Social Media Continuance Intention from the Perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory: A Systematic Literature Review

Dian Jin, Wan Anita Wan Abas, Syafila Kamarudin

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Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia
Corresponding Author's Email: jin.dian@student.upm.edu.my

Abstract

The vast academic research on social media has been facilitated by its broad use. The present study conducted a systematic analysis of extant research on social media users' continuance use intention from the perspective of uses and gratifications theory (U&G). This systematic literature review aims to identify and bridge gaps in topics, theories, variables, and conceptual frameworks in studies of continuance use intention among social media users. The PRISMA method is used to review 18 articles drawn from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. From the analysis, 14 theories or models other than U&G, and a complete framework of causal relations emerge. It is recommended that future research on social media should include a greater diversity of perspective, investigate a wider range of research topics, and adopt different theories or models.

Keywords: Social Media, Continuance Intention, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Systematic Literature Review, Cause–Effect Framework

Introduction

Social media is one of the most widely utilized communication technologies in modern culture (Bertot et al., 2010). It is used globally and has a significant impact on people's daily lives. Web 2.0-based internet apps known as "social media" enable users to generate and share information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). By its applications in communication and entertainment, it is progressively altering conventional ways of life, and its influence is particularly powerful on younger people (Ainin et al., 2015; Sahharon et al., 2018).

A literature review proves that U&G is an important perspective to study the use of social media and has been widely used by many previous studies (Tang et al., 2021). However, to the best of we know, there are few review articles on intention to use social media from the perspective of U&G. Thus, this motivates us to fill the research gap, this study systematically reviews social media users' continuance use intention and establishes a causal relationship design as a review framework. This will be used to identify and fill gaps in the literature regarding topics, theories, variables, and conceptual frameworks for understanding social media users' continuance use intention, thus providing an analysis of the relationships among the conceptual frameworks proposed in previous studies. This systematic review aims to

provide solid foundations for future academic studies in this area, offering a mind map for future research and stimulating new research perspectives. It will also serve as a useful reference for the governments of various countries of in making decisions about media control and users' mental health education.

A systematic review is a comprehensive, synthesizing, and integrated research procedure that uses a set of replicable methods to locate, search for, and review research or related literature (Siddaway et al., 2019). The purpose of a systematic review is to use a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach to study a variety of different designs and concepts (Wong et al., 2013). A systematic review provides a lot of information for reproduction (Pluye & Hong, 2014), and is particularly appropriate for delineating the evolution of concepts.

The general research question in this present study is this: What are the themes, theories, and conceptual frameworks and their relationships among previous studies of social media users' continuance use intention from the perspective of U&G? The purpose of the study is to develop a framework that reveals the causal relationships among the research structures previously employed, and what factors from U&G were used. The main purpose of this research is to conduct a deep exploration and analysis of social media users' continuance use intention to obtain a more comprehensive understanding from the perspective of U&G, and to synthesize extant research.

Method

As a method of review, this study adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), and it selected Google Scholar and Scopus as the databases to be searched. This section sets out the four elements of the methodology employed: publication standards (Moher et al., 2014), resources used, the systematic literature review process, and the data analytic strategy.

This study selected two well-known databases: Google Scholar and Scopus. Google Scholar is a free and open search engine that is available without subscription (Mukherjee, 2009). It can directly index full text or metadata, covering a wide range of publishing formats and subject areas. Google Scholar includes academic journals, books, conference papers, abstracts, technical reports, preprints, and other forms of literature, and it contains about 318 million documents from around the world. It is compatible with bibliography management tools such as RefWorks, RefMan, EndNote, and BibTeX. Scopus covers 36,377 journals and 11,678 publishers worldwide and can only be accessed through institutional subscription (Elsevier, 2020). It covers a range of literature types (book series, academic journals, and conference proceedings) and subject areas (social sciences, life sciences, health sciences, natural sciences, environmental sciences, agriculture, and biological sciences), providing an intelligent visual tool for conducting systematic literature reviews. This review chose these two databases to take advantage of their different strengths, and this choice is fundamental to the quality of the results.

