

Using the consumption values theory to explore the continuance intention to use ChatGPT among Romanian students

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ABSTRACT

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools among university students is increasingly widespread and shows great potential to transform education. One of the most popular tools is ChatGPT. Existing research literature shows growing interest in investigating the use of ChatGPT from different perspectives. This research takes the perspective of consumption values theory to explore the main factors influencing the decision to continue using ChatGPT. The approach is based on testing a MIMIC (Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes) model using formative causal indicators as perceived consumption values. The model has been tested on undergraduate students coming from two faculties of the University of Craiova. Results show that continuance intention is mainly influenced by its pragmatic value, hedonic value, and the perceived role played by AI tools in education. Group analysis revealed significant differences related to gender and study program.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

ChatGPT; AI tool; consumption values theory; MIMIC model; and formative measurement models.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools by university students is becoming increasingly widespread. One of the most popular AI tools is ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformers), an artificial intelligence technology that could be used to answer a variety of questions, including text generation requests, in a user-friendly way.

ChatGPT is changing the way students learn and solve various learning tasks, from understanding algorithms and complex concepts to developing computer programs and preparing for exams. As such, it poses new challenges for education and creates opportunities for content generation and software development [2].

However, the use of ChatGPT in higher education is far from frictionless. Students often report concerns about the accuracy of the answers, the risk of hallucinations, ethical issues such as plagiarism and academic dishonesty, and the fear of becoming over-reliant on the tool [2, 18, 22]. These concerns may act as barriers, brakes, or sources of

inhibition that reduce the willingness to continue using ChatGPT, especially when classroom rules are unclear or when students are unsure how to evaluate AI-generated content.

The relationship between consumer value and education has been extensively researched in the last few decades, with many studies relating the perceived value of education to consumption value theory [14, 15, 20].

Consumption values theory, developed by Sheth et al. [21], states that the consumer's choice to buy a product is a function of independent consumption values that “make differential contributions in any given choice situation”. According to the authors, consumption values theory may be used to predict, describe, and explain the consumer's behaviour and preferences. The theory was used by many authors in conjunction with other theories to take a larger perspective on the antecedents of the behavioral intention to use a product or technology [13, 23].

Recent years show an increasing body of research that investigates the usage of ChatGPT from different perspectives, such as the technology acceptance model [1, 3], unified theory of acceptance and use of technology [17, 19], or consumption values theory [7, 25]. However, there are few studies relating consumer values to the intention to use ChatGPT in educational settings, and none, to our knowledge, targeting Romanian students.

The main objective of this research was to explore the main determinants of using ChatGPT by Romanian university students from the perspective of consumption values theory. The approach undertaken in this work is based on testing a formative construct with indicators as antecedents of the behavioral intention to use ChatGPT. The formative model has been tested on a sample of 206 Romanian university students from the University of Craiova.

Additional objectives are to investigate if there are gender differences and differences between students enrolled in different study programs.

This work makes a twofold contribution. First, the resulting instrument is parsimonious, relying on a small set of formative indicators, and can therefore be reused with reasonable effort to assess and compare various AI tools used for educational purposes. Second, the study provides group-level evidence related to gender and study program from an under-researched educational context.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, the theoretical background and the conceptualization of the proposed model are presented. Next, the empirical study results are presented and discussed. The paper ends with a conclusion and future work intentions.

BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

Related work

A plethora of approaches to studying AI tool use and a wide range of theoretical perspectives exist. The review of Jain et al. [11] analyzed the relationship between AI and consumer behavior and identified five clusters pointing to the consumer behavior research themes: impact of AI on consumer behavior, decision-making with AI, adoption of AI technologies, acceptance and trust in AI, and consumer perceptions of AI.

Paul et al. [18] analyzed the relationship between ChatGPT and consumer behavior, aiming to identify benefits, pitfalls, and research directions. Among the main benefits, they mentioned enhanced engagement, communication practice, cost-effectiveness, improved services, and better understanding of consumer behavior. Among the pitfalls, they drew attention to ethical aspects, dependence, misinformation, and security.

The study of Yue et al. [25] took a consumption value theory approach to analyze the continuation intention of a ChatGPT-driven chatbot. They found that the emotional and epistemic values were the main drivers of the behavioral intention, followed by functional and social values.

Based on thematic analysis, Shoufan [22] explored the use of ChatGPT by computer engineering students and found that it was positively perceived because it is easy to use, interesting, motivating, and useful for learning. On the other hand, students noticed that it may provide inaccurate answers, favor malicious use, and may lead to laziness in learning.

