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An Investigation into Domestic Violence Victims' Adoption of Chatbots for Help-seeking: Based on the UTAUT2 and Health Belief Models

Short Paper

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Abstract

Domestic violence cases have increased during and post COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly jeopardizes victims' health. However, victims rarely seek help due to the associated stigma. One of the strategies to encourage them to seek help is through the use of digital communication tools for achieving confidentiality and anonymity. Thus, this study aims to investigate their adoption intention of chatbots for help-seeking. A review of the related literature is conducted, leading to the development of a conceptual framework within the theoretical background of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) and Health Belief Model (HBM) for better exploring domestic violence victims' adoption intention of chatbots. This study will provide insights into the impacts of information communication technology on domestic violence victims' adoption of relevant chatbots, and offer insightful information to domestic violence organizations and healthcare providers in the development and implementation of chatbots for help-seeking.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, UTAUT2, Health Belief Models, Chatbots, ChatGPT

Introduction

Domestic violence is defined as violent behavior that occurs in intimate relationships (Hossain et al., 2020). It has emerged as a significant public health issue in many countries, particularly in recent years (Olaniran, 2023). For example, in the US, approximately 25% of females and 14% of males may experience domestic violence at some point in their lives (Olaniran, 2023). Domestic violence can take the form of physical or emotional abuse (Olaniran, 2023), which can lead to negative health behaviors such as smoking or drug abuse. As a result, victims of domestic violence are at risk of developing chronic physical health problems, as well as psychological conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, which have received less attention from researchers (Scheer et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to encourage help-seeking among domestic violence victims to promote their well-being (Fugate et al., 2005).

Information technology (IT) has been widely adopted in the healthcare sector, primarily in service provider settings such as hospitals and pharmacies (Olaniran, 2023). From an organizational standpoint, IT applications like decision support systems provide timely and helpful information, enabling domestic violence organizations to provide responses and solutions, such as referrals and recommendations, when reporting domestic violence cases (Murray et al., 2015; Olaniran, 2023; Scheer et al., 2020). From an individual's perspective, IT-supported communications, including social media, online forums, and smartphone applications (such as "Stay Safe Application," "FEMME," and "WoSApp"), facilitate interactions among domestic violence victims and even replace the role of family members in reporting abuse (Hossain et al., 2020; Olaniran, 2023). Recently, artificial intelligence (AI) has been applied to the management of domestic violence in the household setting. For example, Apple Siri and Google Home can be adapted to detect domestic violence events (Olaniran, 2023). These devices are considered a type of chatbot application that can maintain interactions with users via natural language. In other words, chatbots can provide answers to users' questions via textual, audio, or visual conversations (Tzelios et al., 2022).

Deshpande and Warren (2021) and Viduani (2023) argue that chatbots have shown their unique value in supporting domestic violence victims' mental health by detecting self-harm thoughts based on their conversations. Furthermore, chatbots facilitate a stronger connection between domestic violence victims and health service providers by directing them to relevant service organizations (Tzelios et al., 2022). This shows that chatbots can be an important tool for initial help-seeking among domestic violence victims (Tzelios et al., 2022; Viduani, 2023). In practice, domestic violence victims often hesitate to seek help due to associated financial and social stresses (Fugate et al., 2005; Hossain et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2005; Overstreet & Quinn, 2016). With recent chatbot applications like ChatGPT offering more affordable, personalized, and intelligent support, chatbots are poised to play an even more significant role in domestic violence management. Compared to other generic applications, chatbots designed for domestic violence are expected to offer additional benefits, including providing resources, information, planning, or access to support services tailored to the health and safety needs of victims (Hunt et al., 2020). Nevertheless, whether domestic violence victims will adopt new chatbots to support their help-seeking remains under-researched. Moreover, some relevant theories, such as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and the Health Belief Model (HBM), have been applied to explore people's IT-related health behaviors. These theories have revealed that there are several barriers (e.g., effort expectancy and perceived severity) to the adoption of new technology for health-related purposes. However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence to test these theories in the context of domestic violence management. Therefore, this research is designed to address these gaps by answering the following research question: *What are the relevant factors affecting domestic violence victims' adoption of chatbots for help-seeking?*

Theoretical Background

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology: UTAUT and UTAUT 2

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) is one of the most commonly used models for identifying potential factors that influence technology acceptance (Venkatesh, 2022). The fundamental concept underlying UTAUT is that the intention to use information technology is directly related to its actual use (Holden & Karsh, 2010; Grandhi et al., 2020). The behavioral intention is affected by four factors. First, performance expectancy refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using a system will enhance their job performance (Venkatesh, 2022). Second, effort expectancy refers to the degree of ease associated with the use of the system. Third, social influence is defined as an individual's perception that important others believe that he or she should use the new system (Venkatesh, 2022). Finally, facilitating conditions are defined as an individual's belief that an organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support the use of the system (Venkatesh, 2022). Additionally, this model also considers moderating factors related to users' background, such as age and gender (Venkatesh, 2022).

