# Examining Adoption and Effectiveness of WhatsApp as A Marketing Tool: An Example of an Austrian Fitness and Health Center

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the factors influencing user acceptance and intention to use WhatsApp as a business-to-consumer (B2C) communication and marketing tool in the fitness industry, using an Austrian fitness center as a case study. Given WhatsApp's growing commercial relevance, understanding customer interaction determinants is crucial. Despite the overall growth of the fitness sector, businesses face challenges that necessitate innovative communication strategies. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and the Theory of Reasoned Action, this research identifies twelve key acceptance factors. A quantitative deductive approach was applied, and survey data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The findings reveal that perceived value, attitude towards use, and perceived ease of use significantly influence the intention to use WhatsApp. Additionally, perceived usefulness correlates positively with perceived ease of use and the perceived informational and entertainment value. These insights highlight WhatsApp's potential as a marketing and communication tool in the fitness industry. The study offers a foundation for further research and provides practical implications for optimizing business performance through targeted marketing and customer engagement strategies.

## 1  Introduction

WhatsApp has established itself as one of the leading platforms in digital communication and marketing, revolutionizing how global interactions occur in real-time. With over 2.9 billion active users in 2024, available in over 180 countries worldwide, WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging app, particularly favored by younger generations who have a strong preference for online communication tools due to their diverse functionalities (Statista, 2024). Founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum as an alternative to SMS, WhatsApp experienced exponential growth, surpassing two billion monthly active users by 2020 (Fernández-Amaya, 2022). Despite concerns over data privacy and regulatory challenges in 2021, WhatsApp's user base remains stable, solidifying its position as a global leader in digital communication (Statista, 2023).

Notably, WhatsApp is not only used for personal communication but also plays an indispensable role in business operations. Companies increasingly recognize the value of mobile instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp for customer interaction and engagement. As highlighted by Agrawal (2021) and Marino & Lo Presti (2018), WhatsApp enables personalized and efficient

communication, helping businesses improve customer experience, increase engagement, and build deeper connections. This dual functionality, serving both personal and professional communication needs, underscores WhatsApp's versatility and lasting significance in an increasingly digital world (Jannah, 2023).

Another significant aspect of WhatsApp is how it has transformed the communication landscape. According to Chopra and Bedi (2018), technological advancements have drastically changed the way businesses interact with their stakeholders. Social media platforms now play a critical role in facilitating interactions between companies and customers, and WhatsApp, with its user-friendly interface and real-time messaging capabilities, has become a preferred platform for users worldwide (Srivastava & Fernandes, 2022). WhatsApp's acquisition by Facebook in 2014 marked a major milestone in its development, further integrating it into the broader digital communication ecosystem (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020). WhatsApp also proved to be indispensable during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering businesses an effective solution to maintain communication with customers and sustain customer engagement (Sugiyantoro et al., 2022). The platform's flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances allowed businesses to respond quickly to new demands and optimize customer service delivery. Research on WhatsApp usage motivations reveals several factors influencing user engagement. According to Kritzinger and Petzer (2021), key drivers of WhatsApp use include the desire for community, entertainment, perceived value, and the need for social connection and belonging (Kritzinger & Petzer, 2021). These diverse motivations contribute significantly to WhatsApp's widespread popularity and emphasize its role as an essential tool for modern communication.

While the advantages of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X as marketing tools have been extensively studied (Srivastava & Fernandes, 2022), there remains a significant gap in understanding WhatsApp's potential for businesses, especially in niche industries like fitness and health centers. WhatsApp's growing importance in personal communication, alongside its emerging role in business contexts, underscores the need for further research into its effectiveness as a marketing and communication tool (Zarouali et al., 2021). While WhatsApp's use for personal communication is well-established, its potential in the business world, particularly within the fitness industry, has not been thoroughly explored. Despite the platform's global popularity, there is a lack of research focusing on its application in commercial settings, especially in specific sectors like fitness and health centers. This gap raises key questions about WhatsApp's suitability as a communication and marketing tool from the user's perspective in this context. To address this, the present study aims to explore these aspects of an Austrian fitness center, utilizing a quantitative research approach.

(1)     What user acceptance factors influence the intention to use WhatsApp as a B2C communication and marketing tool?

By examining this research question in the context of an Austrian fitness and health center, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into WhatsApp's potential as a strategic tool for businesses in the fitness industry. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to a broader understanding of customer preferences and behaviors regarding digital communication via WhatsApp in commercial settings. Through an in-depth analysis of user perceptions and experiences, this study endeavors to inform strategic decision-making and optimize communication strategies for businesses leveraging WhatsApp with focus on the fitness industry.

Additionally, WhatsApp's role in customer relationship management and marketing cannot be overstated. Its unique attributes as a computer-mediated communication channel make it invaluable for facilitating information exchange and fostering customer interactions (Lei et al., 2020). The emergence of WhatsApp Marketing, although not yet fully defined in scientific literature, holds promise for businesses, particularly in B2C communication (Asmayanti, 2022). While the concept requires further exploration, WhatsApp's immense popularity and functionality make it an ideal platform for implementing viral marketing strategies and driving engagement across various sectors (Yu & Kamarulzaman, 2016).

## 2   Literature Review

### 2.1   WhatsApp as a Communication and Marketing Tool

WhatsApp is classified as an online communication platform, operating entirely through internet-based services. Functionally, WhatsApp aligns with the paradigm of mobile instant messaging (MIM) platforms, as highlighted by Kuru et al. (2022). Such platforms enable real-time engagement on smartphones, promoting inclusivity and eliminating the need for immediate participation to receive messages (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020). The incorporation of diverse media elements, such as video, audio, images, and stickers, enhances the user experience and contributes to the widespread adoption of MIM platforms worldwide, gradually replacing traditional SMS (Marino & Lo Presti, 2018). Affordability and broad distribution are also significant factors driving people's preference for WhatsApp over other communication technologies (Marino & Lo Presti, 2018, p. 693). Messages on MIM applications are generally casual and social, fulfilling users' social needs by enabling easy interaction and engagement (Marino & Lo Presti, 2018, p. 693). In the literature, instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp are defined as computer-mediated communication (CMC) channels with "lean" characteristics. This refers to the absence of non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, compared to face-to-face communication (Lei et al., 2020, p. 230). WhatsApp is characterized as a specific type of CMC, "an application that allows users to engage in online dialogue by typing messages back and forth to each other using mobile devices" (Lei et al., 2020, p. 231). Synchronicity, presence awareness, and the ubiquity of smartphones, which allow easy and fast access to social networks, are key factors that make MIM a valuable platform for customer relationship management (Lo Presti et al., 2022, p. 1433). This specificity, combined with the limited research on the use of mobile IM for business-to-customer (B2C) interactions in the fitness and health context, warrants further investigation. With its potential for synchronous and symmetric communication, WhatsApp has the capacity to facilitate value co-creation in the fitness sector.

