

# Virtual Events and Use of Technology

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## ABSTRACT

This research brings the relationships of human and technology interactions to the forefront in the delivery of an event and focuses upon the description of the various elements and their relationships within the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model. An online survey method was used to investigate the applicability of the model amongst 276 respondents and examine relationships between various existing UTAUT variables with the addition of two variables (hedonic motivations and anxiety). The results of this study support the model and indicated that performance expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence are strong determinants of the use of virtual live events. These findings substantiate earlier research findings that show the relevance of the social context in technology adoption. This study is among the first to use the UTAUT model in the context of event technology and entertainment, especially in the developing country context.

## KEYWORDS

Anxiety, Behaviour Intention, Events, Hedonic Motivations, Social Influence

## INTRODUCTION

The recent technology infusion has caused participation in various virtual events, and with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), the increase in the number of such events is much more visible. With the introduction of lockdown, and people not knowing what to do, virtual events have provided good distractions. They have also paved the way for medical care to be accessible for all and made working from home possible with efficiency. (Shah et al., 2020)

There are many definitions of virtual events, but it here it is explained as a platform that allows a person to get an experience of an event without gathering in person, but online. “*Virtual events are not the same as virtual worlds; they are not web conferencing, but are a result of the new virtual event platforms and software tools that have become available*” (Pearlman & Gates, 2010). Virtual events are dependent on information technology.

With a growing number of marketers using virtual events, there has been an increase in the number of start-ups and platforms specifically designed to meet the end-to-end needs of an event organiser. There are lower entry barriers for companies that want to venture into the field of online event management and promotion (Hall, 2020).

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Due to the onset of Internet technologies, audiences can now use technology to get entertained anywhere and everywhere. It has created a world that connects us and disconnects us from reality together (Hirshberg, 2013).

However, virtual events are still nascent with a vast potential to grow much more prominent in the post-pandemic world. This will also allow live events to convert themselves to a hybrid event, allowing people to stream/attend an event from all across the world.

Understanding the issues relating to acceptance and use of virtual events will assist inappropriate planning and support to encompass technological, social, and individual factors in a country such as India. However, the lack of theoretical or conceptual frameworks in technology and events has made it difficult for event experts to measure these factors' impact on online events successfully. With the advent of virtual events technology, it has become essential to understand the way technology is being adopted and merged with industry and society.

Adoption and diffusion of technology have been studied in great detail lately by researchers in the information systems areas such as e-learning (Masrom, 2007), mobile banking, wireless internet (Lu, et al., 2003), e-commerce (Pavlou, 2003), online banking (Pikkarainen, et al., 2004), course management software (Marchewka & Kostiwa, 2007), social media (Salim, 2012), health care (Holden & Karsh, 2010), et al., and, it is imperative to study the same in the area of virtual events.

Technology acceptance can be studied at two levels: the organisational level and the individual level. Understanding the actual usage of technology is addressed in various models introduced and tested (e.g., the technology acceptance model or TAM; the theory of planned behavior or TPB) over the last three decades. To understand the acceptance and use of Information Technology (IT), (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003) synthesized various models into the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT). UTAUT is a unique combination of concepts and frameworks to include - Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior, 1980), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), Motivational Model (MM) (Vallerand, 1997), and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI) (Rogers, 2002).

Technology acceptance is defined as "an individual's psychological state about his or her voluntary or intended use of a particular technology" (Dillon & Morris, 1998). Therefore, in this paper, UTAUT is used to study the acceptance of events technology. The research examined UTAUT in a marketing communication setting, investigating the factors affecting the audience's acceptance of virtual live events.

## **The Role of Events in Marketing and Communications**

Over the decades, events have grown from mere products to strategic marketing tools to create brand awareness. "*Events can be anything that is planned by an organization to attract and satisfy customers, and that is out of the ordinary*" (Dimanche, 2008). Events allow organisers to gain consumer attention by "*linking a brand and communication message with the event.*" This can be done either through event sponsorship or event marketing (Weihe, et al., 2006).

"Event marketing" can either mean the "marketing of events" or "marketing with events." In this case, we discuss the latter (Sneath, et al., 2005). Event marketing is done when a company/brand acts as an organiser for an event (Weihe, et al., 2006). Event sponsorship is "*the underwriting of a special event to support corporate objectives by enhancing corporate image, increasing awareness of brands, or directly stimulating sales of products and services*" (Javalgi, et al., 1994).

Multiple researchers have attempted to understand the impact of consumers' participation in events towards company brands. A few studies have shown that events have a weak impact on the attitude of the attendees towards a brand, as the prior brand image influences the post-event brand image (Grohs, et al., 2004). Drenchner (2004) surmised that a negative factor of event evaluation would negatively impact a brand's image, but he could not obtain clear results

on how positive factors will affect a brand's image. The attitude towards an event can directly impact a brand's image and an indirect impact where communication activities act as a mediator (Weihe, et al., 2006).

Events can create unique experiences for consumers outside of their normal activities. The events work well within an experience economy (Dimanche, 2008). *"The experience economy framework mainly involves marketing actions of creating experiences that result in positive memories"* (Oh, et al., 2007).

## Digital Growth in Developing Countries

There has been a shift from "industrial modernity to digital modernity." The rise of digital technology and automation has allowed developing countries to rise from low-income countries to middle/high-income countries (Nagano, 2018).