The UTAUT has been tested and modified for the adoption of new technology in different contexts, such as e-commerce, mobile applications, and social media (Venkatesh, 2022). The original model was updated to a new version, UTAUT2, incorporating new constructs, including hedonic motivation, price value, and habit (Venkatesh et al., 2012). First, hedonic motivation highlights the positive emotions (e.g., enjoyment) of using new technology. Second, price value focuses on whether it is a good value for money to use it. Third, habit examines whether new technology has become a part of the user's daily routine (Venkatesh et al., 2012). According to Nikolopoulou et al. (2020), UTAUT2 has a much higher predictive ability than the previous version, UTAUT. Another significant advantage of UTAUT2 is that it is not confined to consumer user types alone and can be applied to health-related new technology, including the adoption of electronic health record portals (Tamilmani et al., 2021; Tavares et al., 2018) and mobile health (mHealth) (Uncovska et al., 2023). Overall, the UTAUT model has been widely adopted as a helpful tool for testing the factors that influence technology acceptance and use. The updated version, UTAUT2, has improved predictive power and can be applied in various contexts, including health-related technology.

The Health Belief Model

The HBM is a psychological framework that explains people's adoption of health behaviors, such as seeking medical support (CC. and Prathap, 2020; Hsieh, 2022). According to this model, the adoption of health behaviors is affected by the following aspects. First, it depends on people's beliefs about the perceived threat of a health problem. The HBM suggests that individuals tend to adopt a health behavior when they believe that they are susceptible to the health problem (i.e., "perceived susceptibility"), and that the consequences of the health problem are serious (i.e., "perceived severity") (Hsieh, 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). Second, it is also affected by individuals' beliefs about the positive outcomes that will result from adopting the health behavior (i.e., "perceived benefits") (Hsieh, 2022; Melzner et al., 2014). Third, people will consider the "perceived barriers," such as psychological, time, effort, or monetary costs (Hsieh, 2022; Melzner et al., 2014). Fourth, the HBM also includes "self-efficacy" as an essential factor, referring to people's belief in their ability to perform behavior effectively (Hsieh, 2022; Melzner et al., 2014). Lastly, the model also highlights the importance of "cue to action." It refers to the stimulus (e.g., reminders from other people) that motivates an individual to take real actions (Hsieh, 2022; Melzner et al., 2014). This model has been applied to various health-related behaviors, such as vaccination intentions (Zampetakis and Melas, 2021) and quitting smoking (Mantler, 2013).

Existing Gaps

The existing literature tends to focus on the application of chatbots to domestic violence from the organizational perspective (Murray et al., 2015; Olaniran, 2023; Scheer et al., 2020). Using UTAUT and HBM can provide new insights into this field by exploring the adoption of chatbots from the user's (i.e. domestic violence victims) perspective. UTAUT and HBM were initially developed for different contexts, as the former focuses on the adoption of new technologies while the latter explores health-related behaviors. However, there are similarities between the two models. For example, they both highlight the role of people's perceptions (i.e. performance expectancy in UTAUT2 and perceived benefits in HBM) in

behavioral change. Further, the two models complement each other. For example, HBM includes generic factors (e.g., perceived barriers), while UTAUT specifies these factors in the context of IT adoption, such as effort expectancy. Given the relationship between UTAUT and HBM, a few scholars have applied them to different IT-related health research. Melzner et al. (2014) proposed an integrated framework by combining the two models to investigate factors affecting the adoption of mobile health applications, while Zhang et al. (2019) applied the UTAUT model and integrated the construct of perceived threats based on HBM to explore people's adoption of diabetes management applications.

While the integration of UTAUT and HBM is important for exploring IT-supported health behaviors, there are several research gaps in the existing literature. First, studies often ignore the interaction between the constructs of UTAUT and HBM. For example, Gumasing et al. (2022) tested the effects of UTAUT factors (i.e. performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, hedonic motivation, facilitating conditions) and HBM factors (including perceived benefits, barriers, severity, susceptibility, and cue to action) on users' behavioral intention. However, the study did not reveal how these factors interact. A similar limitation can be identified in the study by Uncovska et al. (2023) on mobile health apps. Logically, there should be connections between UTAUT and HBM factors. For example, if users have a positive perception of chatbots' performance (i.e. performance expectancy in UTAUT) of chatbots, their perceived benefits (HBM) will be accordingly higher. Likewise, users will perceive fewer barriers (i.e. perceived barriers in HBM) when the use of new technology requires less effort (i.e. effort expectancy in UTAUT).