Systematic Review Process

Identification. The first stage of the systematic review process took place in Jan 2023 and consisted primarily of identifying keywords for information search. Previous studies, thesauruses, dictionaries, and synonyms of keywords suggested by databases provided a feasible list of keywords related to social media, U&G, continuance use intention (see Table 1). This first stage of the process retrieved 122 items of literature from Scopus, 38 from Google

Scholar. After manual deletion of irrelevant documents and removal of duplicates, valid documents remained (see Figure 1).

Screening. The second stage of the systematic review process consisted of screening in accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Figure 1). First, the timeline was controlled from 2014 to 2023, giving a total period of 10 years. Second, only research articles in journals were selected for inclusion; review articles, books, preprints, serials, theses, and conference proceedings were excluded. The third criterion was language. To overcome the language barrier and reduce the distortion of meaning caused by translation, only English publications were included. Finally, in line with the cause–effect framework of this review, only articles using quantitative research methods were selected.

Eligibility. Eligibility is the process by which the author manually includes or excludes literature items considering criteria in accordance with the research question and the study objectives. In this case, all the retrieved articles were reviewed carefully, and only those that fully met the criteria were included. First, a total of 38 duplicates and articles unrelated to the research question were deleted, and the remaining 84 related articles entered the eligibility process. After application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, followed by manual screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts, articles were retained for the qualitative synthesis (see Figure 1.1).

Quality appraisal. The quality of the remaining 18 articles was appraised based on a critical appraisal tool - the Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional Studies (AXIS tool) (Downes et al., 2016). Each article was ranked as three categories: high, medium, or low quality to assess the quality (Goldsmith et al., 2007). Because all 18 articles reached the threshold of medium quality level, these 18 articles were confirmed to be retained.

Table 1
Keywords and Information Search Strategy

| Database	Keywords
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (["social media" OR "social network" OR "social network service*" OR "social network site*"] AND ["continuance use*" OR "continuance intention*" OR "continue use*" OR "continue usage*" OR "continuous use*" OR "continuous usage*"] AND ["Uses and gratifications theory*" OR "U&G" OR "UGT"])
Google Scholar	allintitle: "continuance" OR "continue" OR "continuous use" AND "Uses and gratifications theory" OR "U&G" OR "UGT" OR "gratifications"
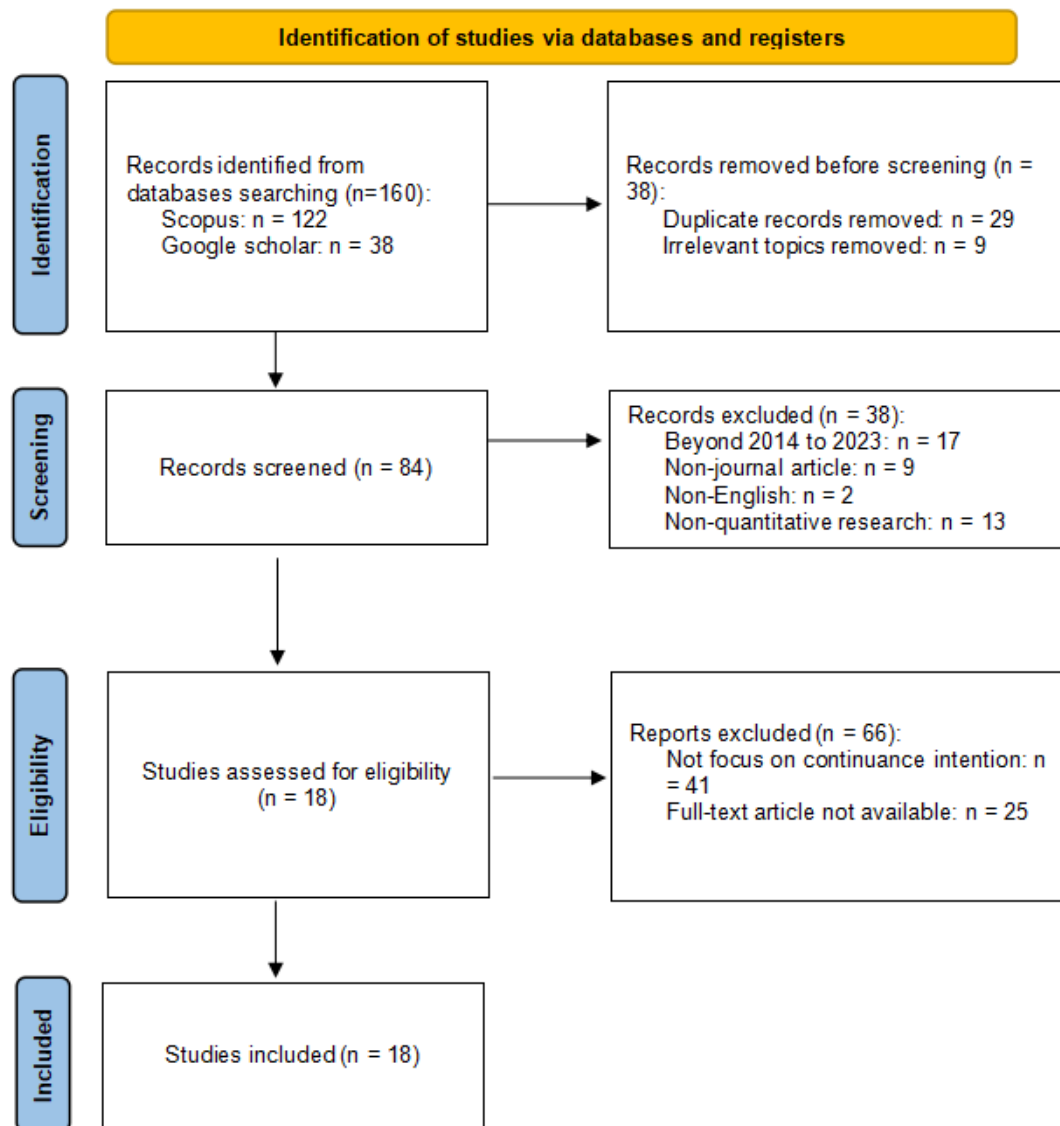
Figure 1: Flow diagram of this review study