The digital economy in India has grown a great deal in recent times, highlighting India as one of the major digital leaders. India saw large-scale adoption of technology between 2013 and 2018, which led to 560 million Internet subscriptions, 294 million social media users, 200 million WhatsApp subscribers, and 176.8 million e-commerce subscribers. India also saw an increase in digital payments, which rose to \$24.3 US billion as of December 2018 (Union Minister for Electronics & Information Technology, 2019). The Indian government has already created unique biometric identities for citizens using Aadhar, a unique identification number that can be obtained by residents or passport holders of India based on their biometric and demographic data, and they have brought 10 million businesses to one common digital platform via the indirect goods and service tax (GST). However, the digital adoption among businesses across industries has been uneven. One can see a change in the digital environment where new ecosystems have entered and used to provide a better consumer-producer interaction in agriculture, retail, logistics, and others (Kaka, et al., 2019).

The trends that are influencing digital media consumption are: (1) The use of smartphones, which have turned into personal media devices for all, (2) the shift to short-form content, (3) smartphone penetration, which has equaled TV/ Satellite reach, (4) the fact that advertisers have started spending more on digital platforms as compared to traditional platforms, and (5) the fact that traditional media is merging with digital media to cater to the audience. These trends make it easier for people to create and distribute content easily and at a much lower cost (Srinivasa & Vora, 2016).

The turn of the new decade saw the world come to a standstill due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although personal and professional lives were severely affected, this pandemic was a blessing in disguise for digital organisations. Social distancing and stay-at-home regulations saw people embrace the internet to meet their needs. Healthcare, education, and entertainment, in general, have had to adapt to this sudden change in lifestyles. This quick rise in the use of the internet has possibly brought with it the sixth segment of the Internet evolution. This segment will be dominated by the rise in digital usage and the purposes of Internet usage. Kantar's ICUBE™ research, which has tracked digital usage and adoption trends in India for the last 20 years, suggests a rapid increase in Internet users over the next five years. This means that the COVID-19 pandemic may carve the path towards a more substantial Internet user base in the country. It is estimated that India will have 900 million Internet users by 2025. The rural population, the education sector, and women are all expected to benefit from the Internet evolution. As India moves towards a more digital approach, users will use services that were not used earlier. The internet is slowly becoming a necessity beyond privilege, and more Indians will soon harness the ever-growing Internet services (Kantar Technology Team, 2020).

The telecom industry is preparing for the arrival of 5G by strengthening its 4G infrastructure. India must have affordable 5G smartphones to have a seamless adoption of 5G. This will also lead to more offerings in the media and entertainment industry, which will help deal with consumers' preferences more efficiently (Deloitte India, 2019).

## World of Events

Events have been a significant part of our history, be it celebrations, religious events, community events, or revolution events (Getz & Page, 2016). The technological advancements post-World War II led to a rise in the numbers of the middle class. People had more dispensable income along with more leisure time on their hands, which resulted in a rise in the number of events throughout the world (locally, regionally, and nationally) and the types of events (festivals, sports, music, food, culture, etc.) (Backman, 2018).

There has been an increase in the number of festivals and events in the twenty-first century. People are ready to travel large distances to attend a single festival or event. Festivals and events help promote the destination and their culture. Even the locals are interested in showcasing their culture to the tourists (Yeoman, 2013). The events and festivals have now become a part of the economy, which is dependent on experience and leisure consumption daily (Yeoman, et al., 2012). They offer people a feeling of belonging socially, culturally, and geographically by answering to the community's needs (Popescu & Corbos, 2012). Depending on the goals and features, events can be divided into seven types: Cultural Celebrations, Sports Competitions, Private events, Art/Entertainment, Business/Trade events, Recreational events, and Political/State events. The size and scope of events can be categorised as mega-events, hallmark events, regional events, and local events (Getz, 2008).

Various “pull” and “push” factors determine the reasons why people attend events (Hixson, et al., 2011). *“Push factors have been conceptualized as motivational factors or needs that arise due to a disequilibrium or tension in the motivational system. That is, as factors that motivate or create a desire to travel. Pull factors, in contrast to push factors, have been conceptualised as relating to the features, attractions, or attributes of the destination itself”* (Kim, et al., 2003). It is imperative to understand such factors in a virtual setup to understand what motivates the consumers to participate in the event and take in the whole experience. According to research by Crompton and McKay (1997), event motivators can be divided into six different areas: *“cultural exploration, novelty/regression, recover equilibrium (rest/relaxation/escape), known group socialization, external interaction/socialization, and family togetherness (enhancing kinship relationships).”*

Motivations for attending events vary depending on the type of event and the type of attendees. For example, young people will attend wine festivals to be together with friends and enjoy the entertainment and the festive atmosphere, compared to the older visitors, who are looking for thrills and excitement (Dodd, et al., 2006).

The coronavirus pandemic has very significantly affected the event industry. Event experiences are no longer reaching consumers in a physically tangible way (Sharma, 2020). According to the Events and Entertainment Association, 10 million out of 60 million employees of the Indian industry have been directly impacted, and the losses for the first two months of lockdown were measured to be around Rs 3,000 crores (30,000,000 Indian Rupees or USD 407,569.35) (PTI, 2020). The industry has seen a transition in the events from physical to digital in the given time. Some examples form large multinational corporations (MNC's) (e.g., Facebook and IBM) who have shifted their conference to a virtual platform (Jain, 2020).

## Virtual Events

### *To Understand Virtual Events, One Must Understand the World of Virtual Reality*

While talking about events, *“Virtual reality involves experiencing an event through the use of special cameras that offer 360 degrees, and it gives a realistic perspective of what is being viewed, very similar to attending in-person”* (Velev, et al., 2019). It helps create a full 3-D virtual representation of events using multiple video streams (Rander, et al., 1997).

