satisfaction, service quality, perceived security, and trust.
In particular, trust and satisfaction mediate the relationship between psychological contract violations and reuse intention (Malhotra, Sahadev, & Purani, 2017). When users feel that implicit promises have been broken—as seen in the backlash against WhatsApp's updated policies—their trust diminishes, adversely impacting their continuance intention.

2.3 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)
The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) posits that behavioral intention is the main predictor of actual behavior and is influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. TPB has been widely applied to explain technology adoption, including users' willingness to reuse digital platforms (Yoon & Kim, 2017).
Within this study, TPB helps explain how users' attitudes toward WhatsApp's policy changes, peer pressure (subjective norms), and their perceived ease or difficulty of migrating to alternative services interact to influence their decisions.

2.4 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), emphasizes two primary factors influencing user acceptance: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. These constructs have been further extended to include elements such as perceived risk, trust, and user enjoyment, particularly in the digital and mobile service domains (Wang, Lew, Lau, & Leow, 2019).
For the case of WhatsApp, while its perceived ease of use and usefulness remain critical, heightened perceptions of privacy risks may override these positive perceptions, leading to discontinuance intentions.

Furthermore, self-efficacy—users' beliefs in their capabilities to perform certain actions—has also been recognized as an important moderating factor in reuse behaviors (Mellarkod, Appan, Jones, & Sherif, 2007).
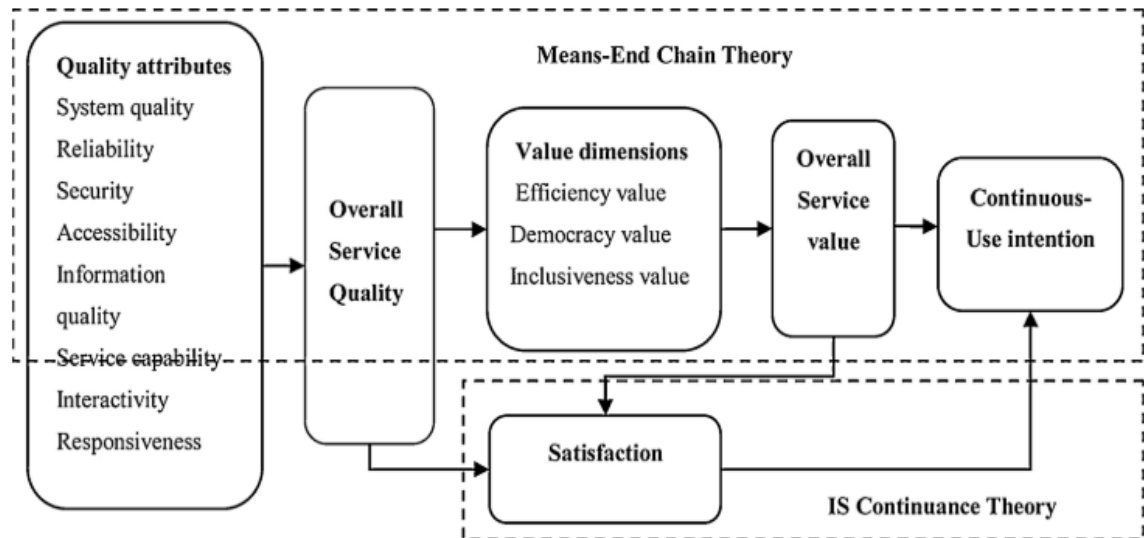

Figure 2.1 A chain model of e-government service quality, perceived value, and citizens' continuous-use intention (Y. Li & Shang, 2020).

