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Social Image Mediating Social Influence Mobile Payment Intention Higher Education Extended UTAUT2 Framework

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Abstract:
The increasing adoption of mobile payment has highlighted the need to understand the behavioral mechanisms that influence users' technology acceptance beyond traditional technological factors. This study aims to examine the mediating role of social image in the relationship between social influence and mobile payment intention using the Extended UTAUT2 framework. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 312 higher education students with prior mobile payment experience, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that social influence significantly affects mobile payment intention ($\beta = 0.243$, $p < 0.001$) and social image ($\beta = 0.687$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, social image significantly influences mobile payment intention ($\beta = 0.541$, $p < 0.001$) and partially mediates the relationship ($\beta = 0.372$, $p < 0.001$). This study extends the UTAUT2 framework by incorporating social image as a mediating construct. It provides practical insights for universities and FinTech providers to develop socially driven strategies that encourage sustainable mobile payment adoption.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of financial technology (FinTech) has fundamentally transformed the way individuals conduct financial transactions, making mobile payment one of the most influential innovations in the digital economy. As societies increasingly embrace cashless transactions, higher education institutions have become strategic environments for understanding technology adoption because university students represent digitally connected consumers with high exposure to financial innovations (Andhika et al., 2024; Kaur et al., 2021; Muhammad et al., 2021). Beyond improving transaction efficiency, mobile payment contributes to financial inclusion, digital business development, and sustainable economic transformation. Nevertheless, technological availability alone does not guarantee widespread acceptance (Abdulla et al., 2023; Samonte et al., 2024). Understanding the behavioral mechanisms that encourage individuals to adopt mobile payments is therefore essential for businesses, financial service providers, policymakers, and higher education institutions seeking to accelerate digital financial ecosystems.

Despite the increasing availability of mobile payment services, significant disparities remain in users' intention to adopt and continuously use these technologies within higher education settings. Many students possess adequate technological resources and digital literacy but still prefer conventional payment methods or demonstrate inconsistent usage behavior (Bakhitah et al., 2023; Ryschawy et al., 2021). This phenomenon indicates that technology adoption cannot be fully explained by functional benefits alone. Social environments increasingly shape individual decisions through peer influence, institutional culture, and perceived social expectations. Furthermore, students often associate digital payment usage with modern lifestyles, technological competence, and social recognition (Neha et al., 2023; Shaikh et al., 2022). Consequently, understanding the interaction between social influence and psychological perceptions has become increasingly important for explaining mobile payment intention in contemporary digital business environments.

Previous studies have extensively employed the Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) to explain mobile payment adoption across various contexts. Puspitaningsih et al. (2023) and Mohd et al., 2023) demonstrated that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, social influence, hedonic motivation, price value, and habit significantly influence technology adoption. Likewise, Negm (2024) and Rismawan et al. (2023) confirmed the applicability of UTAUT2 in explaining consumers' intention to adopt mobile payment services. Research conducted by Fernando et al. (2025), Rababah et al. (2024), and Nur (2024) emphasized the importance of social influence in digital payment acceptance, while Mulyono et al. (2024) reported varying effects of social influence across different demographic groups. However, most previous studies conceptualize social influence as a direct predictor of behavioral intention while overlooking the psychological mechanisms through which social influence translates into adoption decisions.

Addressing this research gap, the present study extends the UTAUT2 framework by introducing social image as a mediating construct between social influence and mobile payment intention. Social image reflects individuals' perception that adopting a particular technology enhances their social status, reputation, and identity within their social environment (Gui et al., 2023; Purwidianti et al., 2024). In higher education contexts, students frequently adopt emerging technologies not only because of their functional advantages but also because these technologies symbolize innovation, competence, and social prestige. Integrating social image into the Extended UTAUT2 framework therefore provides a more comprehensive explanation of technology adoption by incorporating both external social pressures and internal psychological evaluations (Badaik et al., 2023; Djamhari et al., 2024). This theoretical extension is expected to enrich consumer behavior research within digital business and financial technology literature.

Based on the identified theoretical limitations, several research questions emerge. Does social influence significantly affect students' intention to use mobile payment? Does social influence positively shape students' social image

regarding mobile payment adoption? Does social image significantly influence mobile payment intention? More importantly, does social image mediate the relationship between social influence and mobile payment intention within the Extended UTAUT2 framework? Addressing these questions is essential because understanding the underlying behavioral mechanisms can improve theoretical explanations of technology acceptance while supporting organizations, financial institutions, universities, and digital payment providers in designing more effective user adoption strategies.