At its core, WhatsApp offers a comprehensive suite of features, including messaging, file sharing, and voice/video calls, all secured by robust end-to-end encryption protocols (Bameyi et al., 2021; Agrawal, 2021; WhatsApp, 2023a; Agrawal & Mittal, 2019, p. 955). These features, as highlighted by Begam (2020) and Fernández-Amaya (2022), make WhatsApp a versatile tool for both personal and professional communication. Additionally, its group chat functionality, which can accommodate up to 256 participants, and group calling features further enhance its utility, especially for international communication where free options are essential (Goodwin, 2023).

In addition to its smartphone app, WhatsApp also offers a desktop version (Goughari, 2021, p. 41) that can be linked to the profile of a specific phone number (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020, p. 231). Other features include updated statuses, blocking and archiving options, connection status indicators, customized profiles, and wallpapers, among others (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020, p. 231). Different studies have shown that these features make WhatsApp highly efficient in improving information exchange, sharing ideas, solving problems, and strengthening relationships, serving as an important tool for staying connected in both personal and professional contexts (Agrawal, 2021, p. 262; Naneetha, 2018, p. 124).

### 2.1   WhatsApp Business: A Tailored Solution for SME Enterprises

WhatsApp Business, launched in 2018, provides a tailored platform for marketing and corporate communication purposes (Ceci, 2023; Begam, 2020). It enables businesses to engage with customers, leveraging social networks for commercial success (Goodwin, 2023). Before its introduction, many businesses utilized private accounts for commercial interactions (Johns et al., 2023). WhatsApp Business aligns with the core concepts of social network theory (SNT), which studies interconnected individuals forming social structures (Gamper, 2022). SNT emphasizes the interconnectivity of individuals, the exchange of resources through relational ties, and the influence of network structure on actions (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In the digital realm, SNT has been instrumental in understanding online communication channels like social media (Ihsaniyati et al., 2023). WhatsApp facilitates direct

communication between businesses and customers, transcending traditional boundaries and fostering personal connections (Terkan & Celebi, 2020).

Moreover, WhatsApp Business enables efficient information dissemination, akin to the rapid flow of information in social networks (Gamper, 2022). Businesses can efficiently share promotional content, respond to customer queries, and provide updates, enhancing communication efficiency (Jannah, 2023). The platform's structure, resembling degree centrality in SNT, positions businesses as central nodes with customers acting as ties (Gamper, 2022). WhatsApp Business also introduces innovative features to enhance customer service, such as "Click to Chat" ads, enabling direct communication with organizations. This streamlines communication processes, potentially replacing traditional channels like emails and phone calls, thereby improving flexibility and customer experience (Mrad et al., 2022).

### 2.2 WhatsApp Business API: Advanced Features for Larger Enterprises

For larger enterprises, WhatsApp introduced the WhatsApp Business API, offering advanced features and integration with existing systems (Johns et al., 2023). The API allows businesses to automate messaging workflows, provide higher-volume customer support via chatbot, and enhance profile credibility (Steil, 2023). Luxury brands like Yoox Net-a-Porter and traditional brands like Christian Dior have successfully utilized the WhatsApp API for direct selling and customer engagement (Mrad et al., 2022). Despite its success, WhatsApp Business faces challenges such as message misinterpretation and privacy concerns, such as GDPR (Zarouali et al., 2021). Additionally, limitations arise as it cannot be used concurrently with a private account and has a device limit. However, WhatsApp continues to evolve its business offerings, potentially enhancing marketing strategies and customer service (Johns et al., 2023).

### 2.3 WhatsApp Marketing: An Emerging Concept

While mobile instant messaging (MIM) platforms like WhatsApp have significantly gained importance in business-to-consumer (B2C) communication, WhatsApp marketing remains an underdeveloped concept in the academic literature. WhatsApp marketing falls under the broader category of conversational marketing, or conversational commerce, which involves "direct interaction with a target group or its customers" (Mehner, 2022, para. 1; WhatsApp, 2023b). Conversational commerce, as the name suggests, is defined by real-time, direct conversations between businesses and their customers, typically occurring through instant messaging channels, social media, or other online communication platforms. This form of marketing facilitates more personal, authentic exchanges compared to traditional marketing methods. It allows companies to engage in two-way dialogues, where customers can inquire, provide feedback, and even make purchases in real-time (Sterne, 2017).

The key feature of conversational marketing is its ability to create a continuous, personalized experience that builds customer trust and enhances customer relationships. Unlike traditional marketing, which relies heavily on one-way communication, conversational marketing thrives on real-time interaction and engagement. According to Diallo et al. (2021), conversational marketing strategies enable businesses to address customer needs immediately, answer questions without delay, and provide tailored recommendations, which ultimately improves the customer experience and drives higher conversion rates. Furthermore, this form of marketing is not limited to just text-based communication; it often integrates multimedia, such as images, videos, and even voice or video calls, to make the interaction more engaging and meaningful (Gartner, 2020).

Given WhatsApp's immense popularity and widespread usage across the globe, it serves as an ideal platform for implementing viral marketing strategies that leverage real-time interaction. The app's inherent features, such as group chats, multimedia sharing, and the ability to create broadcast lists, allow businesses to engage users in a dynamic, personalized way. This makes WhatsApp an excellent tool for building brand awareness, fostering customer loyalty, and enhancing overall customer engagement (Yu & Kamarulzaman, 2016, p. 2). Moreover, as consumers increasingly expect more personalized,

responsive interactions with brands, WhatsApp and other conversational platforms have become critical for maintaining competitive advantage in crowded markets (Sterne, 2017).

Conversational marketing is particularly well-suited for industries where customer service and relationship management are central, such as e-commerce, hospitality, and health and fitness sectors. In these sectors, real-time communication through WhatsApp can improve satisfaction by delivering faster response times, providing recommendations, resolving complaints quickly, and facilitating purchases. Despite its potential, however, there is still a lack of comprehensive research and standardized definitions within the scientific community regarding WhatsApp marketing and its applications for businesses. As more companies explore its capabilities, it is likely that the full potential of WhatsApp as a marketing platform will become clearer, particularly in the context of real-time, conversational engagement with customers.