A study by (Malhotra, Sahadev, & Purani, 2017) shows that there is a psychological contract between buyer and seller in the online marketplaces. The psychological contracts are given on perceived promises, where one party has the responsibility to perform certain behaviors. Violation of psychological contracts have caused disappointments and structural assurance (SA) provides a trust-building mechanism to proactively address the negative effects of psychological contract violation (PCV) rather than just relying on service – failure recovery systems. In this case the promises made by Facebook when it bought WhatsApp in 2014 is violated and this has caused lots of disappointment.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Building upon TPB and TAM, this research proposes two scenarios:
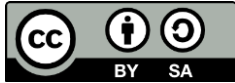Scenario A: Users continue using WhatsApp under conformity pressures despite privacy concerns. Informational and normative conformity, combined with satisfaction, perceived security, and perceived value, sustain continuance intention.
Scenario B: Users discontinue WhatsApp usage but may return if trust is rebuilt and service value increases. Previous experience, confirmation, and perceived service quality mediate the reuse intention.
The conceptual framework integrates factors such as trust, perceived quality, self-efficacy, service quality, perceived usefulness, and consumer conformity to offer a richer understanding of user behavior in response to disruptive policy changes.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual research design aimed at developing an extended theoretical framework to understand the role of consumer conformity in shaping users' continuance and reuse intentions in digital service platforms. Rather than empirical testing, this research synthesizes and extends existing theories to propose conceptual models that capture consumer behavior in the context of policy changes.

The study is motivated by the abrupt privacy policy update implemented by WhatsApp, providing a real-world case for exploring forced consumer conformity and its impact on behavioral intentions. Two hypothetical scenarios are constructed based on existing literature to illustrate different paths of consumer behavior under conditions of limited choice.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The research framework is grounded in the integration of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TPB provides the basis for understanding the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in influencing behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TAM complements this by emphasizing perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key determinants of technology acceptance and continuance intention (Davis, 1989).

The conceptual framework is further enriched with additional constructs drawn from the literature, including consumer conformity (Khandelwal et al., 2018; Princes et al., 2020), trust (Malhotra et al., 2017), perceived security, confirmation, perceived value, service quality, self-efficacy (Mellarkod et al., 2007), and satisfaction (Li & Shang, 2020).

3.3 Scenario Development

Two distinct scenarios are developed to model consumer behavior:

Scenario A: Reluctant Continuance

Users choose to remain with WhatsApp despite concerns, driven by network effects, informational conformity, normative conformity, and perceived inconvenience of switching platforms. Continuance intention in this scenario is primarily influenced by perceived value, trust, perceived security, satisfaction, and confirmation.

Scenario B: Migration and Reuse Intention

Users initially abandon WhatsApp to migrate to alternative platforms such as Telegram or Signal, motivated by perceived risks and loss of trust. However, reuse intention may develop over time if perceived quality, previous experience, trust recovery, and satisfaction are restored.

Both scenarios emphasize the mediating role of consumer conformity in influencing users' continuance or reuse decisions under perceived constraint conditions.

3.4 Variables and Constructs
The key constructs and their theoretical origins are outlined below:

Constructs	Definition	Source
Perceived Usefulness	Belief that using the service enhances effectiveness	Davis (1989); Mellarkod et al. (2007)
Perceived Ease of Use	Belief that the service is free of effort	Davis (1989)
Consumer Conformity	Tendency to align behavior with group norms or pressures	Khandelwal et al. (2018); Princes et al. (2020)
Trust	Confidence in the platform's reliability and integrity	Malhotra et al. (2017)
Satisfaction	Positive evaluation of service experience	Li & Shang (2020)
Perceived Security	Belief in the platform's ability to protect user data	Alalwan (2020)
Perceived Value	Overall assessment of service benefits relative to cost	Li & Shang (2020)
Confirmation	Consistency between expectations and actual performance	Dai, Teo, & Rappa (2020)
Service Quality	Overall quality of service attributes	Wang, Ou, & Chen (2019)
Previous Experience	Prior interactions shaping current perceptions	Mellarkod et al. (2007)
Self-Efficacy	Confidence in the ability to perform tasks with the technology	Mellarkod et al. (2007)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

This study proposed two conceptual scenarios to explain user behavior following a sudden and controversial policy change in a digital service platform, using WhatsApp's privacy update as a real-world case. The findings highlight how consumer conformity, trust, perceived service quality, and previous experience shape users' decisions either to continue using the service or to abandon and possibly reuse it later.
These findings are discussed under two major behavioral pathways:
Scenario A: Reluctant Continuance and Scenario B: Migration and Potential Reuse.
Both the scenarios are based on the perceptions that the customers are given two choices, to conform to the rules or not to use the application again.