A second strand of the literature focuses explicitly on barriers, inhibitors, and ethical concerns that may discourage or moderate the use of ChatGPT in higher education. Adeshola and Adepoju [2] reviewed both the opportunities and the challenges of ChatGPT in education and highlighted issues such as biased outputs, inaccurate information, lack of transparency, and the potential erosion of critical thinking skills. In a similar vein,

Valova et al. [24] surveyed students on their perception of ChatGPT and reported that, while many appreciated its usefulness, a non-negligible proportion expressed reservations regarding the reliability of the answers, fears of becoming dependent on the tool, and uncertainty about whether its use was permitted by their teachers. These results suggest that, alongside the positive drivers of adoption, a set of cognitive, ethical, and institutional inhibitors shapes how students engage with ChatGPT.

A related question is what role university professors should play in this context. Several authors have argued that educators are key in shaping productive patterns of AI use. Paul et al. [18] emphasized the need for clear codes of conduct and for an explicit discussion of ethical issues in

the classroom, while Adeshola and Adepoju [2] called for integrating ChatGPT into well-designed learning activities, where students are guided to verify, refine, and critique AI-generated content rather than to accept it as a finished product. Shoufan's [22] thematic analysis pointed in the same direction: students themselves expect their teachers to provide guidance on appropriate use, to design assignments that cannot be trivially solved by ChatGPT alone, and to model responsible engagement with AI tools. Taken together, these studies suggest that the perceived value of ChatGPT – and therefore the intention to keep using it – is co-shaped by both the intrinsic features of the tool and the institutional framing in which students encounter it.

Research model and measures

The research model is operationalized as an MIMIC (Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes) model with a single latent variable (focal construct) that connects formative-causal indicators (causes) with reflective indicators (effects) [12]. Consumption values were conceptualized as formative-causal indicators. In addition, three measures of behavioral intention to continue using ChatGPT were used as reflective indicators.

In this work, six variables were considered that closely follow four types of consumption values. Three variables were conceptualized as functional values: perceived ease of use (FV1), perceived output quality (FV2), and perceived usefulness (FV3). It is expected that a tool that is easy to use, provides good quality responses, and increases the effectiveness of task performance will positively influence the decision to continue using it.

Emotional value (EV) has been conceptualized as perceived attractiveness [9], and social value (SV) as perceived social influence. Conditional value (CV) has been conceptualized as the foreseen impact of AI tools in education. The variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables

Variable	Statement
FV1	My interaction with ChatGPT is clear and understandable
FV2	ChatGPT's responses meet the standards I need to achieve
FV3	ChatGPT increases my productivity
SV	People who are important to me think that I should use ChatGPT
EV	Using ChatGPT is attractive
CV	AI tools will play an important role in education
BI1	I intend to continue using ChatGPT in the future
BI2	I will frequently use ChatGPT for my tasks
BI3	I plan to use ChatGPT whenever it is appropriate

Model validation criteria

A measurement model describes the causal relationships between a latent variable and its measures. In formative measurement, the direction is from formative indicators to the construct. Unlike reflective measurement, indicators may freely correlate and do not have an error term [4, 5, 6].

Model validation criteria are coverage of the domain of content, the sign and significance of the coefficient measuring the relation of the formative construct with its indicators (γ -coefficients), and the significance of the influence of the focal construct on effect variables (λ -coefficients) [4, 6].

The measurement model of the reflective part should have convergent validity. Convergent validity was checked by examining composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), according to the recommendations from the literature [8].

An acceptable fit of the model with the data is also required, so the following goodness-of-fit indices were used [8, 10]: chi-square (χ^2), normed chi-square (χ^2/df), significance (p), comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The model has been estimated with LISREL 9.3 for Windows [16].

EMPIRICAL STUDY

Sample and data analysis

A total of 209 students from two faculties of the University of Craiova participated in the study. The evaluation instrument was administered between November 2025 and April 2026. The students were asked to answer some general questions, such as gender, enrollment (university, faculty, year of study), and AI tools used, and then to evaluate items on a 5-point Likert scale.

Three observations were eliminated during data screening, so the working sample had 206 observations (125 male and 81 female). The skewness and kurtosis of variables have been examined; all skewness values were within the interval (-1, +1) and all kurtosis values within the interval (-1, +1.6), thus showing moderate deviations from normality [8].

The descriptive statistics, λ -coefficients (factor loadings measuring the influence of the focal construct on the outcome variables, γ -coefficients, and their significance (p) are presented in Table 2.