Data Analytic Strategy

The 18 articles were assessed and reviewed, and the data collected are analyzed and discussed in what follows. Data extraction consisted of three steps: (a) reading the article's title, (b) reading the abstract, and (c) reading the whole article in depth to determine the data content in relation to the current research question. This part of the review focused on matching the data with specific research questions. A systematic literature review can incorporate different types of research designs (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods); the present study took a qualitative approach to the literature and data (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005), using content analysis to identify the themes, theories/models, variables, and research frameworks. This allowed a cause–effect framework to be developed for structural analysis of the research theories/models and conceptual frameworks employed in previous studies.

Result
Platform

The review found that most authors had chosen to focus on the social media platforms Facebook, WeChat, and Weibo (see Table 1.2). Of the 18 articles reviewed, five articles

selected Facebook (Chang, 2018; Chiu & Huang, 2015; Hossain et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2015; Krasnova et al., 2017). Two articles selected WeChat (Gan & Li, 2018; Zong et al., 2019). Two articles selected Weibo (Gogan et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). Five articles did not specify the specific name of the platform studied. It is worth noting that Zhang et al (2016) focused on government social media. Li et al (2015) focused on social network game.

Sample Region
The review found that most of the studies were based on samples from mainland China, Taiwan, and Korea (see Table 1.2). Chinese samples were selected for 6 studies (Gan & Li, 2018; Gogan et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2016; Li et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016; Zong et al., 2019). Four studies took samples from Taiwan (Chang, 2018; Chiu & Huang, 2015; Yen et al., 2019). Three studies took samples from Korea (Hwang & Cho, 2018; Lee & Ryu, 2016; Lee & Kim, 2017). Except three studies (Bae, 2018; Hsu et al., 2015; Krasnova et al., 2017), the samples of all other studies are from the Asian region. Among them, Hsu et al. (2015) conducted a comparative study among different countries, including Australia, Austria, Japan, Taiwan, and the USA.