4.2 Scenario A: Reluctant Continuance

In Scenario A, users opt to continue using WhatsApp despite concerns regarding privacy and data security. This decision is heavily influenced by both informational conformity and normative conformity (Khandelwal et al., 2018; Princes et al., 2020).

Author	Antecedents	Objects	Location	Dependent variables	Base Theory
Blose, Mack and Pitts, (2015)	Message framing	Hotels	South Carolina	Reuse Intention	Social Psychological Theory Prospect Theory
Li et al., (2012)	Service quality, course quality, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, self-efficacy	e-learning systems	Rural China	Behavioral Intention to Reuse	Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Self-efficacy Theory Unified theory of acceptance and usage of technology (UTAUT)
Kim and Hyun, (2016)	Telepresence, service quality, information quality, service quality	Smartphone based AR	South Korea	AR Reuse Intention	Extended TAM Theory (add usefulness)
Rosell and Allen, (2020)	Satisfaction	Autonomous vehicles	Spain	Reuse Intention	Standard satisfaction theory
Malhotra, Sahadev and Purani, (2017)	Trust, satisfaction, structural assurance (SA)	Online retailer websites	Online customers	Reuse intention	Psychological contract theory Institutional Trust Theory
Alalwan, (2020)	Online review, online rating, and online tracking, performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, and price value on e-satisfaction	Mobile food ordering apps	Jordanian online customers	Continued intention to reuse	Extended UTAUT Theory (UTAUT2)
Mellarkod et al., (2007)	Predetermined mindset regarding reuse, perceived usefulness, perceived ease-of-use, self-efficacy	Software assets in application development	India	Reuse Intention	Socio-Cognitive Theory (SCT) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
Yoon and Kim, (2017)	Subjective Norm, Attitude, Availability, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Concern, Perceived Effort	Social science scholars	Community of Science (COS) Scholars database	Intention to Reuse Data	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
Jiang et al., (2018)	Subjective Norms, Attitude, Perceived Behavior Control	Agricultural biomass waste	China	Reuse Intention	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)
Li and Shang, (2020)	Overall service value, satisfaction, quality attributes, overall service quality, value dimensions	e-government	China	Continuous-Use Intention	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) IS Continuance Theory
Wang, Teo and Liu, (2020)	Perceived Value, Relative Advantage (Mobility, Localizability, Personalization, Security), Compatibility (Moderating Variable)	Mobile government service	China	Continuance Intention	Rational Choice Theory (RCT) Behavioral Decision Theory Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT)
Yang, (2021)	Recommendation Satisfaction, Trust in Recommendation, Perceived Information Quality, Perceived System Quality	Social recommender system	WeChat in China	Continuance intention to use	Bagozzi's Self – regulation framework adapted from TPB
Wang et al., (2019)	Computer Self Efficacy (CSE), Enjoyment (E), Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and User Perception (UP)	Cloud e-learning application	IT-students in MMU, Malaysia	Continuance Intention (CI)	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Socio-Cognitive Theory (SCT)
Tan et al., (2020)	App Design, App Utility, UI Graphics, UI Input, UI Output, UI Structure, UI dependability	Disaster Apps	Majority from New Zealand, US, and other countries	Continuance Intention	UTAUT2 Expectation – Confirmation Theory (ECT)
Dai, Teo and Rappa, (2020)	Confirmation, Satisfaction, Attitude, Habit	Massive open online courses (MOOC)	Mainland China	Continuance Intention	Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Expectation – Confirmation Model
Bölen, (2020)	Perceived Usefulness, Satisfaction, Perceived aesthetics, confirmation, Individual mobility, habit	Smartwatches	Not mentioned	Continuance Intention	UTAUT Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT)