## 3        Research model and hypothesis development

In conclusion, WhatsApp's significance extends beyond personal use, profoundly impacting the business communication landscape. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis in 1989, offers insights into the adoption of advanced communication tools like MIM platforms in organizational contexts. TAM emphasizes the role of perceived benefits, ease of use, and utility in motivating employees and businesses to adopt new technologies (Ma & Liu, 2004, pp. 59-60). WhatsApp's prevalence in Europe and its multifaceted functionality position it as an indispensable tool for businesses, driving engagement and fostering connections with customers (Jannah, 2023). By integrating these insights, this study aims to explore WhatsApp's potential as a B2C communication and marketing tool, particularly in niche industries like fitness and health centers, while addressing the existing research gaps.

The current study aims to make a significant contribution to the existing literature on technology acceptance by proposing a comprehensive acceptance model that incorporates various determinants relevant to the context of WhatsApp use in business-to-consumer (B2C) communication. By synthesizing insights from a broad review of the literature, the study aims to explore how various factors, including perceived value (PV), attitude towards the use of WhatsApp (AU), behavioral intention to use WhatsApp (BI), personalization (PE), information & entertainment value (IE), financial benefits (FB), perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), privacy concerns (PC), perceived socialness (PS), information overload (IO), and trust (TR), collectively influence user acceptance and engagement with WhatsApp as a communication tool for businesses.

In the literature, three primary models are frequently referenced to explain the factors that impact individuals' acceptance, behavior, and intention to use a specific technology. These models include the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1980), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). These theoretical frameworks have been widely used to explain technology adoption across various contexts, including mobile instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp. By integrating and adapting the key constructs of these models, the study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence individuals' decisions to adopt WhatsApp for business communications, specifically in the B2C context.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks mentioned above, the study develops a model that integrates key factors influencing technology acceptance. The model incorporates constructs from the TRA, TPB, and TAM, including attitudes towards use, behavioral intention, perceived usefulness, and perceived value. These constructs are critical in understanding individuals' intention to use technology, as they reflect their evaluations of the technology's utility, ease of use, and the personal value it offers.

Additionally, the study adopts elements from the User & Gratification theory, specifically the concepts of information and entertainment value (IE), which are crucial for understanding why individuals engage with technologies like WhatsApp. According to the User & Gratification theory, users seek technologies that fulfill specific needs, such as information retrieval or entertainment. The incorporation of information and entertainment value into the model helps capture the more subjective motivations for using WhatsApp, particularly in a B2C context.

Moreover, the study recognizes that factors such as perceived privacy concerns (PC), perceived socialness (PS), trust (TR), financial benefits (FB), and personalization (PE) are frequently considered relevant in similar contexts and are therefore incorporated into the proposed model. These factors are believed to influence users' adoption of communication technologies by addressing the security, social, and financial aspects of technology use, which are critical in influencing customer trust and engagement. For instance, privacy concerns are often a barrier to technology adoption, particularly when personal data is shared or stored, and perceived socialness reflects the extent to which users feel that a platform facilitates meaningful social interaction (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Finally, the study includes information overload (IO) as an important factor influencing technology acceptance, particularly in the context of mobile messaging platforms like WhatsApp, where users may be overwhelmed by an excessive amount of communication. According to literature, information overload can lead to user disengagement or abandonment of a platform, thus affecting the adoption and continued use of technology (Eppler & Mengis, 2004).

The research aims to examine the relationships among the various factors identified in the theoretical framework and their influence on user acceptance of WhatsApp in a B2C context. Specifically, the study investigates how perceived value, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude towards use, and behavioral intention to use WhatsApp interact to shape users' decisions to adopt the platform for business communications. Additionally, the role of privacy concerns, socialness, trust, personalization, and financial benefits is explored in determining users' overall satisfaction and willingness to engage with businesses through WhatsApp.

A set of hypotheses has been developed to test these relationships, as illustrated in the following figures. These hypotheses seek to validate the proposed model by assessing how each factor influences user engagement and adoption behaviors. By investigating these relationships, the study aims to provide actionable insights for businesses seeking to leverage WhatsApp as an effective communication tool for customer engagement, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience.

This study's theoretical framework integrates multiple theoretical perspectives to offer a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence technology acceptance in the context of WhatsApp's use for B2C communication. By exploring the interrelations between various determinants like perceived value, perceived ease of use, privacy concerns, trust, and personalization, the research seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform the design of more effective communication strategies for businesses.

Figure 1. Research Model for Predicting WhatsApp Acceptance in the Fitness Context
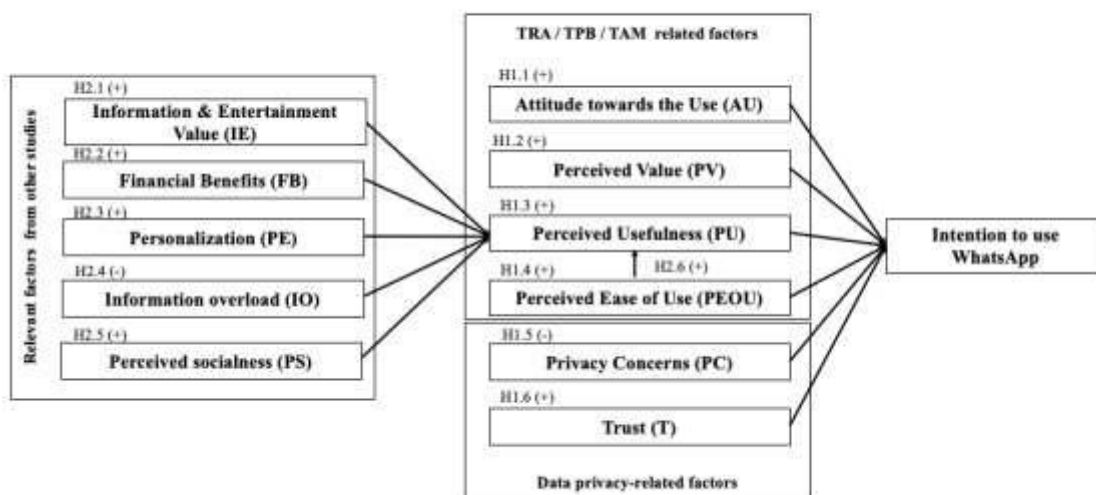
Note. Research model for analyzing determinants that have an influence on the behavioral intention to use WhatsApp. Own illustration.

| No. | Hypothesis |
|---|---|
| **H1.1** | Attitude towards the use (AU) of WhatsApp positively affects the behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp. |
| **H1.2** | Perceived value (PV) positively affects the behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp. |
| **H1.3** | Perceived usefulness (PU) positively affects the behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp. |
| **H1.4** | Perceived ease of use (PEOU) positively affects the behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp. |
| **H1.5** | Perceived privacy concerns (PC) negatively affect the behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp. |
| **H1.6** | Perceived trust (TR) positively affects the behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp. |
| **H2.1** | Perceived information and entertainment value (IE) positively affects the perceived usefulness (PU) of WhatsApp. |
| **H2.2** | Perceived financial benefits (FB) positively affect the perceived usefulness (PU) of WhatsApp. |
| **H2.3** | Perceived personalization level (PE) positively affects the perceived usefulness (PU) of WhatsApp. |
| **H2.4** | Perceived information overload (IO) negatively affects the perceived usefulness (PU) of WhatsApp. |
| **H2.5** | Perceived socialness (PS) positively affects the perceived usefulness (PU) of WhatsApp. |
| **H2.6** | Perceived ease of use (PEOU) positively affects the perceived usefulness (PU) of WhatsApp. |

Figure 2. Summary of the developed hypotheses.