These environments created by virtual reality can be called “Virtual Worlds” (Pearlman & Gates, 2010). A virtual world can be broadly defined as *“a place described by words or projected through pictures which create a space in the imagination, real enough that you can feel you are inside of it”*

(Damer, 2008). Scholars agree on a few dimensions, which help differentiate between virtual and non-virtual worlds. These dimensions are game space, persistence, social nature, and nature (commercial or open-source). Virtual worlds are different from persistent game spaces because they allow for a neutral space with social equality where people can communicate, create, exchange ideas, goods, and services (Pearlman & Gates, 2010).

*“Virtual events are not the same as virtual worlds; they are not web conferencing, but are a result of the new virtual event platforms and software tools that have become available”* (Pearlman & Gates, 2010). A virtual event allows an individual to experience the event online without gathering in person (Cvent, 2020). These events can be of any nature, such as conferences, live streams, and so on (West, 2020). Virtual events offer many advantages for all the parties involved. Event organisers can see an increase in the number of attendees worldwide (West, 2020); virtual events help cut costs while increasing revenues, and they help organisers track event attendance. They also help extend a company’s brand while broadening its communities.

For attendees, virtual events allow for free access from remote locations, and they are not controlled by the boundaries of their geographical location (Pearlman & Gates, 2010), which also reduces travelling costs (Cvent, 2020). Since the individuals cannot see one another in significant events, it is complicated to form biases against people in terms of race, gender, or age, which leads to less discrimination among the attendees and increased comfort (Rheingold, 2008). Since the onset of COVID-19, people have been quarantined at home. Virtual events allow them to visit and explore an event without the fear of contracting the deadly disease. With the robust technology and advancements, walking through a virtual world has become effortless and enjoyable (EE News Desk, 2020).

Virtual events do have their drawbacks. The lack of interaction among members in terms of face-to-face communication can lead to misunderstandings because a person cannot communicate via body language or facial expressions. The organiser will never be sure if the message has been appropriately received by the attendee or not. They will also not have consistent feedback due to the unpredictability of the response (Rheingold, 2008).

Virtual events can be classified into virtual conferences and summits, webcast events, webinars, e-learning events, podcasts, online radio, live and virtual hybrid events, and live streaming (Evans, 2020). *“A hybrid event is an event that takes place in a physical venue, while also being attended by a live and interactive audience online”* (Angage, 2019). An industry professional must know how and when to use the virtual and in-person methods for events to maximise return on investment. It can result in a hybrid event, which will act as a platform for connecting people and information to meet business needs (Pearlman & Gates, 2010).

Numerous studies have been done to understand the intention of teenage consumers who purchase virtual goods and services in virtual worlds (Gables, 2020). The same has also been discussed to understand the purchase intentions (Guo & Barnes, 2009) and purchasing behaviours as they relate to virtual games, such as the World of Warcraft (Gui & Barnes, 2012). While most of the above studies focused on the youth market, some research has been done on the older generation and their intention to purchase during online shopping by understanding the drivers and barriers affecting them (Lian & Yen, 2014).

The UTAUT model focuses on explaining the influence of individual differences in the use of technology (Marchewka & Kostiwa, 2007). The model’s construct includes four measurable concepts: Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, and Facilitating Condition, and four key moderators of the model: gender, age, experience, and voluntariness of use (Puspitasari, et al., 2019). *“UTAUT model condenses 32 variables from eight existing models into four main effects and four immediate factors”* (Kocaleva, et al., 2014). Therefore, in this paper, UTAUT is used to study the acceptance of events technology. The research examined UTAUT in a marketing communication setting, investigating the factors affecting the audience’s acceptance of virtual live events.

The four concepts, as discussed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), are:

1. **Performance Expectancy (PE):** The degree to which the user believes that the use of the system would help them satisfy their job-related objectives.
2. **Effort Expectancy (EE) or the Perceived Ease of Use (PU):** The degree of ease related to system usage.
3. **Social Influence (SI):** The degree of user perception regarding the effect of others in his/her decision to use the system.
4. **Facilitating Conditions (FC):** The degree to which the user believes that appropriate infrastructure supports their Internet usage level.

The above concepts applied to virtual events was adapted as follows.

### **Performance Expectancy**

- Attending virtual live events provides the same level of satisfaction as live events.
- I can be a part of the virtual live event from any place.
- In my view, virtual live events provide value for the money.
- According to me, virtual live events save travel time.

### **Effort Expectancy**

- Learning to operate the virtual live events platform was easy for me.
- Interaction with virtual live platforms to attend events comes naturally to me.
- Overall, the virtual live events platform is easy to use.
- I rarely become confused when I use the virtual live events platform.
- I rarely make errors when using the technology for virtual live events.
- I am rarely frustrated using the virtual platform to attend live events.

### **Social Influence**

- People who influence my behaviour think I should attend virtual live events.
- People who are important to me think I should attend virtual live events.
- My close friends think I should attend virtual live events.
- My peers think I should attend virtual live events.
- People whose opinions I value prefer that I attend virtual live events.

### **Facilitating Conditions**

- I have the resources that are required to attend a virtual live event.
- I have the knowledge and the skills to connect with a virtual platform to attend live events.
- Clear instruction was available to facilitate attending virtual live event.
- Guidance and assistance helped to overcome system difficulties.