Table 2
Overview of Research Platform and Sample Region

Reference	Platform	Sample Region
Yen et al, 2019	No specific	Taiwan
Chen et al, 2019	No specific	Arab Countries
Zong et al, 2019	WeChat	China
Hossain et al, 2019	Facebook	Bangladesh
Chang, 2018	Facebook	Taiwan
Gogan et al, 2018	Weibo	China
Bae, 2018	No specific	USA
Hwang & Cho, 2018	Instagram	Korea
Gan & Li, 2018	WeChat	China
Hur et al, 2017	travel-related social media	Korea
Krasnova et al, 2017	Facebook	Germany
Lee & Kim, 2017	No specific	Korea
Lee & Ryu, 2016	No specific	Korea
Guo et al, 2016	government social media	China
Zhang et al, 2016	Microblog (Weibo)	China
Chiu & Huang, 2015	Facebook	Taiwan
Hsu et al, 2015	Facebook	Australia, Austria, Japan, Taiwan, USA (comparative study)
Li et al. 2015	social network game	China

Gratification Factors
U&G is a theory widely used in communications, and different studies have classified gratification factor differently. Seven articles classified gratification into several variables in the models (e.g., (Yen et al., 2019; Zong et al., 2019). Six articles have classified gratification factor into several categories (e.g., (Gogan et al., 2018; Hossain et al., 2019), each category

containing one or more variables. Three articles classified gratification factor into one-order and second-order constructs and established corresponding formative indicators in the models (Chiu & Huang, 2015; Guo et al., 2016; Lee & Kim, 2017). Two articles integrated gratification factors into one variable in the model (Chen et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2016). The review identified 3 main gratification factors related to social media users' continuance use intention: Information, Sociality, and Entertainment. 13 articles covered all these three factors (e.g., (Hossain et al., 2019; Yen et al., 2019). Four articles covered two of them (Chiu & Huang, 2015; Hsu et al., 2015; Krasnova et al., 2017; Lee & Kim, 2017). Only one articles covered one of them (Li et al., 2015).

Related theories and/or models
Eight theories or models (except for U&G) employed were summarized in the 20 articles (see Table 3). SOR was used in two articles (Gogan et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2016). Flow theory was used in two articles(Guo et al., 2016; Lee & Kim, 2017). ECM was used in two articles (Krasnova et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2017). MSD was used in two articles (Bae, 2018; Chiu & Huang, 2015). IS success model was used in two articles (Lee & Kim, 2017; Zhang et al., 2016). Some other theories such as IDT (Yen et al., 2019), social capital theory (Chen et al., 2019), TAM (Hwang & Cho, 2018) are also used in these articles.

Table 3
Overview of Theories and Models Employed

Theories and/or models	Frequency	Reference
Stimulus-Organism-Response theory (SOR)	2	Gogan et al, 2018; Guo et al, 2016
Flow theory	2	Lee & Kim, 2017; Guo et al, 2016
Expectation-confirmation model (ECM)	2	Krasnova et al, 2017; Sun et al, 2017
Media system dependency theory (MSD)	2	Bae, 2018; Chiu & Huang, 2015
Information system (IS) success model	2	Lee & Kim, 2017; Zhang et al, 2016
Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT)	1	Yen et al, 2019
Social capital theory	1	Chen et al, 2019
Technology acceptance model (TAM)	1	Hwang & Cho, 2018
Elaboration likelihood model (ELM)	1	Hur et al, 2017
Self-construal theory	1	Krasnova et al, 2017
Self-regulation model	1	Lee & Kim, 2017
Theory of planned behavior (TPB)	1	Sun et al, 2017
Wixom and Todd's model (User Satisfaction and Technology Acceptance)	1	Zhang et al, 2016
Social Cognitive Theory	1	Chiang& Hsiao, 2015

Analysis Method
Analysis methods used were summarized by these studies. The results showed that PLS-SEM and CB-SEM are the two most used analysis methods. 9 studies used PLS-SEM while 8 studies

used CB-SEM. Different from other studies, hierarchical regression was used in the Hwang and Cho (2018)'s study instead of PLS-SEM or CB-SEM.