Note. Own illustration.

# 4 Empirical Study

## 4.1 Research design and method

The empirical research design employs a quantitative approach, chosen to effectively address the defined research questions and achieve the established objectives. This method allows a comprehensive exploration of complex issues, while also facilitating a detailed investigation that enables researchers to analyze data at the micro level (Zainal, 2007, p. 2). The online survey was distributed via email (through a newsletter) and through the social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook) of the selected case. The primary goal is to gain an initial understanding of the current situation and to fill the gap identified in the earlier sections.

## 4.2 Sampling

For this study, the target population was defined as all current members of the Austrian fitness center who actively use WhatsApp as a messaging tool. A non-probability sampling technique was employed, combining convenience and snowball sampling methods. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants without forming a random sample, making it a more straightforward approach compared to other methods (Aitytan, 2022, p. 331 f.). In contrast, snowball sampling begins with a small group of initial participants who then refer others from the target group (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 192 f.). However, it is important to note that these sampling methods come with an inherent risk of bias. Therefore, when interpreting the results from these non-probability samples, it is essential to acknowledge the potential lack of generalizability (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 177).

## 4.3 Data collection

### 4.3.1 Survey data

The survey link was shared across various platforms of the fitness club from July 7th to July 16th, 2023. It was featured in the official Instagram story of the fitness center, where the CEO addressed members through a brief video message, encouraging their participation. In addition, the link was distributed via the fitness center's newsletter. To expand the reach, participants were invited to share the survey with their contacts, utilizing snowball sampling to increase the sample size. Furthermore, the survey link was shared through the researcher's personal accounts on public platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Lastly, it was directly sent via WhatsApp and email to potential participants.

Prior to the survey, a pre-test was carried out from 26th to 30th of July 2023. In accordance with the recommendations of Bässler (2014, p. 83), a pre-test is conducted to check the functionality of the questionnaire with the respondents. In this study, six individuals out of the target population were requested to provide feedback. The focus was on two factors. Firstly, the chosen participants were asked to complete the questionnaire on the online survey platform SosciSurvey and to provide feedback regarding difficulties or unclear wording they experienced while filling it out. Secondly, the average duration of the interviews was considered.

Based on the feedback from the pre-test, slight modifications were made to some items regarding the risk construct, and one more item was added regarding willingness for innovation. Furthermore, more options regarding the frequency were added, according to the feedback of the respondents. Overall, the clarity and precision of the questionnaire's formulation could be improved.

On average, the test participants required six minutes to complete the questionnaire. Consequently, an estimated processing time of five to seven minutes was projected for the main study. In general, no further modifications to the fundamental structure of the questionnaire were deemed necessary. The participants who took part in the pre-test were subsequently excluded from the main survey.

### 4.3.2    *Survey layout*

The online survey was created and conducted using the SoSci Survey tool. Upon accessing the survey through the provided link, participants were welcomed with a brief introduction explaining the research objectives, assuring them that their data would be handled confidentially, and providing the researcher's contact details for any questions. Participants were encouraged to provide honest and complete responses to help ensure meaningful insights into the research question. The survey consisted of 47 questions, aimed at gathering relevant data. Since the majority of the sample was expected to predominantly speak German, the questionnaire was exclusively made available in that language.

During the survey period, 254 individuals clicked on the link to the questionnaire. After cleaning the dataset, 178 valid responses remained, consisting of complete and evaluable questionnaires from fitness club members who actively use WhatsApp. Of these, 70.1% completed the survey in full, with an average completion time of approximately 6.5 minutes (M = 388.13, SD = 148.20), resulting in a dropout rate of 29.9%. The gender distribution of the valid cases (N = 178) included 94 female participants (52.8%) and 84 male participants (47.2%). Nearly 40% of participants reported prior communication with the fitness club via WhatsApp, while the remaining participants had not yet used this communication channel. Geographically, the majority of respondents (54.5%) were from Austria, followed by almost 40% from Germany, and 3% each from Italy and other countries. Regarding the highest level of education, over half of the respondents (64.6%) held a university degree, followed by 21.9% with an Abitur (higher secondary school diploma) and 11.2% with an intermediate school leaving certificate. Further details on the characteristics of the sample are provided in Table 1. The average age of the respondents was 32 years (M = 32.27), with ages ranging from 20 to 65 years. The majority of participants were between 20 and 30 years old.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Characteristic.

| Sample characteristics | N = 178 | |
|---|---|---|
| | n | % |
| Fitnessclub / Club member | 178 | 100.00 |
| WhatsApp user | 178 | 100.00 |
| Contact with Fitness club via WhatsApp | | |
|    Yes | 69 | 38.30 |
|    No | 109 | 61.20 |
| Gender | | |
|    Male | 84 | 47.20 |
|    Female | 94 | 52.80 |
|    Diverse | 0 | 0.00 |
| Country of origin | | |
|    Austria | 97 | 54.5 |
|    Germany | 71 | 39.9 |
|    Italy | 5 | 2.80 |
|    Other | 5 | 2.80 |
| Highest completed level of education | | |
|    Secondary school leaving certificate | 2 | 1.10 |
|    Intermediate school leaving certificate | 20 | 11.20 |
|    A-level (Subject-Specific higher education entrance qualification or similar) | 39 | 21.90 |
|    University degree (Bachelor, Master) | 115 | 64.60 |
|    Other | 1 | 0.60 |
|    Not specified | 1 | 0.60 |

Note. Output adapted from SPSS.