Two additional factors have been added in the model for the second part of the research within this model. They are: Hedonic Motivations and Anxiety. These two factors directly impact the behavioural intentions of an individual. Hedonic motivations are defined as “*the willingness to initiate behaviours that enhance the positive experience (pleasant or good) and behaviours that decrease negative experience*” (Kaczmarek, 2017). Since an attendee will use the technology at will, hedonic motivations are important in this paper’s context because it is important to understand if the consumer/ attendees are enjoying their experience of using the technology. Similarly, anxiety, defined as “*A natural reaction of the human body to stress; in other words, it is a kind of feeling of fear or concern*”

about the future” (Dönmez-Turan & Kır, 2019), is also important, because the anxiousness of a user towards technology can lead to non-acceptance, which hinders adaptability of the technology, which will directly impact the virtual event industry at large.

The conceptual framework for this research with two aspects added is shown in Figure 1. The variables outside the model boxes indicate the variables additionally to be tested.

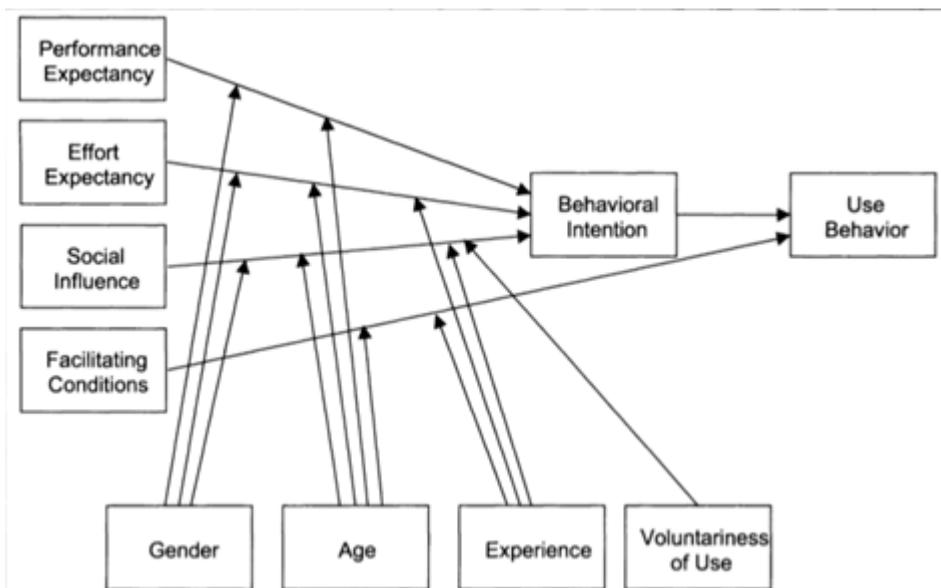
The main research objective is to recognize the model fit to the UTAUT model. The research also focuses on understanding the role and relationship for two additional variables added to the model: Hedonic Motivations and Anxiety.

The hypotheses based on the UTAUT model in the context of the virtual live events are shown below.

## Hypotheses

- H1:** Performance expectancy positively influences behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.
- H2:** Effort expectancy positively influences the behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.
- H3:** Social influence positively influences behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.
- H4:** Facilitating conditions positively influence the use of attending virtual live events.
- H5:** There will be a significant difference between male respondents and female respondents in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.
- H6:** There will be a significant difference among respondents between ages 17-19 years, 20-22 years, 23-25 years, and 26 years and above in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.
- H7:** There will be a significant difference among respondents based on social media exposure of 0-2 hours, 2-5 hours, and 5-7 hours per day in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework for research (model figure with two aspects added)



**H8:** Performance expectancy positively predicts behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.

**H9:** Effort expectancy positively predicts behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.

**H10:** Social influence positively predicts behavioural intention to attend virtual events.

**H11:** Facilitating conditions positively predict use behaviour.

**H12:** Hedonic Motivations positively predicts behavioural intention.

**H13:** Anxiety positively predicts behavioural intention.

**H14:** Attitude toward using technology positively predicts use behaviour.

**H15:** Behavioural Intention positively predicts use behavioural.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Proposed Model

This research applied the UTAUT model proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), which included four constructs as the antecedent variables that determined the usage behaviour (Effort Expectancy, Performance Expectancy, Facilitating Conditions, and the Social Influence). Based on the literature review, two factors, viz Hedonic Motivations, and Anxiety, were added to directly impact an individual's behavioral intentions to attend virtual live events.

### Instrument Development and Data Collection

A questionnaire based on the current UTAUT literature was created and the variables used for the study were validated from earlier studies (Venkatesh et al. (2003). For each construct, at least three items were included (Hayduk & Littvay, 2012). A pre-test was conducted with 25 respondents to determine vagueness related to the tested variable and the use of words/language, wording, or measurement. The questionnaire was also pilot-tested to determine internal consistency.

Due to COVID 19 pandemic, a non-probability sampling technique was used to create an online survey to reach out to participants in India using virtual live events through snowball sampling. All the participants were from the urban population, but gender was not controlled. Based on event type classification (Backman, 2018), which comprises festivals, art, sports, art, music, food, culture, etc., the present research includes virtual live events for art, culture, and music. Only virtual live events in three categories are included in the study design in the absence of events in other categories and the absence of hybrid events due to lockdown.

Out of 505 respondents across India contacted to participate in the research study, 360 respondents (response rate 71%) participated, and only 276 responded had attended a virtual live event. Thus, 276 responses were further evaluated for applying the UTAUT model. A 5-point Likert-type scale with the endpoints being "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" were adapted from scales measuring variables in Venkatesh, et al. (2003).