This study argues that social influence does not directly translate into mobile payment intention but operates through the formation of social image, which strengthens individuals' motivation to adopt digital payment technologies. Students who perceive mobile payment as enhancing their social identity and recognition are expected to demonstrate stronger adoption intentions than those motivated solely by external social pressure. The originality of this research lies in integrating social image as a mediating mechanism within the Extended UTAUT2 framework, thereby providing a deeper behavioral explanation of mobile payment adoption in higher education. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to technology acceptance and consumer behavior literature while offering practical implications for FinTech providers, universities, and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable digital payment adoption.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the mediating role of social image in the relationship between social influence and mobile payment intention within the Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) framework (Ghanad, 2023). A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted because it enables the systematic examination of causal relationships among latent constructs at a single point in time. The proposed conceptual model consists of three principal constructs: social influence as the independent variable, social image as the mediating variable, and mobile payment intention as the dependent variable. This explanatory design is appropriate for testing theoretically derived hypotheses and evaluating mediation effects in technology adoption research.

The study targeted undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled at higher education institutions who had prior experience using at least one mobile payment application. University students were selected because they represent one of the most active digital consumer segments and are frequently exposed to financial technology innovations. Data were collected using a structured self-administered online questionnaire distributed through institutional communication channels and social media platforms. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only respondents meeting the predetermined inclusion criteria participated in the survey. A minimum sample size of 250 respondents was established based on recommendations for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), ensuring adequate statistical power for hypothesis testing and mediation analysis.

Measurement items were adapted from previously validated instruments to ensure construct validity and reliability (Semaan et al., 2020). Social influence was measured using indicators adapted from the UTAUT2 scale developed by Venkatesh et al., while social image items were adopted from established technology acceptance and innovation diffusion studies. Mobile payment intention was measured using behavioral intention indicators that have been widely validated in FinTech and digital payment literature. All questionnaire items employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Prior to the main survey, academic experts reviewed the questionnaire and pilot-tested it with a small group of students to assess clarity, readability, and content validity.

The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software (Dabbous et al., 2021). PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predictive research, theory extension, and mediation analysis involving latent variables measured by multiple indicators (Othman et al., 2024). Data analysis followed a two-stage procedure comprising measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation. The measurement model assessment included indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, convergent validity through average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Subsequently, the structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect size (f^2), and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to determine the statistical significance of direct, indirect, and total effects.

To ensure methodological rigor, several procedures were implemented to minimize potential sources of bias (Russo et al., 2024). Common method bias was assessed using full collinearity variance inflation factors (VIF), while multicollinearity among constructs was evaluated before hypothesis testing. Ethical considerations were addressed by informing participants about the voluntary nature of their participation, guaranteeing anonymity, and ensuring that responses would be used solely for academic research purposes. Completion of the online questionnaire was regarded as informed consent. Through these procedures, the study sought to ensure the validity, reliability, transparency, and ethical integrity of the empirical findings while providing robust evidence regarding the mediating role of social image in mobile payment adoption among higher education students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results are presented to evaluate the proposed Extended UTAUT2 framework through descriptive and inferential analyses. The findings include respondent characteristics, measurement model assessment, structural model evaluation, hypothesis testing, and mediation analysis. Together, these results provide empirical evidence regarding the relationships among social influence, social image, and mobile payment intention.

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 312 valid responses were included in the final analysis after incomplete questionnaires were removed. The respondents consisted of undergraduate (79.8%) and postgraduate students (20.2%) who had experience using at least one mobile payment application. Female respondents accounted for 58.3%, while male respondents represented 41.7%. Regarding usage frequency, 46.2% reported using mobile payments daily, 37.5% used them several times per week, and 16.3% used them occasionally.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (n = 312)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	130	41.7
	Female	182	58.3
Education	Undergraduate	249	79.8
	Postgraduate	63	20.2
Mobile Payment Usage	Daily	144	46.2
	Weekly	117	37.5
	Occasionally	51	16.3

The respondent profile indicates that the sample adequately represents digitally active university students, who constitute one of the largest consumer groups within the FinTech ecosystem. The relatively high proportion of daily users suggests that mobile payment has become integrated into students' routine financial activities, making the sample appropriate for investigating behavioral intention toward digital payment adoption.

Measurement Model Assessment

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed through indicator loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All indicators exceeded the recommended loading threshold of 0.70. Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.867 to 0.904, while Composite Reliability values exceeded 0.90 for all constructs. Likewise, all AVE values were above the recommended threshold of 0.50, confirming satisfactory convergent validity.