## 5 Research results

### 5.1 Descriptive statistics of the WhatsApp preferences and usage behavior

Regarding the preferred frequency of communication via WhatsApp, the majority of respondents indicated a preference for weekly contact, with 30.3% selecting this option, while 32% preferred communication no more than once per week. However, nearly one-fifth of the participants expressed uncertainty regarding their ideal frequency of interaction. In terms of the types of information participants wished to receive, all proposed categories were highly rated (see Table 2). Over 60% of respondents expressed interest in receiving updates and news concerning the fitness centers. Approximately half (50.7%) indicated a preference for fitness-related content, including training plans and tips, while 56.2% expressed a desire for nutrition-related tips and recipes. Additionally, respondents who utilized the option to provide open-ended answers suggested further content areas, including "events," "special opening hours," and "detailed descriptions of exercises during group sessions."

In relation to the circumstances under which participants would consider contacting the fitness center via WhatsApp, consultancy services were the most highly ranked, with 71% of respondents selecting this option. This was followed by a substantial proportion (60.8%) who indicated a preference for providing feedback (both positive and negative) and 54.4% who expressed interest in receiving information. In contrast, a smaller percentage of participants (14.5%) would consider using WhatsApp for appointment scheduling.

Finally, with regard to reasons for limiting contact via WhatsApp, data privacy emerged as the primary concern, with nearly three-quarters of participants (74.8%) citing it as a significant factor. The absence of personalized communication was also highlighted as a critical issue, with 77.4% of respondents identifying it as a key deterrent. A smaller proportion (14.5%) expressed concern over receiving an excessive number of messages. A more detailed presentation of these findings can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample's preferred WhatsApp Usage

| WhatsApp usage | N = 178 | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | n | % |
| Preferred frequency of contact via WhatsApp | | |
|     Monthly | 29 | 16.30 |
|     Weekly | 54 | 30.30 |
|     Not more than 1 time per week | 57 | 32.00 |
|     2 to 3 times per week | 8 | 4.50 |
|     I do not know | 30 | 16.90 |
| Preferred information | | |
|     Current offers and promotions | 65 | 44.50 |
|     Fitness tips and training plans | 74 | 50.70 |
|     Nutrition tips and recipes | 82 | 56.20 |
|     News and updates | 89 | 61.00 |
| Situations for contacting | | |
|     Appointments | 29 | 18.40 |
|     Information seeking | 86 | 54.40 |
|     Feedback (positiv, negativ) | 96 | 60.80 |
|     Consultancy | 112 | 70.90 |
| Reasons for limiting contact | | |
|     Data privacy concerns | 119 | 74.80 |
|     Unintersting content | 66 | 41.50 |
|     Too many messages | 23 | 14.50 |

| No personalized messages | 123 | 77.40 |

Note. Output adapted from SPSS

### 5.2 Hypotheses

In the following section, the outcomes of the hypothesis testing will be presented. As summarized in Table 3, the analysis revealed that five out of the twelve hypotheses were empirically supported.

Table 3. Validation of Hypotheses

| Hypothesis | Path | β | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| H1.1 | AU→BI | **.27*** | **Supported** |
| H1.2 | PV→BI | **.61*** | **Supported** |
| H1.3 | PU→BI | .00 | Not supported |
| H1.4 | PEOU→BI | **.15*** | **Supported** |
| H1.5 | PC→BI | -.02 | Not supported |
| H1.6 | TR→BI | .05 | Not supported |
| H2.1 | IE→PU | **.24*** | **Supported** |
| H2.2 | FB→PU | .06 | Not supported |
| H2.3 | PE→PU | .04 | Not supported |
| H2.4 | IO→PU | .04 | Not supported |
| H2.5 | PS→PU | .05 | Not supported |
| H2.6 | PEOU→BI | **.55*** | **Supported** |

Note. Own table. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.

The findings from the multiple linear regression analysis (MLRA 1) indicate that three out of the six hypothesized determinants had a significant positive impact on the behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp. Specifically, hypotheses H1.1, H1.2, and H1.4, which pertain to the factors "attitude towards the use of WhatsApp" (AU), "perceived value" (PV), and "perceived ease of use" (PEOU), were supported. Conversely, hypotheses H1.3, H1.5, and H1.6 were not substantiated, as no significant relationships were found between "perceived usefulness" (PU), "privacy concerns" (PC), and "trust" (TR) and BI. In the second multiple linear regression analysis (MLRA 2), a significant positive effect was observed for "perceived information and entertainment value" (IE) and "perceived ease of use" (PEOU) on "perceived usefulness" (PU), thus confirming hypotheses H2.1 and H2.6. However, hypotheses H2.2, H2.3, H2.4, and H2.5 were not supported, as no significant effects were identified between "perceived financial benefits," "personalization," "information overload," and "perceived socialness" and PU. A visual representation of the results can be found in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Results of MLRA 1 and MLRA 2 and Revised Research Model
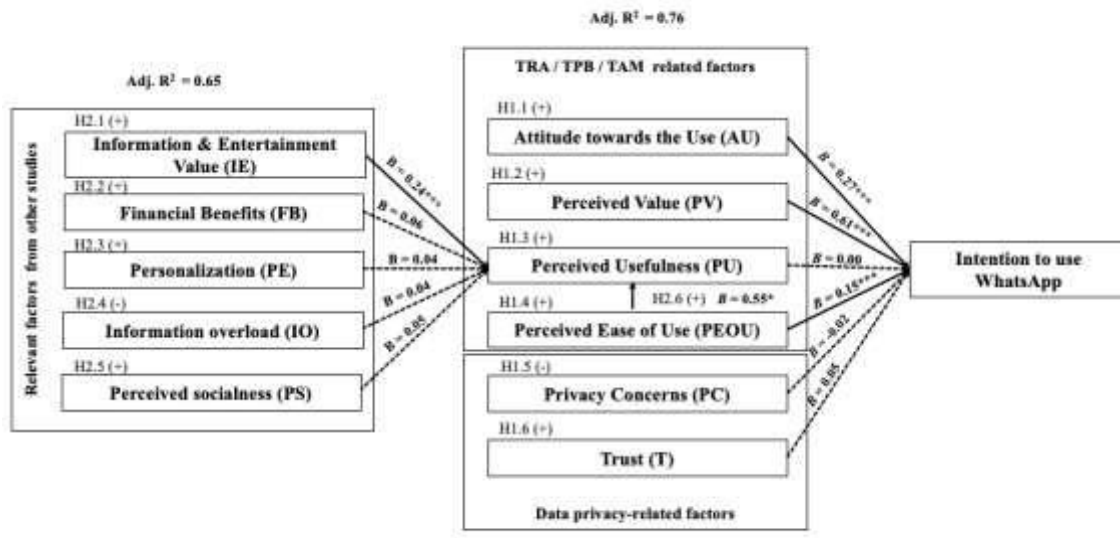
Note. Own illustration of the adjusted research framework. Supported hypotheses are shown with continuous lines. Not supported hypotheses are shown with dashed lines. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.