A descriptive analysis of the demographic information (age and gender) and internet use showed that the majority of the respondents spent over 2 to 5 hours a day on the internet. The respondents' ages varied from 17 to 35 years, and over half of the respondents (58%) were female. The platform used by the respondents to attend live events was Google Meet (55%), Zoom (32%), and Microsoft Teams (13%).

### Measures

Reliability analysis ensured the internal validity and consistency of the items used for each variable. Cronbach's alpha reliability scores were all over 0.78, which is considered very good (Nunnally, 1978).

### Methods

Structural Equation Modelling was used to confirm the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). T-test was used to study whether there was a difference between male

and female respondents in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.

An F-test was used to study whether respondents' ages (17-19 years, 20-22 years, 23-25 years, and 26 years and above), in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.

An F-test was used to study the duration of respondents' exposure (0-2 hours, 2-5 hours, and 5-7 hours) in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.

A regression analysis was performed to ascertain whether Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Hedonic Motivations, and Anxiety significantly predicted Behavioural Intention. A regression analysis was also employed to study whether Behavioural Intention and Attitude towards use of technology significantly predicted user behaviour.

A unified theory of acceptance and use of technology model is shown in Figure 2.

Table 1 shows the fit measures of models. Fit measures CFI, GFI, TLI, and NFI had values above or close to the cut-off limit of 0.90. The model CFI is 0.993, GFI is 0.983, NFI is 0.999, and TLI is 0.973. This means that all other measures are above 0.90 and the model is fit.

Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) is attempting to adjust the GFI for the complexity of the model. AGFI is 0.911, which is above 0.90, indicating that the model is perfect. The relative fit index (RFI) is 0.973 and the incremental fit index (IFI) is 0.993, which is above 0.90, indicating the model is perfect.

Figure 2. Model showing unified theory of acceptance and use of technology

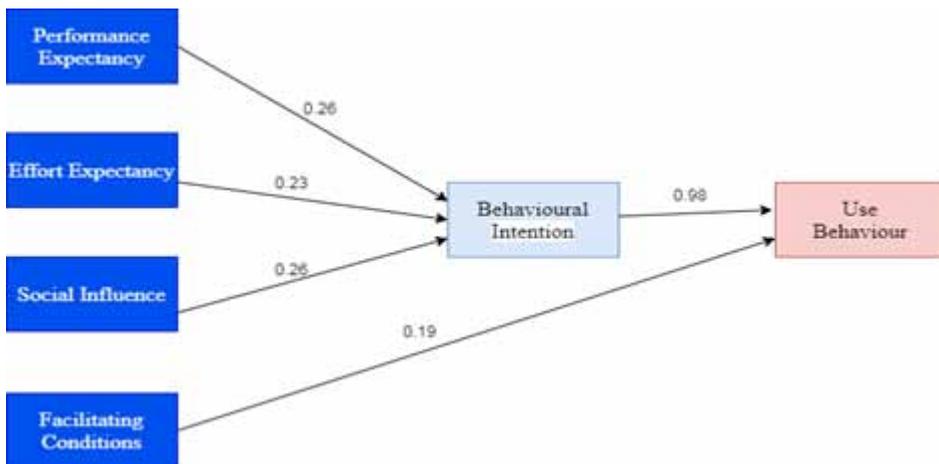


Table 1. Fit measurement of model

| Fit Measures  | X <sup>2</sup> (Significant) | DF | X <sup>2</sup> /DF | CFI   | GFI (AGFI)    | NFI (IFI)     | TLI (RFI)     | RMSEA |
|---------------|------------------------------|----|--------------------|-------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| Default Model | 14.07 (0.01)                 | 4  | 3.51               | 0.993 | 0.983 (0.911) | 0.990 (0.993) | 0.973 (0.962) | 0.071 |

Root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) indicates the approximation of the observed model to the true model. The lower the RMSEA is, the better the model. RMSEA is 0.071. The values of RMSEA were below the prescribed limit of 0.08 in the model, thus, the model can be accepted.

### Hypothesis Tests

Table 2 indicates that explanatory variables (independent variables) predict the criterion variables (dependent variables).

**H5:** There will be a significant difference between male respondents and female respondents in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.

The results of the independent sample t-test performed to study the variables between male and female respondents are shown in Table 3.

T-test results reveal that gender does not affect Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, Attitude Towards Using Technology, or Behavioural Intention of the respondents. However, gender does affect Voluntariness of Use of the respondents. Female respondents have higher Voluntariness of Use compared to male respondents.  $t(274) = 2.094, p = 0.037$ , where the mean of male employees is 8.56(SD = 1.72) and the mean of female employees is 9.00(SD = 1.75).

**H6:** There will be significant differences among respondents between the ages of 17-19 years, 20-22 years, 23-25 years, and 26 years and above, in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.

Table 4 shows the results of the F-test, which was used to test the differences among the respondents ages 17 to 19 years, 20 to 22 years, 22 to 25 years, and 26 years and above in the perspectives of the studied variables.