Discussion
As mentioned above, a variety of theories and/or models have been used in studies on social media user's continuance use intention. Except for U&G, the analysis shows that these theories and models are derived mainly from three disciplines: psychological theories (e.g., SOR, flow theory, ELM), sociological theories (e.g., social capital theory, social cognitive theory), and communication theories (e.g., media dependency theory, TAM, IDT).
According to Mohammed et al (2010), different research constructs are based on a causal framework that includes predictors, moderators, mediators, and outputs. In other words, a framework contains exogenous variables, moderating variables, mediating variables, and endogenous variables. Baron and Kenny (1986) explained that predictors cause outputs (that is, exogenous variables lead to endogenous variables) and that the causal relationships between exogenous variables and endogenous variables are explained by mediating variables and impacted by moderating variables.
As social media use behaviors have different reasons and results, researchers have developed different research constructs according to their research fields and topics. The present study has adopted a cause–effect framework to probe the interrelationships among different conceptual constructs in the literature (see Figure 1.2). Researchers have focused on different topics and priorities, and the same concept may appear in the research framework in the form of different variables. For example, Age was regarded as a control variable in one article (Zong et al., 2019) but as a moderating variable in another (Li et al., 2015). Among all reviewed articles, five major concepts are concluded: gratification factors, platform characteristics, psychological factors, user characteristics, and behavioral intention (see Figure 1.2).

Exogenous Variables
In this cause–effect framework, exogenous variables are the predictive factors of the output results. Among all reviewed articles, 3 major exogenous variables are concluded: gratification factors, platform characteristics, social factors.
Gratification factors are important exogenous variables in research on social media users' continuance use intention. A total of 14 articles used gratification factors as major exogenous variable. Despite the differences in the authors' understanding of gratification factors and the ways in which they are classified, there is a general agreement in their consideration of them as major exogenous factors. Meanwhile, platform characteristics are also considered by the authors as exogenous variables of the model (Hur et al., 2017; Hwang & Cho, 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). For example, Hwang and Cho (2018) took perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of the platform as exogenous variables based on TAM and proposed their relationship with continuance use intention. Social factors were considered as exogenous variables. (Hossain et al., 2019) believed that subjective norms (SN) is directly related to continuance use intention and behavior.

Moderating Variables
The role of moderating variables is described in research as interaction. A moderating variable can be either categorical or continuous, which influences the direction and/or strength of the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables (Cohen et al., 2014). User characteristics was found the only moderating variable in this review. Variables associated

with user characteristics include age, gender, habit, education, income, and culture. Chen et al (2019) believed that users' habits can moderate the relationship between continuance use intention and continuous use behavior. Li et al (2015) considers that age and gender played moderate roles in the relationship between gratification factors and continuance use intention.

Mediating Variables

Mediating variables, the third type of variable in the conceptual framework, are used to interpret the nature and mechanism of relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables (MacKinnon, 2012). According to the review, two categories moderating variables were concluded: psychological factors and behavior factors. According to the summary, mediating variables related to psychological factors include satisfaction, flow, and other emotional responses. Mediating variables related to behavior factors include continuance use intention and other behavior. For example, Chen et al (2019) argued that continuance use intention would be affected by gratification factors and affect continuance use behavior. Hossain et al. (2019) argued that 'liking' behavior is influenced by gratification factors and has a significant positive impact on continuance use intention.

Control/confounding Variables

In research, unseen factors may distort the relationship under study and the results. These factors are known as confounding variables, and they can influence both exogenous and endogenous variables. It is therefore advisable to control for confounding variables (Spector & Spector, 1981). In the articles under review here, there were only one type of control or confounding variables: user characteristics. Zong et al. (2019) considered users' age, gender and time spent on platform as control variables. Krasnova et al (2017) considered users' age, number of friends as control variables. Guo et al (2016) considered perceived privacy as control variable.