## 6 Discussion

In the subsequent section, the findings from the descriptive statistical analysis of the constructs will be examined. Initially, the analysis revealed a generally positive attitude toward the use of WhatsApp, with nearly three-quarters of the participants expressing agreement or strong agreement, as measured through Likert-scale responses. Similarly, the evaluation of the intention to use WhatsApp, assessed via scale-based survey items, indicated its suitability for the fitness industry, as 71.5% of respondents agreed. However, when analyzing the mean values, only a moderate to slightly positive result was observed, as 15% of participants remained neutral (M = 3.86, SD = 1.31). Consequently, the study results, characterized by moderate mean values, suggest a moderate to slightly positive level of willingness among participants to use WhatsApp for interactions with their fitness centers.

Among the most notable findings were the high mean scores for perceived ease of use (M = 4.14, SD = 0.95) and perceived value (M = 4.12, SD = 1.03), derived from construct-based measurement scales, indicating that participants regard WhatsApp as a valuable service and perceive it as user-friendly. Another significant result was the relatively low mean score for privacy concerns (M = 2.93, SD = 1.67), suggesting that a substantial proportion of respondents expressed minimal concerns regarding privacy when using WhatsApp for communication, as measured through standardized survey instruments. However, the data also indicate that a significant percentage of participants held ambivalent or undecided attitudes toward privacy concerns, reflecting considerable uncertainty on this issue, as identified through variance analysis. Nonetheless, nearly 35% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, highlighting that a notable portion of participants does harbor privacy concerns related to WhatsApp.

Furthermore, the lower mean scores for social presence (M = 3.44, SD = 1.33) and financial benefits (M = 3.13, SD = 1.55), obtained through descriptive statistical evaluation, suggest that neither financial incentives nor the perception of social interaction are critical factors in the adoption of WhatsApp as a business-to-consumer (B2C) communication and marketing tool. In contrast, the analysis of personalized and tailored messages, conducted using scale-based metrics, revealed this

factor to be of considerable importance (M = 4.06, SD = 0.99), underscoring its relevance in the context of WhatsApp-based communication strategies.

### 6.1 Interpretation of the effects on the behavioral intention to use WhatsApp

The first multiple linear regression analysis (MLRA) demonstrated a substantial explanatory power for the dependent variable behavioral intention (BI) to use WhatsApp, as evidenced by a high adjusted coefficient of determination ($R^2$ = 0.76). The overall significance of the regression model, confirmed through the F-test ($F(5, 172)$ = 111.79; $p < 0.001$), indicates the model's effectiveness in predicting BI. Consistent with the results of the second MLRA, the determinant perceived ease of use (PEOU) emerged as a critical factor. This finding underscores the importance of user-friendliness, suggesting that it not only influences the perception of usefulness but also significantly impacts users' intention to adopt WhatsApp. These outcomes align with prior research, which has consistently identified PEOU as a key predictor of technology acceptance (e.g., Chopra & Bedi, 2018, p. 126; Charoensereechai et al., 2022), emphasizing the necessity of ensuring a user-friendly experience to enhance adoption rates.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that users who perceive a higher perceived value (PV) in using WhatsApp are more likely to exhibit a stronger intention to use it. Consequently, Hypothesis 1.1 (H1.1), which posits that perceived value positively affects behavioral intention to use WhatsApp, was supported. This finding is consistent with the results of Bauer et al. (2005), Kim et al. (2008), Merisavo et al. (2007), and the more recent study by Altpeter (2017), all of which have highlighted the importance of PV in technology acceptance models. One plausible explanation for this relationship is that communication channels like WhatsApp do not inherently satisfy basic needs; thus, without added value, consumers lack motivation to adopt them. Consequently, businesses must effectively communicate the benefits of engaging in commercial communication through such platforms.

Another significant predictor of BI was attitude toward use (AU). This result indicates that individuals with a more positive attitude toward WhatsApp are more likely to express a higher intention to use the application. This finding corroborates the work of Bauer et al. (2005) and Kuo & Yen (2009), who identified a significant relationship between AU and BI in the context of mobile marketing.

In contrast, the other independent variables—perceived usefulness (PU), privacy concerns (PC), and trust (TR)—did not exhibit significant effects on BI. A potential explanation for this may lie in the strong influence of PV. If participants perceive a high level of PV in using WhatsApp, the direct effects of PU, PC, and TR may diminish, as PV encompasses aspects of these factors. It is plausible that PV acts as a dominant factor in shaping users' intention to use the platform. Nevertheless, the non-significant effects of PU, PC, and TR warrant further investigation.

These results partially diverge from previous studies on mobile instant messaging (MIM) acceptance. On one hand, the strong influence of PC and TR identified in several acceptance studies (e.g., Ainin et al., 2015, p. 573; Chopra & Bedi, 2018, p. 27; Zarmpou et al., 2012, p. 230; Farooq et al., 2023, p. 4; Hubert et al., 2019, p. 1074; Mrad et al., 2022, p. 5; Zarouali et al., 2021, p. 254) could not be confirmed in this study. On the other hand, the foundational assumption of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989)—that PU significantly influences BI—was not supported. A possible reason for this discrepancy may be the inclusion of the additional variable PV, which may have captured variance that would otherwise have been attributed to PU. Thus, the direct impact of PU on BI may have been attenuated in the presence of PV.

### 6.2 Interpretation of the effects on the perceived usefulness of WhatsApp

The research model demonstrated that two out of six hypotheses were statistically supported. Specifically, it was confirmed that perceived ease of use (PEOU) of WhatsApp positively influences perceived usefulness (PU). This finding aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis et al. (1989, p. 996 f.), as the positive relationship between PEOU and PU was empirically validated within this study. A plausible explanation for this relationship lies in WhatsApp's widespread adoption and its intuitive user interface, which enhance users' perception of its usefulness. This result is consistent with the findings of Chopra & Bedi (2018, p. 126), who identified PEOU as a critical factor in evaluating service quality. However, it contrasts with studies by Altpeter (2017), Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2015), and Soroa-Koury & Yang (2010), which did not find significant

relationships between these constructs.

Additionally, Hypothesis 2.1 (H2.1), which posits that perceived information and entertainment value (IE) positively affects the perceived usefulness (PU) of WhatsApp, was supported. This result aligns with the findings of Mrad et al. (2021, p. 344), who emphasized WhatsApp's utility as an informative and entertaining channel in business communication. It also corroborates the work of Gründel (2018, p. 12), who found that messenger applications can enhance customer loyalty when businesses effectively deliver informative and entertaining content. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with studies by Altpeter (2017) and Niklas & Niklas (2015), which recognized the importance of these constructs in shaping user perceptions.