The results show that significant differences exist among respondents in terms of Performance Expectancy ( $F = 4.95, p > 0.01$ ) and Facilitating Conditions ( $F = 3.595, p > 0.01$ ). Respondents ages 26 years and above have higher Performance Expectancy compared to respondents 17 to 19 years

**Table 2. Path analytic results of hypotheses of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, behavioural intention, and use behaviour**

| Criterion Variable    | Explanatory Variable    | SRW  | URW   | SE   | CR     | p significant | Decision                |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|------|-------|------|--------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Behavioural Intention | Performance Expectancy  | .259 | .252  | .062 | 4.050  | 0.01          | H <sub>1</sub> accepted |
| Behavioural Intention | Effort Expectancy       | .231 | .117  | .029 | 4.020  | 0.01          | H <sub>2</sub> accepted |
| Behavioural Intention | Social Influence        | .264 | .169  | .036 | 4.666  | 0.01          | H <sub>3</sub> accepted |
| Use Behaviour         | Facilitating Conditions | .194 | 14.59 | .061 | 4.121  | 0.01          | H <sub>4</sub> accepted |
| Use Behaviour         | Behavioural Intention   | .978 | .668  | .010 | 70.010 | 0.01          | H <sub>5</sub> accepted |

Table 3. Independent variable t-test between studied variables and gender

|                                   | Gender | Mean  | Std. Deviation | t-test | DF  | Sig. |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|----------------|--------|-----|------|
| Performance Expectancy            | Male   | 12.04 | 3.37           | .113   | 274 | .910 |
|                                   | Female | 12.00 | 3.00           |        |     |      |
| Effort Expectancy                 | Male   | 24.07 | 6.26           | .472   | 274 | .637 |
|                                   | Female | 23.72 | 5.90           |        |     |      |
| Social Influence                  | Male   | 13.86 | 4.94           | .915   | 274 | .361 |
|                                   | Female | 14.40 | 4.71           |        |     |      |
| Facilitating Conditions           | Male   | 7.79  | 2.20           | 1.235  | 274 | .218 |
|                                   | Female | 8.11  | 1.99           |        |     |      |
| Hedonic Motivations               | Male   | 15.50 | 4.46           | .278   | 274 | .781 |
|                                   | Female | 15.36 | 4.09           |        |     |      |
| Anxiety                           | Male   | 11.31 | 3.01           | 1.627  | 274 | .105 |
|                                   | Female | 11.88 | 2.76           |        |     |      |
| Attitude Towards Using Technology | Male   | 29.05 | 6.76           | .084   | 274 | .933 |
|                                   | Female | 29.12 | 6.14           |        |     |      |
| Behavioural Intention             | Male   | 8.94  | 3.07           | .810   | 274 | .419 |
|                                   | Female | 9.24  | 3.06           |        |     |      |
| Use Behavioural                   | Male   | 6.02  | 2.06           | .587   | 274 | .558 |
|                                   | Female | 6.17  | 2.12           |        |     |      |
| Voluntariness of Use              | Male   | 8.56  | 1.72           | 2.094  | 274 | .037 |
|                                   | Female | 9.00  | 1.75           |        |     |      |

old. However, 17 to 19-year-old respondents perceived higher Facilitating Conditions compared to respondents in other categories.

There is a significant difference among respondents with regards to age in term of Voluntariness of Use ( $F = 3.370, p > 0.01$ ). Respondents in the age range of 23 to 25 years have higher Voluntariness of Use than respondents who were 26 years old and above.

There is no significant difference among respondents in terms of Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, or Attitude Towards Using Technology, Behavioural Intention, or Use Behaviour.

**H7:** There will be a significant difference among respondents based on social media exposure of 0-2 hours, 2-5 hours, and 5-7 hours per day in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Voluntariness of Use.

The results of the F-test to analyse hours of exposure to social media and the study variables are shown in Table 5.

There exists no significant difference among duration of exposure of 0 to 2 hours, 2 to 5 hours, and 5 to 7 hours in terms of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, Attitude Towards Using Technology, Behavioural Intentions, Use Behaviour, or Voluntariness of Use.

Table 4. F-test of age and the study variables

|  |                    | Mean                | Std. Deviation | DF     | F     | Sign. |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------|-------|-------|
| <b>Performance Expectancy</b>            | 17 to 19 years     | 12.02 <sup>a</sup>  | 3.24           | 3, 272 | 4.951 | .002  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 11.52 <sup>ab</sup> | 2.82           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 12.10 <sup>ab</sup> | 2.99           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 13.62 <sup>b</sup>  | 3.61           |        |       |       |
| <b>Effort Expectancy</b>                 | 17 to 19 years     | 24.23               | 6.28           | 3, 272 | .472  | .702  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 23.88               | 5.77           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 22.00               | 7.10           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 23.50               | 6.28           |        |       |       |
| <b>Social Influence</b>                  | 17 to 19 years     | 14.72               | 4.55           | 3, 272 | 1.831 | .142  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 13.54               | 4.82           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 14.00               | 4.45           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 15.19               | 5.18           |        |       |       |
| <b>Facilitating Conditions</b>           | 17 to 19 years     | 8.29 <sup>a</sup>   | 2.01           | 3, 272 | 3.595 | .014  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 8.05 <sup>a</sup>   | 2.06           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 6.40 <sup>b</sup>   | 2.80           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 7.45 <sup>b</sup>   | 1.95           |        |       |       |
| <b>Hedonic Motivations</b>               | 17 to 19 years     | 15.74               | 4.77           | 3, 272 | 1.154 | .328  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 15.11               | 3.84           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 17.40               | 4.01           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 15.31               | 4.39           |        |       |       |
| <b>Anxiety</b>                           | 17 to 19 years     | 11.76               | 2.69           | 3, 272 | .153  | .927  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 11.66               | 2.93           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 11.30               | 2.54           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 11.45               | 3.19           |        |       |       |
| <b>Attitude Towards Using Technology</b> | 17 to 19 years     | 29.41               | 6.60           | 3, 272 | .348  | .791  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 29.09               | 6.19           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 27.30               | 6.86           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 28.86               | 6.68           |        |       |       |
| <b>Behavioural Intention</b>             | 17 to 19 years     | 9.47                | 3.03           | 3, 272 | .765  | .514  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 8.85                | 3.06           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 9.10                | 3.11           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 9.29                | 3.17           |        |       |       |
| <b>Use Behaviour</b>                     | 17 to 19 years     | 6.28                | 2.05           | 3, 272 | .472  | .702  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 5.96                | 2.08           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 6.20                | 2.53           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 6.21                | 2.16           |        |       |       |
| <b>Voluntariness of Use</b>              | 17 to 19 years     | 8.62 <sup>ab</sup>  | 1.55           | 3, 272 | 3.370 | .019  |
|  | 20 to 22 years     | 9.01 <sup>ab</sup>  | 1.89           |        |       |       |
|  | 23 to 25 years     | 9.90 <sup>a</sup>   | 1.97           |        |       |       |
|  | 26 years and above | 8.33 <sup>b</sup>   | 1.39           |        |       |       |