Endogenous variables

Endogenous variables are the outcomes in the cause–effect framework, namely, the expected results under the joint influence of exogenous, moderating, and mediating variables. Among the articles reviewed, there was only one type of endogenous variable: behavioral intention. In this review, behavioral intention mainly refers to continuance use intention. Among all 18 articles in the review, 17 articles have regarded continuance use intention as an endogenous variable, and 16 of them have regarded continuance use intention as the only endogenous variable. It is worth noting that Chen et al (2019) regarded continue use behavior as the endogenous variable, and Hur et al (2017) considered information sharing intention as another endogenous variable in addition to continuance use intention.
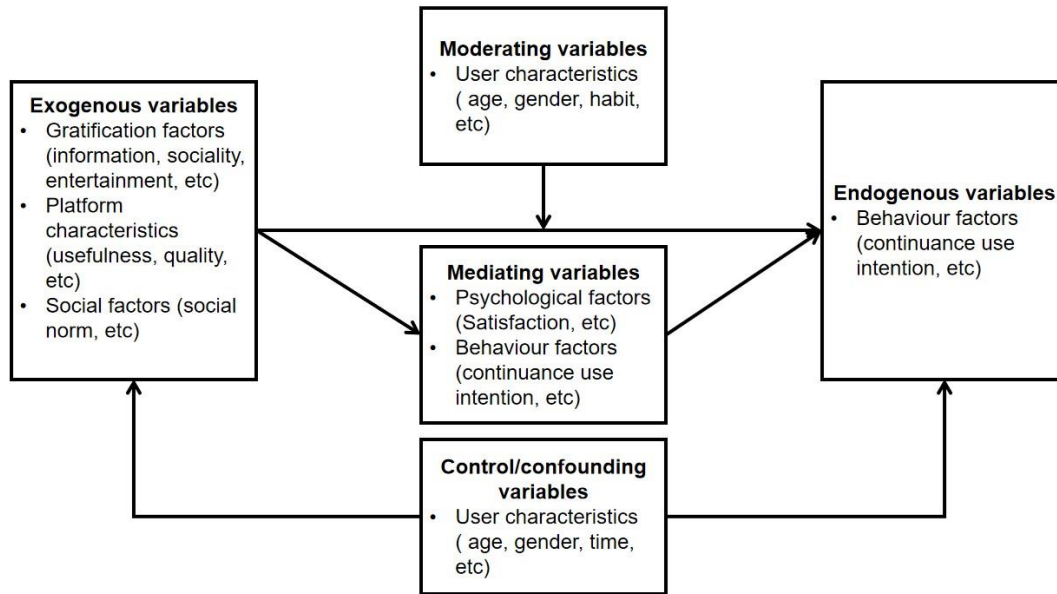
Figure 2: Conceptual framework based on review

Conclusion

This study adopted the PRISMA systematic review method for an in-depth review of 18 articles in terms of the main types of social media studied, relevant research topics, theories and models used, and research frameworks constructed to study social media users' continuance use intention. The variables used in the articles were grouped into a cause-effect framework and divided into five types: exogenous, moderating, mediating, confounding/control, and endogenous variables. It has been found that gratification factors are widely used in these studies as exogenous variables, And the information, the sociality, entertainment was identified as the three main gratification factors related to social media users' continuance use intention. The endogenous variable mainly manifests in users' continuance use intention. The major conclusion was presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Major Conclusion of the Review

Aspect	Main concept
Research Platform	Facebook
	WeChat
	Weibo
Sample Region	China
	Korea
Theories and/or models (other than U&G)	SOR
	Flow theory
	ECM
	MSD
	IS success model
Analysis method	PLS-SEM
	CB-SEM
Exogenous variables	Gratification factors
	Platform characteristics
	Social factors
Moderating variables	User characteristics
Mediating variables	Psychological factors
	Behavioral factors
Control/confounding variables	User characteristics
Endogenous variables	Behavioral factors

Note: SOR: Stimulus-Organism-Response theory; ECM: Expectation-confirmation model; MSD: Media system dependency theory; IS: Information system; PLS-SEM: Partial least squares based structural equation modeling; CB-SEM: Covariance based structural equation modeling

Based on U&G and previous studies, the results thoroughly examine and analyze social media users' intentions to continue using them to gain a deeper knowledge theoretically and contextually. By presenting a road map for future study and inspiring fresh research approaches, this systematic review intends to lay solid foundations for scholarly investigations in this field in the future. It will also be a helpful resource for the governments of various nations as they decide how to regulate the media and educate users about their mental health.

This study also provides reference for future research. First, future research can focus on a certain social media platform (e.g., Facebook, WeChat, Weibo) or sample region (e.g., China, Korea) to have a deeper understanding and conduct a more detailed review. Second, future research can also focus on a specific theoretical perspective (e.g., SOR, ECM, MSD) other than U&G to understand the intention to continue intention of social media. Third, future studies can also refer to the summary of various variables in this study and try to establish a reasonable research conceptual framework in combination with a specific context to solve a wider range of problems.

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