In contrast, no significant relationships were found for financial benefits (FB), personalization (PE), interactivity and openness (IO), or social presence (PS). These results diverge from prior research. For instance, Altpeter (2017) found that advertising is perceived as less intrusive and more useful when users experience financial benefits, a relationship not supported in this study. Similarly, Nguyen (2023) identified a positive link between personalization and perceived usefulness, which was not confirmed here. Additionally, the findings of Zhang et al. (2022) and Chaouali (2016) regarding the effects of interactivity and openness were not replicated. Furthermore, the results of Gefen & Straub (2004) and Lu et al. (2016), which highlighted the significance of social presence, were not supported in this study.

In summary, the results suggest that perceived usefulness (PU) is influenced, to a significant extent, by perceived ease of use (PEOU) and the availability of informative and entertaining content (IE), as these variables positively affect users' perceptions of WhatsApp's utility. The adjusted $R^2$ value indicated that PEOU and IE collectively explain 65% of the variance in PU. However, other factors not included in the model may also influence PU, potentially leading to a higher coefficient of determination. Future research should explore these additional variables to further refine the understanding of the determinants of perceived usefulness in the context of mobile instant messaging applications.

## 7      Conclusion

### 7.1 Theoretical implications

This study makes four significant contributions to the existing literature on WhatsApp acceptance within the fitness industry, which are delineated as follows:

First, this study represents a pioneering effort in analyzing WhatsApp acceptance in the fitness context. While Mrad et al. (2022) recently explored WhatsApp's suitability in the luxury industry, no prior research has investigated its application in the fitness sector. Given the scarcity of scientific literature on WhatsApp's role in business-to-consumer (B2C) communication, this study provides a foundational contribution that is highly valuable for advancing research in this domain.

Second, the developed research model offers a robust framework for understanding WhatsApp acceptance. This model is particularly noteworthy for two reasons: (1) it explains 65% of the variance in perceived usefulness (PU) and 76% of the variance in behavioral intention (BI), demonstrating its strong predictive power; and (2) it highlights the critical role of information and entertainment value (IE), perceived ease of use (PEOU), perceived value (PV), and attitude toward use (AU) as direct predictors of both BI and PU. These findings underscore the model's utility in analyzing technology acceptance in specific contexts.

Third, the research framework extends beyond the analysis of behavioral intention (BI) by also examining the effects of specific factors on perceived usefulness (PU). This dual focus provides a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants influencing WhatsApp acceptance, offering deeper insights into user perceptions and intentions.

Fourth, the study's findings align with established theoretical frameworks in technology acceptance and consumer behavior. On one hand, the results support the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), as significant positive effects of PEOU on both PU and BI were observed, alongside the influence of PV and AU on BI. This reaffirms the TAM's relevance as a suitable framework for

analyzing WhatsApp acceptance, despite the non-significant effect of PU on BI in this context. The study particularly emphasizes PEOU as a critical determinant of acceptance, a finding corroborated by prior research (e.g., Chopra & Bedi, 2018; Charoensereechai et al., 2022; Davis, 1989). On the other hand, the study validates the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) approach by demonstrating that information and entertainment value (IE) is a key factor in explaining the perceived usefulness of WhatsApp as a new service. This aligns with previous studies (e.g., Yang, 2013; Mrad et al., 2021), further reinforcing the applicability of the U&G framework in understanding user motivations and perceptions.

In summary, this study not only addresses a significant gap in the literature by exploring WhatsApp acceptance in the fitness industry but also provides a validated research model that enhances understanding of the factors driving technology adoption. By integrating insights from the TAM and U&G frameworks, the study offers a nuanced perspective on the interplay between user perceptions, intentions, and contextual factors, paving the way for future research in this area.

### 7.2 Practical implications

Based on the empirical findings of this study, several actionable implications emerge for fitness and health centers aiming to enhance consumer acceptance and engagement with WhatsApp as a communication platform, while optimizing their communication strategies. These implications are grounded in the study's results and provide a structured approach for leveraging WhatsApp effectively in a business-to-consumer (B2C) context.

The study reveals a general willingness among consumers to use WhatsApp for interactions with fitness centers, a finding of significant relevance for businesses operating in this sector. By analyzing the individual constructs and the results of the multiple linear regression analyses (MLRAs), the following key factors have been identified as critical for successful implementation of WhatsApp as a communication and marketing tool:

(2)    Informative and Entertaining Content: Fitness centers should prioritize the dissemination of high-quality, informative, and entertaining content via WhatsApp. The study underscores the importance of information and entertainment value (IE) in enhancing perceived usefulness (PU) and fostering user engagement. By delivering content that is both valuable and engaging, fitness centers can strengthen consumer willingness to adopt WhatsApp as a preferred communication channel.

(3)    Privacy and Data Security: Although privacy concerns (PC) did not yield statistically significant results in the study, they were frequently highlighted as a critical issue by participants. To address this, fitness centers should develop and communicate a comprehensive privacy policy that clearly outlines how customer data will be used, stored, and protected. Additionally, offering an opt-out option can further enhance transparency and trust, addressing potential reservations among users.

(4)    Trust Building: The data indicate that participants exhibit uncertainty regarding WhatsApp's security as a platform for B2C interactions. To mitigate this, fitness centers should actively work to build trust with their customers. This can be achieved through consistent, transparent communication and by demonstrating a commitment to data security and user privacy. Trust-building measures are essential for promoting positive behavioral intentions (BI) toward WhatsApp usage.

(5)    User-Friendly Communication: The study identifies perceived ease of use (PEOU) as a critical determinant of perceived usefulness (PU). To ensure a seamless user experience, fitness centers should prioritize simplicity and clarity in their WhatsApp communications. Providing clear instructions and minimizing complexity in interactions can enhance user satisfaction and foster greater acceptance of the platform.

(6)    Optimal Communication Frequency: Participants expressed a preference for regular but not excessive communication, with a suggested frequency of once per week. Striking a balance between maintaining continuity and avoiding information overload is crucial, as excessive messaging can negatively impact users' intention to adopt WhatsApp. Incorporating

engagement and community-building activities can further enhance the social aspect of interactions, fostering a sense of connection and belonging among users.