Table 5. F test results of hours of social media exposure and the study variables

|                                   |              | Mean              | Std. Deviation | DF     | F     | Sig. |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|--------|-------|------|
| Performance Expectancy            | 0 to 2 hours | 12.41             | 3.28           | 2, 273 | 1.622 | .199 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 11.84             | 2.99           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 11.44             | 3.28           |        |       |      |
| Effort Expectancy                 | 0 to 2 hours | 23.79             | 6.26           | 2,273  | .385  | .681 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 24.12             | 5.91           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 23.12             | 5.92           |        |       |      |
| Social Influence                  | 0 to 2 hours | 14.36             | 4.87           | 2,273  | 1.088 | .338 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 13.79             | 4.78           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 15.06             | 4.64           |        |       |      |
| Facilitating Conditions           | 0 to 2 hours | 7.72 <sup>a</sup> | 2.11           | 2, 273 | 3.487 | .032 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 8.31 <sup>b</sup> | 1.99           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 7.50 <sup>a</sup> | 2.22           |        |       |      |
| Hedonic Motivations               | 0 to 2 hours | 15.42             | 4.13           | 2,273  | .819  | .442 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 15.63             | 4.13           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 14.59             | 4.99           |        |       |      |
| Anxiety                           | 0 to 2 hours | 11.75             | 3.10           | 2,273  | .893  | .411 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 11.72             | 2.47           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 11.03             | 3.49           |        |       |      |
| Attitude towards using Technology | 0 to 2 hours | 29.15             | 6.50           | 2, 273 | .490  | .613 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 29.30             | 6.24           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 28.09             | 6.74           |        |       |      |
| Behavioural Intention             | 0 to 2 hours | 9.24              | 2.98           | 2,273  | .167  | .846 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 9.05              | 3.08           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 8.97              | 3.33           |        |       |      |
| Use Behavioural                   | 0 to 2 hours | 6.21              | 2.08           | 2,273  | .226  | .798 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 6.05              | 2.09           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 6.00              | 2.22           |        |       |      |
| Voluntariness of Use              | 0 to 2 hours | 8.79              | 1.98           | 2, 273 | .045  | .956 |
|                                   | 2 to 5 hours | 8.82              | 1.62           |        |       |      |
|                                   | 5 to 7 hours | 8.88              | 1.39           |        |       |      |

However, there exists a significant difference among duration of exposure of 0 to 2 hours, 2 to 5 hours, and 5 to 7 hours in terms of Facilitating Conditions ( $F=3.487$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). Post hoc tests show that there is a significant difference between social media exposures of 0 to 2 hours as compared to 5 to 7 hours.

- H8:** Performance expectancy positively predicts behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.  
**H9:** Effort expectancy positively predicts behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.

**H10:** Social influence positively predicts behavioural intention to attend virtual live events.

**H11:** Facilitating conditions positively predict use behaviour.

**H12:** Hedonic Motivations positively predicts behavioural intention.

**H13:** Anxiety positively predicts behavioural intention.

Table 6 presents the regression between Behavioural intentions and Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Hedonic Motivations, and Anxiety.

There is a significant positive correlation between Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Hedonic Motivations, Anxiety, and Behavioural Intention.

**H14:** Attitude toward using technology positively predicts use behaviour.

**H15:** Behavioural Intention positively predicts use behaviour.

Table 7 presents the regression between Use Behaviour, Behavioural Intention, and Attitude Towards Using Technology.

The results show a significant positive correlation between Behavioural Intention, Attitude Towards Using Technology, and Use Behaviour.

Thus, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) is accepted and supported by the current study in the field of virtual events. This is perhaps the first study, as per the researchers' knowledge, considering how the UTAUT model can be applied to understand events.

**Table 6. Behavioural intention as predicted by performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivations, and anxiety**

| Variables               | Beta Value | t Value | F Ratio  | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> |
|-------------------------|------------|---------|----------|------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Performance Expectancy  | .528       | 10.28** | 105.86** | .528 | .279           | .276                    |
| Effort Expectancy       | .463       | 8.63**  | 74.61**  | .463 | .214           | .211                    |
| Social Influence        | .479       | 9.03**  | 81.70**  | .479 | .230           | .227                    |
| Facilitating Conditions | .455       | 8.45**  | 71.51**  | .455 | .207           | .204                    |
| Hedonic Motivations     | .645       | 13.96** | 194.93** | .645 | .416           | .414                    |
| Anxiety                 | .319       | 5.56**  | 30.96**  | .319 | .102           | .098                    |

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level.