The mean values of the output quality and social influence are below the neutral value of 3.00. The perceived impact of AI tools in education, ease of use, and usefulness of ChatGPT have the largest mean values.

As regards the AI tools used, 180 students (87.38%) mentioned ChatGPT, 112 (54.37%) Gemini, 55 (26.70%) Claude, and 30 (14.56%) DeepSeek. From the total of 206 students, 88 (42.72%) also mentioned other AI tools, such as Copilot, Cursor, Meta AI, Grok, Perplexity, and various AI editors.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and loadings (N=206)

Value	M	SD	λ	γ	p
FV1	3.52	0.74		0.15	0.002
FV2	2.74	0.81		0.10	0.051
FV3	3.34	0.90		0.37	0.000
SV	2.70	0.85		0.10	0.055
EV	3.10	0.88		0.32	0.000
CV	3.65	0.67		0.21	0.000
BI1	3.45	0.81	0.87		0.000
BI2	3.16	0.82	0.85		0.000
BI3	3.35	0.82	0.77		

Model estimation results

The focal construct has good convergent validity, with a CR of 0.87 and an AVE of 0.691, both above the thresholds of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. Collinearity was checked by calculating VIF values, which range from 1.09 to 1.589, below the recommended threshold of 3.

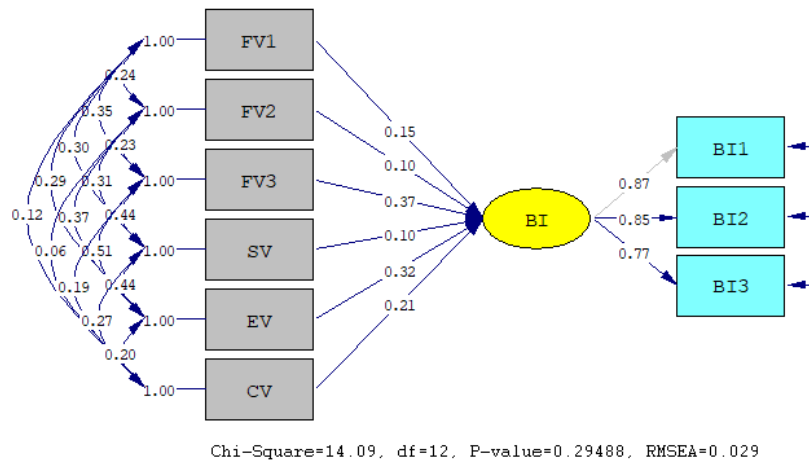


Figure 1. Model estimation results (N=206)

The model estimation results are presented in Figure 1. The nonsignificant p-value and the goodness-of-fit indices indicate an excellent fit of the model with the data: $\chi^2=14.09$, $DF=12$, $p=0.2949$, $\chi^2/DF=1.17$, $CFI=0.97$, $GFI=0.98$, $SRMR=0.017$, $RMSEA=0.029$.

The model explains 72% of the variance in the focal

construct. The error variance of BI is only 0.28, which shows an acceptable coverage of the domain of content.

Two formative indicators are marginally significant: FV2 ($\gamma = 0.10$, $p=0.051$) and SV ($\gamma = 0.10$, $p=0.055$). FV1 is significant at the $p<0.01$ level, and the remaining indicators (FV3, EV, and CV) are significant at the $p < 0.001$ level. The indicators making the highest contribution to the

continuance intention are perceived usefulness FV3 ($\gamma = 0.37$, $p=0.000$) and perceived attractiveness EV ($\gamma = 0.32$, $p=0.000$), followed by the perceived role of AI tools in education CV ($\gamma = 0.21$, $p=0.000$) and perceived ease of use FV1 ($\gamma = 0.15$, $p=0.002$). The correlations between indicators are not too high, below the recommended threshold value [6].

Gender analysis

To see if there are gender differences, a comparison of mean values between male and female students has been carried out, which is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Gender differences (N=206)

Variables	Male (N=125)		Female (N=81)		Diff.
	M	SD	M	SD	
FV1	3.67	0.63	3.28	0.84	0.39
FV2	2.83	0.79	2.59	0.82	0.24
FV3	3.53	0.71	3.05	1.07	0.48
SV	2.76	0.79	2.61	0.93	0.15
EV	3.14	0.82	3.04	0.96	0.10
CV	3.62	0.60	3.68	0.76	-0.06
BI1	3.58	0.84	3.24	0.82	0.34
BI2	3.27	0.84	2.98	0.82	0.29
BI3	3.45	0.84	3.19	0.82	0.26

Overall, with one exception, female students scored lower than male students. The differences are higher for the functional values, with female students finding ChatGPT less easy to use, less accurate, and less useful.