In summary, the study's findings underscore the importance of delivering personalized and value-added content, ensuring ease of use, fostering social interaction, and addressing privacy concerns to build trust and enhance user acceptance of WhatsApp in a B2C setting. By integrating these strategies, fitness and health centers can effectively leverage WhatsApp as a powerful tool for customer engagement and communication, ultimately driving higher levels of user adoption and satisfaction. These insights not only provide practical guidance for businesses but also contribute to the broader understanding of technology acceptance in the fitness industry.

### 7.3 Limitations of research

The research is subject to several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, the quantitative research design employed in this study may have resulted in the oversight of certain nuanced information and contextual details during the process of data quantification. To address this limitation, future research should consider employing methodological triangulation, which involves the integration of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This approach would enable a more comprehensive understanding of how the investigated effects manifest in real-world settings, as emphasized by Beeton (2005, p. 37). This recommendation is further supported by Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 60), who advocate for the use of mixed-methods research designs—combining qualitative and quantitative approaches—to enhance the depth and validity of findings. The integration of qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide richer insights into user perceptions and behaviors, as highlighted by Creswell & Plano Clark (2017, p. 213).

Secondly, the study did not assess whether the dependent variable, behavioral intention (BI), translates into actual usage of WhatsApp, as the fitness center under investigation had not yet implemented WhatsApp as a communication and marketing tool at the time of data collection. This gap highlights the need for future research to examine the relationship between behavioral intention and actual usage behavior, particularly in contexts where the technology has been operationalized. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that behavioral intention is a precursor to actual usage (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). However, without empirical validation of this relationship in the current context, the findings remain incomplete. Future studies should incorporate longitudinal designs to track the transition from intention to actual usage, as suggested by Venkatesh et al. (2012, p. 159).

Thirdly, the study is limited by its reliance on a specific sample and context. While the results are considered representative of the fitness club studied, they cannot be generalized to all fitness and health centers more broadly. This limitation is consistent with the challenges of generalizability often associated with context-specific research (Yin, 2017, p. 45). Future research should aim to include a broader sample or multiple contexts to enhance the external validity and generalizability of the findings. For instance, cross-industry comparisons or multi-country studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing technology adoption, as recommended by Straub et al. (2004, p. 23).

In summary, while this study provides meaningful insights into the acceptance of WhatsApp in the fitness context, its limitations underscore the need for future research to adopt mixed-methods approaches, investigate the link between behavioral intention and actual usage, and expand the scope of inquiry to include diverse samples or contexts. Addressing these limitations would contribute to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing technology adoption in the fitness and health industry, as well as align with broader theoretical frameworks such as TAM and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 447).

### 7.4 Outlook for future research

While this thesis provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the behavioral intention (BI) to

use WhatsApp, it is imperative to acknowledge its limitations, which underscore the necessity for further research. A significant research gap has been identified concerning the use of mobile instant messaging (MIM) platforms, particularly WhatsApp, in business-to-consumer (B2C) communication. Despite its widespread adoption, there is a dearth of scientific literature that comprehensively examines WhatsApp as a communication tool. Only two recent studies (Zarouali et al., 2021; Mrad et al., 2022) have analyzed WhatsApp in specific contexts, highlighting the need for a more extensive and systematic literature review on this topic.

One notable limitation of the current study is the absence of actual usage data, as the fitness center under investigation had not yet implemented WhatsApp at the time of data collection. This presents a significant opportunity for future research, particularly as more businesses begin to adopt WhatsApp for customer engagement. Additionally, the study did not explore the potential moderating effects of socioeconomic characteristics, such as age or gender, on behavioral intention. Given that the average age of respondents in this study was relatively young, and the selected case study targeted this demographic, future research could investigate how age influences or moderates the intention to use WhatsApp. Furthermore, examining the effectiveness of WhatsApp at different stages of the customer journey could provide deeper insights into its role in customer engagement. Theoretical frameworks such as the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) (Rogers et al., 2014) could be employed to further elucidate adoption processes.

Beyond these specific gaps, there is a broader need to explore emerging trends and technologies, such as the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on B2C communication. As businesses increasingly adopt MIM platforms for customer interaction and engagement (Marino & Lo Presti, 2018), understanding the evolving dynamics of digital communication becomes crucial. Online communication has fundamentally transformed customer-business relationships, fostering interdependency and enabling more personalized interactions (Kitchen & Proctor, 2015, p. 35). MIM platforms like WhatsApp offer flexibility and automation capabilities, enhancing customer service efficiency (Strategic Direction, 2022). However, these platforms are not without risks, including vulnerabilities to cyberattacks and data security breaches (Jannah, 2023). Additionally, the impersonal nature of online communication and the potential for misinterpretation highlight the need for businesses to develop adept communication strategies (Venter, 2019; Jannah, 2023).

WhatsApp, in particular, has emerged as one of the most widely used MIM platforms in Europe, offering numerous advantages for businesses (Jannah, 2023, p. 490). Its multifunctionality—enabling the transfer of text, photos, videos, documents, location data, voice messages, and video calls—makes it a versatile tool for B2C communication (WhatsApp, 2023a; Agrawal & Mittal, 2019, p. 955).

The growing relevance of WhatsApp marketing is supported by literature, which highlights its role as a digital business platform that facilitates interaction between sellers and buyers, enabling the exchange of product and company information (Asmayanti, 2022, p. 113). Its capacity for rapid message dissemination and viral marketing further enhances its utility (Yu & Kamarulzama, 2016, p. 2). During the COVID-19 pandemic, WhatsApp was particularly valued as an effective solution for maintaining customer communication (Sugiyantoro et al., 2022, p. 1). Studies have also confirmed that MIM apps are perceived as effective tools for fostering customer relationships and supporting marketing efforts throughout the customer journey (Lo Presti et al. 2022). Despite its growing importance, WhatsApp marketing remains inadequately defined in the scientific literature, in contrast to WeChat marketing, which has been extensively studied (Yang, 2021, p. 625). WeChat marketing is defined as "network marketing methods where enterprises use the platform of WeChat to carry out a series of marketing activities" (Yang, 2021, p. 625). Given WhatsApp's immense popularity, it serves as an ideal platform for implementing viral marketing strategies (Yu & Kamarulzama, 2016, p. 2). Future research should aim to develop a comprehensive definition and framework for WhatsApp marketing, drawing parallels with existing studies on WeChat and other MIM platforms.

In conclusion, while this study contributes to the understanding of WhatsApp's role in B2C communication, its limitations highlight the need for further research to explore actual usage patterns, moderating factors, and emerging trends in digital communication. By addressing these gaps, future studies can provide a more nuanced understanding of WhatsApp's potential as a marketing and communication tool, ultimately enabling businesses to leverage its capabilities more effectively.

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