Ashfaq et al., (2020)	Perceived Enjoyment, Satisfaction, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, information quality, service quality	AI – powered service agents	United States	Continuance Intention	ECT TAM Social Exchange Theory
Gupta, Yousaf and Mishra, (2020)	Satisfaction, post-adoption self-efficacy and post-adoption perceived usefulness, perceived security	M – Wallet Services	India	Post-adoption continuance intention	ECT TAM IDT
(Hepola, Leppäniemi, & Karjaluoto, 2020)	Engagement, attitude, satisfaction	Mobile music and mobile parking	Finnish online consumer panel	Service Continuance Intention	TPB UTAUT
(K. H. Kim, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2019)	Satisfaction, content quality, privacy, reliability, usability	mHealth services	One care Service in Korea	Continuance Intention	TAM TPB Motivation theories
(Cho & Lee, 2020)	Satisfaction, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Confirmation	Smart device for disabilities	Korea based online café	Continuance Intention	ECT TAM
(Shao, Li, Guo, & Zhang, 2020)	Location reliability, prompt response, customization, transaction assurance, vividness, perceived usefulness, confirmation, satisfaction	Bicycle sharing	China	Continuance Intention	ECT Service Quality Theory
(W. T. Wang, Ou, & Chen, 2019)	Interaction quality, environment quality, outcome quality, user satisfaction, inertia	Mobile communication applications	Taiwan	Continuance Intention	Service Quality Model
(Chuah, 2019)	Perceived Benefits, perceived risks, inspiration, well-being, previous lifestyle incongruence	Smartwatch	Malaysia	Continuance Intention	IDT TAM TPB UTAUT
(Ding, 2019)	Confirmation, Personal Innovativeness, Involvement, Exploratory use	Information system	Mobile applications, Instagram and Camera+	Information system continuance	ECT Appraisal Theory
(Mouakket, 2019)	Intrinsic gratifications (Entertainment, perceived escapism), extrinsic gratifications (information sharing, perceived usefulness)	Mobile instant messaging	United Arab Emirates	Continuance motivation	UTAUT TPB
(Zhou, Cai, Liu, & Fan, 2019)	Self-image, peer influence, sense of belonging, satisfaction	Social network and micro-blogging sites	Ren Ren and Weibo in China	Continuance intention	TPB Appraisal Theory Social presence theory
(C. Y. Li & Fang, 2019)	Brand-self congruity, brand attachment, expectation confirmation, satisfaction, perceived usefulness, perceived conplementarity	Mobile branded apps	My Starbucks in Taiwan	Continuance intention	ECT Attachment Theory Task-technology fit theory