A one-way ANOVA (1,204) shows that only for functional values and continuance intention, the differences are statistically significant: FV1 ($F=14.241$, $p=0.000$, $\eta^2=0.065$), FV2 ($F=4.386$, $p=0.038$, $\eta^2=0.021$), FV3 ($F=14.823$, $p=0.000$, $\eta^2=0.068$), BI1 ($F=9.647$, $p=0.002$, $\eta^2=0.045$), BI2 ($F=6.651$, $p=0.011$, $\eta^2=0.032$), and BI3 ($F=5.125$, $p=0.025$, $\eta^2=0.025$).

To see whether consumption values are related to gender, the model has been tested on each sample. The γ -coefficients and their significance for each gender are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Significance of γ -coefficients

Variables	Male (N=125)	Female (N=81)
FV1	0.14 ($p=.024$)	n.s.
FV2	0.23 ($p=.001$)	n.s.
FV3	0.33 ($p=.000$)	0.46 ($p=.000$)
SV	n.s.	0.23 ($p=.011$)
EV	0.39 ($p=.000$)	0.22 ($p=.033$)
CV	0.30 ($p=.000$)	0.13 ($p=.089$)

The model testing results showed a good fit for each sample. For the male students, GOF indices were: $\chi^2=15.29$, $DF=12$, $p=0.2260$, $\chi^2/DF=1.27$, $CFI=0.990$, $GFI=0.973$, $SRMR=0.030$, $RMSEA=0.047$. The model explained 74.60% of the variance in behavioral intention.

For the female students, GOF indices were: $\chi^2=16.13$, $DF=12$, $p=0.1853$, $\chi^2/DF=1.34$, $CFI=0.988$, $GFI=0.973$,

$SRMR=0.029$, $RMSEA=0.066$. The model explained 72.10% of the variance in behavioral intention. For male students, emotional value has the highest contribution, followed by usefulness value and conditional value. Social value does not significantly influence the decision to continue using ChatGPT. For female students, the usefulness value has the highest contribution, followed by the social and emotional values. Ease of use and output quality were not significant.

Faculty analysis

To see if there are differences between students enrolled in computing programs (FC) and economics (FEA), a comparison of mean values has been carried out, which is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Faculty differences (N=206)

Variables	FC (N=154)		FEA (N=52)		Diff.
	M	SD	M	SD	
FV1	3.59	0.63	3.25	1.03	0.34
FV2	2.84	0.79	2.42	0.80	0.41
FV3	3.47	0.72	2.92	1.23	0.55
SV	2.80	0.80	2.40	0.93	0.39
EV	3.17	0.78	2.92	1.06	0.25
CV	3.61	0.58	3.71	0.91	-0.10
BI1	3.55	0.60	3.15	1.19	0.39
BI2	3.28	0.73	2.77	0.98	0.51
BI3	3.39	0.71	3.19	1.12	0.20

Except for one variable, students enrolled in computer science programs scored higher. The differences are higher for the functional and social values. The mean values scored by FEA students are low, below the neutral value of 3.00, for the perceived output quality, usefulness, social influence, and enjoyment.

A one-way ANOVA (1,204) shows that the differences between the two samples are statistically significant for the functional values, the social value, and two of the three continuance intention indicators: FV1 ($F=9.504$, $p=0.002$, $\eta^2=0.045$), FV2 ($F=10.679$, $p=0.001$, $\eta^2=0.050$), FV3 ($F=15.988$, $p=0.000$, $\eta^2=0.073$), SV ($F=8.629$, $p=0.004$, $\eta^2=0.041$), BI1 ($F=9.580$, $p=0.002$, $\eta^2=0.045$), and BI2 ($F=16.702$, $p=0.000$, $\eta^2=0.076$), while the differences for EV ($F=2.936$, $p=0.088$), CV ($F=0.870$, $p=0.352$), and BI3 ($F=2.406$, $p=0.122$) are not statistically significant.

Given the too small number of FEA students, the MIMIC model has not been tested.

Discussion

This work contributes to a MIMIC model addressing the choice to continue using ChatGPT from a consumption values perspective. The main advantage of this approach is an instrument with a small set of indicators, which could be applied with a reasonable effort to assess and compare various AI tools that are used for educational purposes.

