

Discord Use and Intent

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ABSTRACT

Discord is a text, voice, and video-based online application that facilitates voice and video calls, media sharing, and text messaging. Although Discord was initially developed and released for gamers, the uses of Discord can apply to many other scenarios: friends just chatting, online schooling, and more. This study focuses on the facets that influence current and future Discord usage. A 10-minute IRB-approved survey was given to a total of 175 students from a public midwestern university. Results of this study show that current Discord use and future Discord use intent are predicted by different attitudes. Current use was only found to be significantly associated with social norms surrounding the user and the user's amount of time spent gaming. On the other hand, future Discord use intent was significantly associated with perceived usefulness, facilitating resources, amount of time spent gaming, and amount of time spent on any other social media application.

Introduction

Communication has always been an integral part of everyday life, but communication online is central to education, work, and socializing in the twenty-first century (Lam, 2020). Text-based, voice-over internet protocol (VoIP), and video-based online applications have become some of the most widely used and preferred methods of human communication (Moffitt et al., 2021). The recent COVID-19 pandemic boosted the popularity of online communication platforms dramatically (Lam, 2020). In particular, Discord, a commonly used, free, and cross-platform application supports video conferencing and the ability to create public and private chats for the purpose of voice and text messaging (Odinokaya et al., 2021). Presently, Discord boasts a staggering one hundred and fifty million monthly active users and four billion server conversation minutes daily (Geysler, 2021). The present research focuses on this highly popular and novel platform that is presently transforming the world of communication. Although a number of studies have examined Discord in the context of educational use such as Ramadhan, 2021; Wahyuningsih & Baidi, 2021; Wulanjani, 2018, few have examined its general use and adoption. Specifically, the question, what facets of this communication platform influence current and future Discord use as a general communication platform?

Discord is unlike many currently popular communication platforms. Discord allows users to make calls and send messages to selected friends or through its widespread social networking system and freemium model. In order to examine how these facets influence perceptions and adoption of Discord, we utilize the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Results from an online study suggest that Discord use and intent are predicted not only by variables in UTAUT, but also by facets specific to this communication technology. These results provide notable insights into the gradual changes in communication technology over time. The goal is to update knowledge on the relatively new topic of online communications by conducting this research.

What is Discord?

Discord, although first aimed toward the gaming community as an alternative to the messaging application TeamSpeak (Srivastava, 2021), has exploded in popularity to all audiences since its release in 2015. Discord may have experienced

this massive rise in part due to its unique freemium business model, meaning it is available completely ad-free with all features accessible to everyone. The majority of Discord's profits come from optional purchases of Discord Nitro, tangible merchandise apparel, and cosmetic items (Rioja, 2021). Further, Discord appeals widely because of its cross-platform availability and ability to handle thousands of server communications efficiently (*Discord Growth Story: 5 Takeaways to Replicate in Your Business*, 2019). People enjoy using the Discord application for several reasons, two of which are the incredible ease of use and amazing social capabilities, both with strangers and close friends.

Research on Discord Use

Previously, there have been few studies on Discord but none on Discord use intent. One study suggested that Discord is a viable option in the field of online learning (Wahyuningsih & Baidi, 2021). The study concludes that Discord can create an environment that is both entertaining and interesting for students. The authors reached this conclusion by analyzing information gathered from interviews with students and teachers as well as observations of online meetings with students on the Discord application where the researcher acted as a teacher. Through these two methods, the researchers identified a pattern that students and teachers perceived Discord as a viable learning platform. This study examined the viability of Discord and the use intent of teachers and students, but it did not address broader use intent.

The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), which developed out of the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), is a widely used model developed to understand technological adoption. The importance of the TAM and UTAUT models for tech-adoption research can be explained by understanding why people use or reject certain technology, as well as understanding the usage and usage intent of technology. This study uses UTAUT to investigate actual system usage and the use intent of Discord. TAM explains that two primary factors, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, influence attitude toward using a given technology, which predicts actual use (Davis, 1989). While the TAM model has been criticized for being too simplistic, it laid a study foundation for the analysis of factors in the adoption of new technology.

Following TAM, UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003) includes a measure of effort expectancy (similar to perceived ease of use in TAM) and performance expectancy (similar to perceived usefulness). Further, UTAUT adds measures of social influence (i.e., friend's belief that one should use a product) and facilitating conditions (i.e., necessity to use a product, access to a product) as predictors of technology use intent.