Scenario A

The results reveal that the concept of e-government service quality has eight contributing dimensions: system quality, reliability, security, accessibility, information quality, service capability, interactivity, and responsiveness. Perceived service value is a powerful mediator between service quality and citizens' continuous-use intention. The intention to use is a consequence of service quality, service value, and satisfaction. (Y. Li & Shang, 2020)
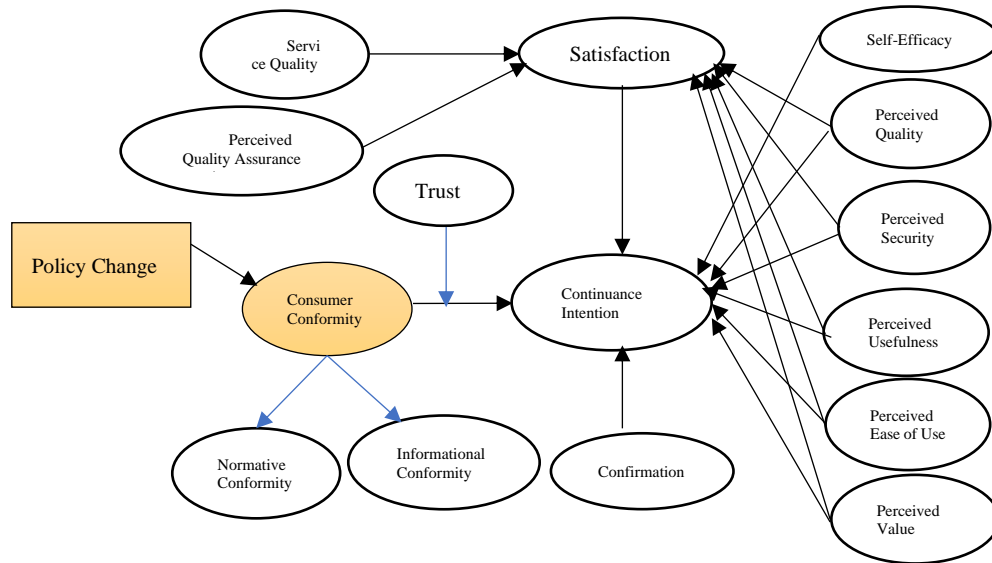
Proposed Research Framework Model A

Key Findings in Scenario A:

- Informational Conformity: Users assume that if a majority continues using the service, the risks might be manageable or exaggerated.
- Normative Conformity: Users feel social pressure to stay on WhatsApp because their social network (friends, family, colleagues) remains there.
- Perceived Value and Convenience: The strong network effects and perceived ease of use reinforce the decision to stay (Davis, 1989).
- Trust Recovery Efforts: WhatsApp's communication efforts to reassure users about end-to-end encryption helped partially restore trust (Malhotra et al., 2017).
- Satisfaction and Service Quality: Prior satisfaction with the service moderates the negative perception arising from the policy change (Li & Shang, 2020).

This behavior can be explained using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), where perceived usefulness and ease of use continue to drive user behavior despite new perceived risks. Additionally, under the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), subjective norms exert a strong influence, suggesting that peer influence can override personal concerns when social connection is prioritized.

Thus, companies facing policy controversies must recognize the importance of managing public perceptions and maintaining satisfaction to retain users under conformity pressures.

Scenario B : Migration and Potential Reuse

In Scenario B, users initially choose to abandon WhatsApp in response to perceived threats to privacy and a violation of psychological contracts (Malhotra et al., 2017). However, over time, these users may reconsider returning to the platform based on improvements in perceived service quality, trust rebuilding efforts, and past positive experiences.
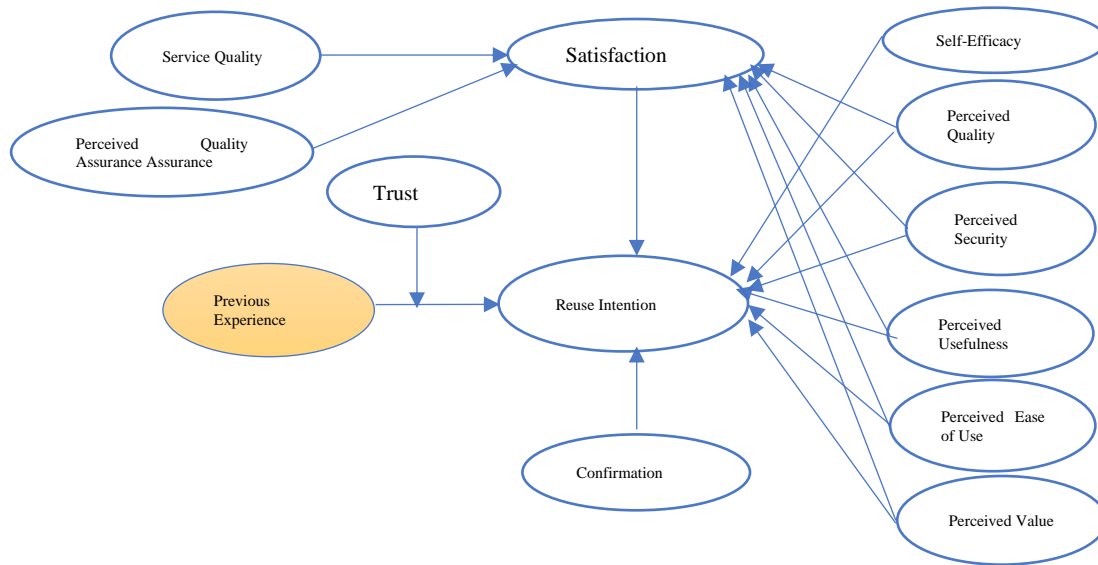
Proposed Research Framework Model B