The results of this study show that the main reasons why university students intend to continue using ChatGPT are its pragmatic value, hedonic value, and conditional value, the latter being measured by the future role played by AI

tools in education. In the meantime, the relatively low mean values do not show high enthusiasm, which may be explained by both a critical assessment of its qualities and the use of other AI tools.

Gender analysis revealed two things. First, female students scored lower on almost all variables. Significant differences have been found for the pragmatic value and the behavioral intention to continue using ChatGPT.

Second, for male students, perceived enjoyment, perceived usefulness, and perceived impact are the most important consumption values, whereas social value is not significant. Female students mainly praised the usefulness of ChatGPT, followed by social and emotional value. On the contrary, ease of use and output quality were not significant, which is consistent with gender differences in the mean values: female students found ChatGPT less easy to use and less accurate.

The analysis of the mean values scored by students from the two faculties shows a sharp difference, with computer science students having a higher perception of almost all consumption values. This is explained by the deeper understanding of AI tools and the frequent use of ChatGPT for assistance in programming and other learning tasks.

This work has implications for both researchers and educators. For researchers, it helps to better understand why university students are using ChatGPT. For educators, it shows that students are aware of the role AI tools will play in education and should motivate them to better integrate these tools into the teaching process.

The relatively low mean values observed for output quality ($FV2=2.74$) and social influence ($SV=2.70$) suggest that, alongside the positive drivers identified by the model, several barriers and sources of inhibition are at work. The moderate score on output quality is consistent with concerns reported in the literature about answer accuracy and hallucinations [18, 22].

The low mean value of social influence indicates that students do not perceive a strong normative pressure from peers or teachers to adopt ChatGPT. The low contribution (marginally significant) of social value shows that this consumption value is less relevant for the choice of using ChatGPT and is consistent with the findings of Foroughi et al. [7].

This may reflect uncertainty of some students about whether the use of the tool is encouraged, tolerated, or discouraged in their academic environment. The differences between faculties reinforce this reading: economics students scored substantially lower than computer science students on the functional values, which is consistent with a smaller exposure to AI tools and possibly a lower confidence in evaluating the quality of AI-generated outputs. It may also reflect a belief that most of the people who are important for a student are using ChatGPT, which is likely to be the case for computer science students.

These findings translate into several concrete actions for professors. In the context of educational changes, the role of educators becomes pivotal: by setting transparent guidelines, integrating AI tools into the teaching process,

and supporting the development of AI literacy, professors can help to transform initial enthusiasm into a sustainable and responsible use [2]. Understanding what drives students toward continuing to use ChatGPT – and what holds them back – is therefore a precondition for designing such pedagogical responses.

First, transparent policies on the acceptable use of ChatGPT in coursework can reduce uncertainty and decrease the inhibition associated with potential academic misconduct. Second, dedicated activities aimed at developing AI literacy – including prompt formulation, critical evaluation of responses, source checking, and recognition of hallucinations – can directly address the perceived limitations in output quality. Third, the marked gender and faculty differences suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective: students with less prior exposure to programming and AI may benefit from targeted, discipline-specific introductions rather than from general guidelines alone. Finally, given the importance of conditional value, educators have an interest in articulating explicitly how AI tools fit into the future of their respective disciplines, which may help to convert a passive acknowledgement of their growing role into an active and informed use.

There are several limitations to this exploratory study. First, the sample is a convenience sample coming from a single Romanian university, with an imbalance between computing and economics students. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to Romanian students at large. Second, the number of formative indicators is relatively small.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The consumption values theory brings a useful perspective, helping to better understand the contribution of consumer values to the behavioral intention to use ChatGPT by university students.

Although the results are based on a small set of indicators, representing four categories of consumption values, the model explains 72% of the variance in the behavioral intention, a reasonable domain coverage for an exploratory study, and a promising starting point for future studies.

From a practical perspective, the results indicate that increasing the perceived value of ChatGPT is not only a matter of improving the technology itself, but also of how university professors frame, regulate, and integrate it within the learning process. By offering clear rules of engagement, by addressing the barriers related to output quality and ethical concerns, and by adapting their interventions to the specific profile of each cohort, educators can lower the inhibitions associated with AI use and help students to develop a more reflective and productive relationship with these tools.

Future research directions should increase the number of indicators so as to get better coverage of the perceived value of ChatGPT. Another concern is to test the model on other samples and analyze the differences between students enrolled in different program studies. Since the collected data also include the AI tools used by each respondent, a

natural extension is to examine whether students from different study programs rely on different AI tools and why.

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