TAM and UTAUT have been used in many studies to examine adoption of social media platforms. For example, studies have covered the possibility of the usage of social media applications such as Facebook inside of a learning environment (AlmisadBudour & AlsalimMonirah, 2020; Al-rahimi et al., n.d.; Escobar-Rodríguez et al., 2014). Adding on to this, previous research utilizing the TAM and UTAUT framework has been done to examine actual social media usage (Hwang & Cho, 2017; Jarvinen et al., n.d.; Rauniar et al., 2014). These papers attempt to write out the adoption and integration of social media into people's lives. This research can be applied to alternative social media applications such as Discord; however applications like Discord differ from others due to factors such as the freemium model.

One previous study (Coa & Setiawan, 2017) analyzes the factors of behavioral intention to use Snapchat and Instagram. This study utilizes a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire specifically created to collect quantitative data. The study concludes that perceived enjoyment in Snapchat and Instagram has the largest influence on attitudes. This results in someone's behavior and intention driving them to use these applications.

Another study (Rauniar et al., 2014) utilized a web-based questionnaire surveying 398 users of Facebook. The survey using a revised version of the TAM framework gathered data on the understanding of usage behavior and user attitude. The survey's results demonstrated that many topics and subjects affect a person's perceived usefulness and enjoyment while using social media.

Although TAM and UTAUT have been used to study other social media platforms, there are very few studies that have used these frameworks to examine Discord adoption. One study (Arifianto & Izzudin, 2021) examined a student's acceptance of Discord as an online learning application. This study used the TAM framework to explain the

techniques used by students in order to properly adapt to and adopt new technology. The majority of studies on Discord which follow the TAM or UTAUT frameworks follow the topic of Discord in the context of online learning.

There is plenty of previous research on social media applications that don't follow the TAM or UTAUT models. Despite this, the majority of such research focuses on the use of social media applications in the context of online learning and education. Studies such as *Adoption of Social Media by Business Education Students: Application of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)*, n.d.; AlmisadBudour & AlsalmMonirah, 2020; Escobar-Rodríguez et al., 2014 all use either the TAM or UTAUT frameworks to research and discuss the usage of social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter for the purpose of online learning. However, papers researching the usage of social media applications do exist, as seen with *(Consumer Acceptance and Use of Instagram)*, n.d.; Hwang & Cho, 2017; Rauniar et al., 2014). These studies, like previously mentioned studies on social media in an educational setting, use either the TAM or UTAUT models to research the usage and use intent of popular applications such as Instagram and Facebook.

Research Questions

The present exploratory study responds to the lack of research on Discord adoption in general, utilizing the UTAUT frameworks to guide the inquiry. In addition to the predictive factors specified in UTAUT, we are also interested in whether previous amount of gaming, amount of social media use, and attitudes about Discord's freemium model (without advertising) are related to Discord adoption intent. We expect that such factors may influence Discord adoption because Discord was originally designed to support communication between video game players, it is one of many currently popular social media applications, and it contains far less advertising compared to other social media applications, respectively. We pose the following research questions:

RQ1: Is current Discord use predicted by gender, perceived Discord usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, facilitating conditions, amount of gaming experience, amount of social media use, and liking that Discord does not include advertising?

RQ2: Is future Discord use intent predicted by gender, perceived Discord usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, facilitating conditions, amount of gaming experience, amount of social media use, and liking that Discord does not include advertising?

Methodology

A total of 175 participants were recruited to participate in an IRB-approved 10-minute survey, from students at a public midwestern university who reported at least some level of familiarity with Discord. Participants were compensated with a small amount of class credit through a privacy-protecting participant portal. The 20 participants who reported never using Discord were removed from the analysis. Some participants accessed the survey more than once, so only the first, more complete sessions were retained in the analysis. This led to a final N of 154 (101 women, 52 men, one not reporting gender), average age of 20.13 ($SD = 1.48$), minimum age of 18.

Measures

All measures were recorded on 5-point Likert scales of agreement with the following options: "Not at all", "Slightly", "Moderately", "Strongly", "Extremely", unless otherwise indicated below. Chronbach's alpha was calculated for all items in each metric in order to determine reliability, and then composite metrics were calculated from mean scores across items. Example items are provided below and the full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

Discord Use Intent ($\alpha = .97$) was our primary outcome of interest, given that the UTAUT framework was designed to predict technology use intent. This was measured with 3 items, including “I intend to use Discord in the future,” and “I will try to use Discord in the future.”

Current Discord Use ($\alpha = .91$) was another outcome of interest, given that it is also a strong predictor of future use. This was measured with 5 items, including “I use Discord every day,” and “Discord is amongst the first things I check when waking up.”

Perceived Usefulness ($\alpha = .93$) was measured with 5 items adapted from the TAM questionnaire (Davis, 1989). Items included “Discord is useful,” and “Using Discord would allow me to accomplish tasks more quickly.”

Ease of Use ($\alpha = .94$) was measured with 7 items adapted from the TAM questionnaire (Davis, 1989). Items included “Discord is easy to set up,” and “It would be easy for me to become skillful at using Discord.”