Key Findings in Scenario B:

- Risk Aversion Behavior: Users motivated by high perceived concern for security actively seek alternatives (Yoon & Kim, 2017).
- Impact of Previous Experience: Familiarity and previous satisfaction with WhatsApp's features can later facilitate reuse intentions (Mellarkod et al., 2007).
- Trust Restoration and Confirmation: If WhatsApp effectively communicates improved privacy protections and users' expectations are confirmed, trust can be gradually rebuilt (Dai, Teo, & Rappa, 2020).
- Perceived Quality and Service Assurance: Investments in transparency, reliability, and user-centric updates can restore perceived service quality, leading to reuse intentions.

Scenario B is consistent with extended models of TAM and TPB, where behavioral intention is influenced not only by initial attitudes and subjective norms but also by dynamic perceptions of risk, confirmation of expectations, and trust recovery.

The findings emphasize the necessity for continuous relationship management, even after user defection, by focusing on service improvement, targeted communication, and community engagement.
Thus, platforms should not regard user migration as permanent loss but as a reversible decision, contingent upon strategic trust-building actions and service excellence.

4.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications:
This study extends TPB and TAM by introducing consumer conformity as a moderating factor in technology continuance and reuse intentions.
It highlights the critical roles of trust restoration, psychological contract management, and perceived value enhancement during service policy shifts.

Practical Implications:
Digital service providers must anticipate user resistance when implementing major policy changes and plan proactive trust-building strategies.
Companies should continuously monitor user sentiment, offer clear and transparent communication, and engage in visible service improvements.
Building resilience into user relationships can mitigate the negative effects of psychological contract breaches and facilitate user return after initial dissatisfaction.

V. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of consumer conformity in shaping continuance and reuse intentions, particularly under conditions where users are forced to make rapid decisions due to sudden policy changes. Through the case of WhatsApp's policy update, it becomes evident that when consumers are presented with limited options—either comply with new terms or abandon the service—their behavior is heavily influenced by psychological factors such as perceived risk, trust, satisfaction, and perceived usefulness.

In Scenario A, users who reluctantly accept the policy change continue using the service due to informational conformity, attachment to existing networks, and the perceived inconvenience of switching. In Scenario B, users who refuse to accept the risk migrate to alternative platforms but may reconsider returning if trust can be reestablished and if perceived value outweighs previous concerns. In both scenarios, trust recovery, service quality, and the management of consumer expectations are paramount for securing long-term user loyalty.

The research proposes that companies must be cautious in enforcing sudden policy changes without fully considering consumer psychology. Strategies that build trust, provide clear communication, emphasize data security, and reinforce perceived service value are essential to minimize consumer backlash and prevent mass defections. Furthermore, the inclusion of consumer conformity as a moderating factor in the continuance intention model enriches the existing theoretical frameworks of TPB and TAM by demonstrating the influence of social and psychological pressures beyond mere functional satisfaction.
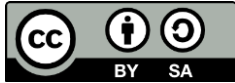
Future research could empirically test the proposed models across different platforms and regions to validate the findings and provide broader generalizability. Companies in the digital economy must learn to

balance innovation with the preservation of consumer trust, especially in an era where privacy concerns are increasingly at the forefront of user decision-making.

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