Second, some studies did not include all the key constructs of UTAUT and HBM in the research design. For instance, the study by Melzner et al. (2014) highlights perceived susceptibility and perceived severity as independent variables affecting people's adoption of mobile health applications; however, some other key factors of HBM (such as perceived barriers) were replaced by UTAUT factors (such as effort expectancy). Although a higher level of perceived ease of use may suggest fewer difficulties in using new technology, it cannot necessarily represent all the different barriers that a domestic violence victim may confront. By comparison, Wei (2022) has investigated the related perceived benefits, perceived barriers, perceived threats, and self-efficacy to performance expectancy. Nevertheless, other factors (e.g. effort expectancy) in UTAUT were excluded.

Third, studies limited to the earlier version of UTAUT did not consider other factors added to UTAUT2, such as users' habits. For instance, the recent study by Zhang et al. (2019) adopted UTAUT rather than UTAUT2 to test people's usage of diabetes management apps.

Finally, the combination of UTAUT and HBM has been applied to different health-related areas, including wellness cloud (Hsieh, 2022), contact tracing (Van der Waal et al., 2022), fitness, and personal health information systems (Chopdar, 2022). However, there is still a lack of research that has applied it to more complicated contexts involving both physical and psychological issues. Given that domestic violence can affect victims' physical and psychological well-being (Fugate et al., 2005), more studies in this field are needed to test the relevant theories. Therefore, this study developed relevant hypotheses to address these gaps in the next section.

Hypothesis Development

This study develops a conceptual research model by incorporating UTAUT and HBM. UTAUT is used for investigating the users' adoption of new technologies. Meanwhile, HBM is applied to understand users' adoption of health behaviors. These theories provide a suitable lens for exploring the domestic violence victims' adoption of chatbots for help-seeking.

People's behaviors are led by their perceptions. According to HBM, perceived threats can significantly affect people's behavioral change (Hsieh, 2022; Lu & Lin, 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). In the context of domestic violence, some victims perceive violence as a normal issue in their relationships. Consequently, they may not be motivated to report their domestic violence cases (Fugate et al., 2005; Liang et al., 2005; Olaniran, 2023). Furthermore, many of them may not realize the significant impacts of domestic violence on their physical and mental health (Fugate et al., 2005; Scheer et al., 2020). Therefore, when victims do not perceive the severity and susceptibility of domestic violence, they are less likely to adopt chatbots for help-seeking. We accordingly propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1-2: Perceived severity (H1) and perceived susceptibility (H2) increase the intention to adopt chatbots.

User behaviors are not only shaped by negative consequences, but also influenced by positive outcomes. Thus, HBM suggests that people's behavioral change is affected by whether they perceive clear benefits to their health. Research has revealed that many victims of domestic violence choose not to report their abuse because they do not see clear benefits to their personal well-being or their relationship (Fugate et al., 2005; Olaniran, 2023; Scheer et al., 2020). For example, they may believe that they will not receive helpful responses when reporting to others (Fugate et al., 2005; Hossain et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2005; Overstreet & Quinn, 2016). According to UTAUT2, the expected performance (e.g., flexibility) is a key factor when individuals choose to replace human support with new technologies (i.e., AI) for greater benefits (Yang and Wibowo, 2022). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Positive performance expectancy increases the perceived benefits of chatbots.

Hypothesis 4: Perceived benefits increase the intention to adopt chatbots.

While HBM recognizes the importance of reducing perceived barriers to facilitate behavioral change, UTAUT2 specifies these barriers more precisely (Chopdar, 2022). For example, UTAUT2 considers effort expectancy a significant barrier (Uncovska et al., 2023), which is also a key factor affecting domestic violence victims' help-seeking (Fugate et al., 2005). Furthermore, the model also considers the price value of new technology (Chopdar, 2022). Thus, when chatbots (e.g. ChatGPT) can offer affordable or even free support to victims, it can significantly reduce the economic barriers to help-seeking. Moreover, the role of hedonic or emotional motivations is also highlighted by UTAUT2 (Chopdar, 2022). Domestic violence victims often avoid seeking help due to associated stigma (Fugate et al., 2005; Hossain et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2005; Overstreet & Quinn, 2016). However, people are less likely to form emotional bonds with AI (Yang & Wibowo, 2022). Thus, chatbots may reduce emotional barriers. We accordingly propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5-7: Positive effort expectancy (H5), price value (H6), and emotional motivation (H7) decrease the perceived barriers to adopting chatbots.