Social Norms ($\alpha = .90$) were measured with 6 items adapted from the UTAUT questionnaire (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Items included “People who influence my behavior think that I should use Discord,” and “People who are important to me think that I should use Discord.”

Discord Facilitating Conditions ($\alpha = .81$) were measured with 3 items adapted from the UTAUT questionnaire (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Items included “The organizations and groups to which I belong can help me use Discord,” and “I have the resources needed to use Discord.”

Time Spent Gaming ($\alpha = .97$) was measured with 9 items, including “Any type of video game,” and “Games in Virtual Reality.”

Time Spent Using Social Media ($\alpha = .81$) was measured with 13 items, including “Time spent using TikTok,” and “Time spent using Instagram.”

Disliking Advertisements was measured with a single item, “I prefer to use Discord because there are no advertisements.”

Gender was measured with 1 item, “With what gender do you identify with?” with answer options including “Man/boy” ($n = 52$), “Woman/girl” ($n = 101$), and “Non-binary/third gender” ($n = 0$).

Results

To test Research Question 1, we conducted a linear regression analysis with current Discord use as the dependent variable, and gender, perceived usefulness, ease of use, social influence, facilitating conditions, amount of gaming, amount of social media use, and liking that Discord does not include advertising as the independent variables. Results (see table 1) suggest that current Discord use was positively associated with social norms and amount of gaming time. No other significant predictors were found.

Table 1. Results of Regression Model Predicting Discord Use Intent.

Variable Predicting Current Discord Use Intent	Standardized Coefficients Beta	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	---	0.018
GenMW	-0.074	0.3
DisUseful	0.169	0.132
DisEaseOfUse	0.049	0.582
DisSocialNorms1	0.369***	<0.001
DisFacilitatingResources	-0.032	0.685
GameTime	0.16*	0.03
PopScMed	-0.101	0.1
LikeNoAds	0.104	0.25
adj. $r^2 = .54$		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

To test Research Question 2, we conducted a similar linear regression analysis with the same independent variables and future Discord use intent as the dependent variable. Results suggest that use intent was positively associated with perceived usefulness, game time amount, disliking advertising, and (marginal) facilitating resources, while negatively associated with amount of social media time.

Table 2. Results of Regression Model Predicting Future Discord Use Intent.

Variable Predicting Future Discord Use Intent	Standardized Coefficients Beta	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	---	0.428
DisUseMean	0.043	0.501
GenMW	0.013	0.813
DisUseful	0.384***	<0.001
DisEaseOfUse	0.065	0.341
DisSocialNorms1	0.003	0.966
DisFacilitatingResources	0.108†	0.077
GameTime	0.14*	0.015
PopScMed	-0.097*	0.04
LikeNoAds	0.269***	<0.001
adj. $r^2 = .732$		

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to grow and add to the limited knowledge pool of the current use and future use intent of social media, specifically the application Discord. Results of this study show that both current use and future use intent are predicted by different items. Current Discord use is only significantly associated with social norms surrounding the user and the user's amount of time spent gaming. On the other hand, future Discord use intent was significantly associated with perceived usefulness, game time amount, disliking advertising, (marginal) facilitating resources, spending less time on social media. However, it is important to note that current Discord use and future Discord use intent were predicted by different variables (see tables 1 and 2).

An interesting result of the survey found is the influence of social norms on current Discord usage. This could suggest that people only use Discord because other people want them to use it. It could also mean that Discord users only use Discord so they can interact with friends or people close to them on Discord. While many people do use social media due to other's influence, I expected Discord to be different. This is due to the unique feature of Discord servers. With a Discord server, it is possible to easily interact with and befriend random strangers on the internet. Because of this, I expected more people to use Discord because they wanted to join bigger communities, rather than geographically local friend groups.

A possible limitation of this study could lie in the participants taking the survey for this paper. As stated before in the method, only people of 18 years or older were accepted into this survey. However, online articles state that Discord is most popular amongst teenagers (*Discord User and Funding Statistics: How Many People Use Discord in 2022?*, 2021). By choosing not to include teenagers into our study, we actively excluded the group most interested in using the application, Discord. Another limitation in the pool of participants could lie in the amount of diversity in the location. This survey was only distributed to students attending one Midwestern university. By including more locations around the United States - even the globe, survey results could include more and different opinions, thus making results geographically larger trends, rather than local ones.

The purpose of this study is to fill in a gap of knowledge left behind by other similar papers published at the time of writing. This paper, unlike others, covers the usage and use intent of Discord. These results give notable information into slow but consistent changes within the world of communication technology. The final goal of conducting this research and writing this paper is to update and add to the limited pool of findings on the relatively new topic of online communications.

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