**Table 7. Use behavioural as predicted by behavioural intention and attitude towards using technology**

| Variables                         | Beta value | t value | F Ratio   | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---------|-----------|------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Behavioural Intention             | .977       | 75.39** | 5684.86** | .977 | .954           | .954                    |
| Attitude Towards Using Technology | .449       | 8.30    | 69.03**   | .449 | .201           | .198                    |

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \* Significant at the 0.05 level.

Summary of the results of the hypotheses tested:

- Respondents with higher Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, and Social Influence have higher intentions to engage in virtual live events.
- Performance expectancy, Effort Expectancy, and Social Influence positively influence the Behavioural Intention of engaging in virtual live events.
- Respondents' Use Behaviour related to virtual events is influenced by Facilitating Conditions available to related virtual live events.
- Female respondents have higher Voluntariness of Use than male respondents.
- Respondents reporting higher Hedonic Motivations have a higher intention of engaging in virtual live events.
- Respondents reporting higher anxiety have a higher intention to engage in virtual live events.
- Respondent's gender affects only Voluntariness of Use.
- Respondent's age only impacts Performance Expectancy and Voluntariness of Use.
- Exposure to social media does not significantly affect the studied variables, except Facilitating Conditions.

## DISCUSSION

This study analysed the diffusion and acceptance of technology in the field of virtual events. An extended model of UTAUT was developed for this study wherein factors of anxiety and hedonic motivations were added to fully measure the behavioural intentions of the attendees for virtual events. This study accepted and supported the UTAUT model to measure the acceptance and growth of virtual events in the current time.

It was noted that performance expectancy positively influenced intention to attend virtual live events. Respondents with higher performance expectancy had a higher chance of participating in the event. The research clearly shows that if attendees perceive virtual live events as having the same value as live events, they will choose to attend the virtual event in terms of time, money, and location. A similar effect was also witnessed while studying the effect of effort expectancy and social influence on the attendees. Both positively impacted the behavioural intention for engagement in virtual live events. The research establishes that if attendees believe that using and interacting with a virtual live event platform is easy and natural, they will be a part of the event. However, ease of use cannot solely drive someone to be a part of a virtual live event. It is crucial that the attendee is attracted to the event and understands its worth. This study also brings to light the role of subjective norm i.e., people directly impacted by the perceptions of those close to them (relatives, family, friends, and colleagues) when deciding to attend a virtual live event. Facilitating resources, knowledge, skills, and guidance leads to higher engagements in virtual events. The study suggests that it is vital for the demographic to have access to the technology to access the virtual event platform, but they should also have the knowledge and skills to connect. Thus, attendees will require guidance and instruction to facilitate the process and overcome any difficulties that they may face.

Gender, in particular, does not influence factors such as Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Behavioural Intention, Use Behaviour, Hedonic Motivation, and Anxiety. However, the study suggests that female respondents usually have higher voluntariness of use than male respondents. Thus, the event marketers could leverage opportunities to create virtual live events to attract female audiences, audiences with a higher level of anxiety, and those with a greater need for health and safety. A strategic plan to persuade the male segment and hedonic motivations should create a pull towards virtual live events.

This study observed that the attendee's age only impacted performance expectancy and voluntariness of use. The respondents aged 26 years and above had higher performance expectancy and lower voluntariness of attending than respondents of other age groups. Thereby, the need to

create assurance about the usefulness of the event and the value of the experience itself is crucial lead them voluntarily choose to attend the virtual live event. The present research accentuates the role of appropriate media communication, including influencer marketing or social media marketing programs, by leveraging the younger audiences to reach the other age groups, thereby reducing anxiety and encouraging technology acceptance.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Work**

This research focused on audiences in Urban India and data gathered through self-reporting related to participating in virtual live events. Furthermore, the data that was collected was not longitudinal. Hence, there was an ambiguity that expectations and vice versa influenced this usage. Future research should aim to apply the proposed extended UTAUT model utilizing data from marketers for better prediction of behaviour and intention with an added variable of customer satisfaction. This study was conducted during the lockdown caused due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. However, with technology adoption being rampant in India, there is immense scope to be replicated to a larger audience to understand variations across regions and various events in India to investigate the application of the model. Considering the nascent stage of technology use in India's virtual event industry, this research has clubbed art, cultural & musical events together without differentiating between various types of events, different platforms, and its impact on the various factors of the model. Further research on personal events (e.g., wedding), sports events (e.g., Olympics), official events (conference & meetings) needs to be planned in post-pandemic normalcy times.

### **CONCLUSION**

In recent years, virtual entertainment and virtual experiences have become an essential and pervasive technique used in daily life rapidly and cheaply. In this study, the researchers aimed to determine all factors that affect the use of virtual live events amongst the Indian audience and investigate the role of hedonic motivation and anxiety. The study results indicated that Performance Expectancy, Facilitating Conditions, and Social Influence are strong determinants of the use of virtual live events. Increasing hedonic motivations and decreasing anxiety can improve user satisfaction.

These findings support previous research indicating that the social context in which technology is employed plays a critical role in an individual's decision to adopt the technology. This study could offer marketers practical insights on developing successful designs, implementing effective marketing strategies to attract audiences, and forging broader acceptance in the long run. This study is among the first to use the UTAUT model in event technology and entertainment, especially in the developing country context. It would also help event researchers to delve deeper to understand cross-regional and industry implications.

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