Hypothesis 8: Perceived barriers decrease the intention to adopt chatbots.

HBM proposes that people's behavioral change depends on their self-efficacy (Hsieh, 2022). Therefore, if a victim doubts their ability to use new technology, they are more likely to give up on using chatbots for help-seeking or not even attempt to use them in the first place (Yang & Wibowo, 2022). However, if people have developed a habit of regularly using technology to perform certain tasks, they tend to be more confident in their ability to use new technology in the future, relying on their prior experiences (Yang & Wibowo, 2022). Additionally, according to UTAUT2, facilitating conditions (e.g., necessary resources and support) also influence people's behaviors (Chopdar, 2022). Thus, when a victim has access to technical assistance, it enhances their confidence in using chatbots effectively. Furthermore, people's self-efficacy is affected by social factors (Yang & Wibowo, 2022). If a victim believes they have a supportive network of others who can help them use new technology effectively, they are more motivated to adopt it. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 9-11: Habit (H9), facilitating conditions (H10), and social influence (H11) increase self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 12-14: Self-efficacy (H12), facilitating conditions (H13), and social influence (H14) increase the intention to adopt chatbots.

UTAUT suggests that people's actual use of a new technology depends on their willingness to use it (Chopdar, 2022). Thus, when a victim has a stronger intention to use chatbots, it indicates a higher likelihood of adoption in the future. However, according to HBM, people's actions are influenced by cues from external environments (Hsieh, 2022). The adoption of new technology by disadvantaged groups significantly depends on the availability and accessibility of resources or support, such as in the case of domestic violence victims (Fugate et al., 2005; Hossain et al., 2020). Furthermore, when authorities and organizations facilitate more ethical conditions for the use of AI, it builds people's trust, which affects actual adoption (Yang & Wibowo, 2022). Moreover, when domestic violence victims, especially migrants and sexual minorities, have the intention to seek help, they often fear the social stress from their cultural group (Hossain et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2005; Olaniran, 2023). Thus, if chatbots can provide confidential support involving less social stress, it can reduce the negative cue to action. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 15: Intention to adopt chatbots increases actual use.

Hypothesis 16-17: Facilitating conditions (H16) and positive social influence (H17) increase cues to action.

Hypothesis 18: Cues to action increase actual use.

Based on the proposed hypotheses, we developed a research model as shown in Figure 1:

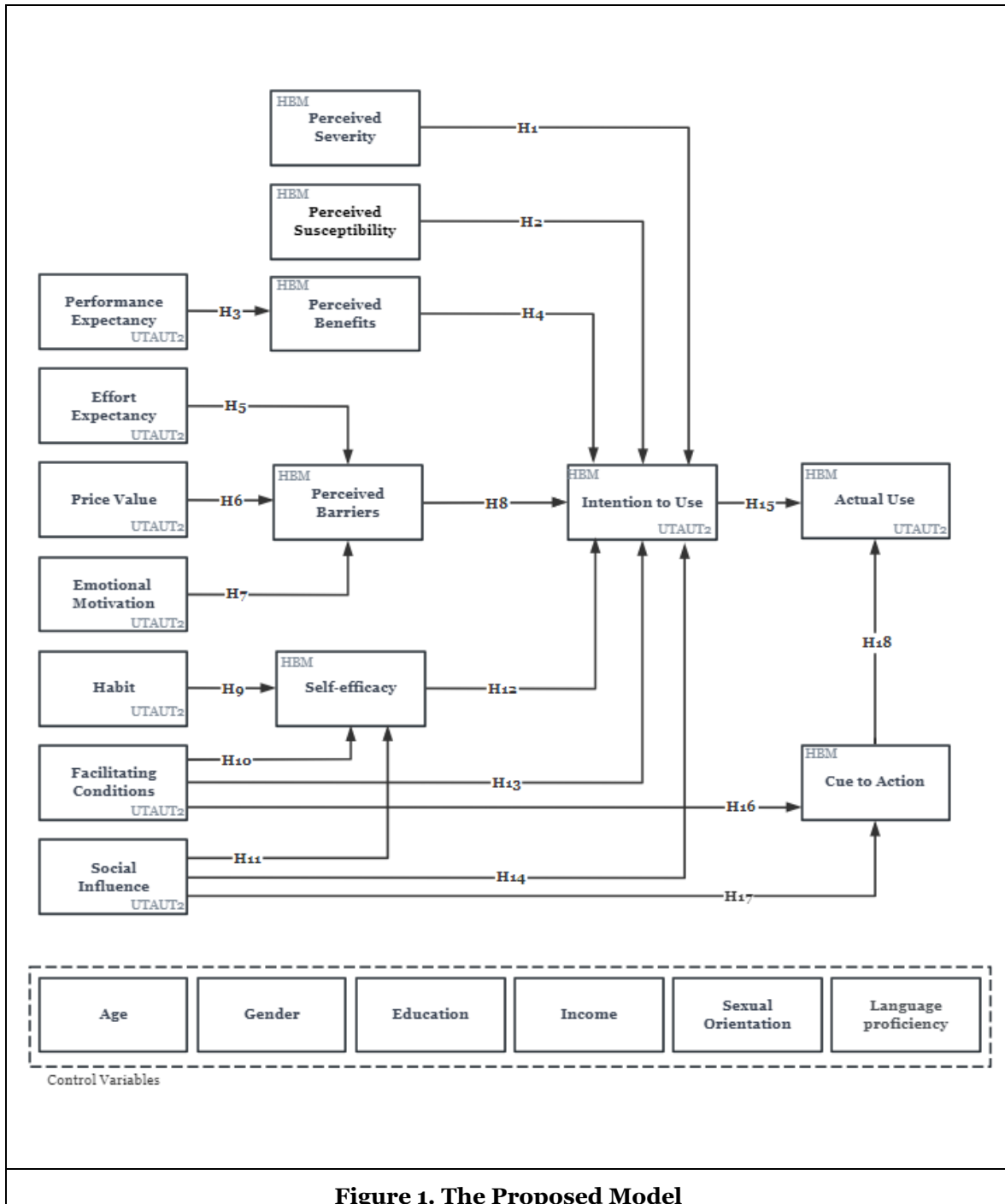


Figure 1. The Proposed Model

According to UTAUT2 and HBM, people's behavioral change is related to their demographic backgrounds (e.g. age, gender and education) (Chopdar, 2022). Thus, these factors are treated as control variables. Further, domestic violence victims' help-seeking can also be affected by their income, sexual orientation and language proficiency (Hsieh, 2022; Melzner et al., 2014, Zhang et al., 2019). Therefore, these factors are also included as control variables.

Proposed Methodology and Future Work

This paper aims to explore the factors that influence domestic violence victims' adoption intention of chatbots for seeking help. A research model based on UTAUT and HBM is developed. An online survey instrument using Qualtrics will be used to collect data and test the research model and hypotheses. The data collection and analysis will consist of the following steps:

1. Questionnaire Design

The survey questionnaire will consist of three sections. The first section will ask respondents about their basic demographic information, including age, gender, education level, income, sexual orientation, and language proficiency. The second section will ask respondents about their experiences (if any) with chatbots and their general evaluation. The third section includes questions based on the research model. These questions will require respondents to share their perceptions of adopting chatbots designed for domestic violence victims. A seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (7) Strongly Agree will be used to measure the items. To minimize multicollinearity issues, the survey questionnaire will adopt a random ordering of measurement items and include reversed-scored items.

2. Pre-testing

20 participants will be invited to identify any issues regarding question clarity, response options, or overall survey structure. Then, this study will make necessary revisions based on the feedback received.

3. Sampling and data collection

Several domestic violence organizations in Australia will be contacted for participation, and it is expected that data from 350 respondents with and without experience in using chatbots will be recruited.

4. Data validation

Incomplete and inconsistent responses will be excluded from the dataset.

5. Data analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) will be adopted for data analysis and hypothesis testing because this method is suitable for complicated models based on smaller sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021).

Expected Contribution

Previous studies have demonstrated the use of AI in supporting the management of domestic violence victims. However, there is limited research on whether domestic violence victims will adopt new chatbots to support their help-seeking, and the relevant factors that may influence their adoption intention. Therefore, the goal of this study is to investigate these factors and shed light on the behavioral adoption intention of chatbots for help-seeking among domestic violence victims. From a theoretical perspective, this study will contribute to the information systems (IS) body of knowledge on technology adoption and behavioral intention to adopt chatbots. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study will provide valuable insights to domestic violence organizations and government agencies on the development and implementation of effective chatbots for help-seeking.

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