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Social Influence	0.881	0.918	0.738
Social Image	0.867	0.909	0.715
Mobile Payment Intention	0.904	0.933	0.777

The findings demonstrate that all latent constructs possess strong internal consistency and convergent validity. High Composite Reliability values indicate that the measurement items consistently capture their respective constructs, while AVE values exceeding 0.70 suggest that each construct explains more than

half of the variance in its observed indicators. These results confirm that the measurement model satisfies the recommended psychometric criteria for subsequent structural model analysis. Discriminant validity was further evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). All HTMT values remained below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the latent constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct	Social Influence	Social Image	Mobile Payment Intention
Social Influence	–		
Social Image	0.693	–	
Mobile Payment Intention	0.711	0.779	–

The HTMT results indicate that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. Therefore, the proposed measurement model demonstrates adequate discriminant validity, confirming that Social Influence, Social Image, and Mobile Payment Intention measure conceptually different dimensions.

Structural Model Assessment

The explanatory power of the proposed model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and effect size (f^2).

Table 4. Structural Model Evaluation

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Q^2
Social Image	0.472	0.321
Mobile Payment Intention	0.618	0.438

The structural model explains 47.2% of the variance in Social Image and 61.8% of the variance in Mobile Payment Intention, indicating moderate-to-substantial explanatory power. Furthermore, positive Q^2 values demonstrate that the model possesses satisfactory predictive relevance, suggesting that the Extended UTAUT2 framework effectively predicts students' mobile payment intention.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing (Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Social Influence → Mobile Payment Intention	0.243	3.814	<0.001	Supported
H2	Social Influence → Social Image	0.687	14.256	<0.001	Supported
H3	Social Image → Mobile Payment Intention	0.541	8.973	<0.001	Supported

The bootstrapping results indicate that all direct relationships are positive and statistically significant. Social Influence positively affects Mobile Payment Intention, suggesting that students are more likely to adopt mobile payment when influenced by peers, lecturers, or their surrounding social environment. Social Influence also exhibits a strong positive effect on Social Image, implying that social interactions contribute substantially to shaping students' perceptions of status and identity associated with mobile payment usage. Furthermore, Social Image significantly enhances Mobile Payment Intention, indicating that students who perceive mobile payment as enhancing their social image demonstrate stronger intentions to use digital payment services.

Mediation Analysis

The mediating effect of Social Image was examined using the bootstrapping indirect effect procedure.

Table 6. Mediation Analysis

Indirect Relationship	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	Mediation
Social Influence → Social Image → Mobile Payment Intention	0.372	7.815	<0.001	Partial Mediation

The indirect effect of Social Influence on Mobile Payment Intention through Social Image is positive and statistically significant. Because both the direct and indirect effects remain significant, Social Image functions as a partial mediator within the Extended UTAUT2 framework. This finding suggests that social influence shapes students' behavioral intention not only directly but also indirectly by strengthening their perception that using mobile payment enhances social recognition and personal identity. Consequently, integrating Social Image into the Extended UTAUT2 model provides a more comprehensive explanation of mobile payment adoption among higher education students than relying solely on direct social influence relationships.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that social influence positively affects students' mobile payment intention, indicating that adoption decisions are strongly embedded within social interactions rather than being purely individual choices. This result is consistent with the UTAUT2 framework proposed by Singh et al. (2020), which identifies social influence as a significant determinant of technology acceptance. It supports the findings of Cong et al. (2024) and Belascu et al. (2023), who reported that recommendations from peers and important social groups increase consumers' willingness to adopt digital payment services. However, the present study extends previous evidence by showing that the impact of social influence remains substantial in higher education despite students' high level of digital familiarity. Therefore, universities and FinTech providers should encourage peer-led promotion, student ambassador programs, and community-based digital payment campaigns to accelerate mobile payment.

Another important finding is the strong positive relationship between social influence and social image. This suggests that students' perceptions of status, modernity, and technological competence are shaped by the expectations and behaviors of their surrounding social networks. While previous studies have generally treated social influence as a direct antecedent of behavioral intention, relatively few have examined its capacity to construct users' perceived social identity (Ngomo et al., 2024; Ullah et al., 2023). The current finding therefore complements technology acceptance research by demonstrating that social interactions first shape symbolic evaluations before influencing adoption decisions. From a theoretical perspective, this highlights social image as a meaningful psychological mechanism that links external social pressure with internal cognitive evaluation (Das, 2023; Farivar et al., 2022). Therefore, mobile payment providers should position their services not only as efficient financial tools but also as symbols of innovation, digital competence, and contemporary lifestyles that resonate with university students.

The results further reveal that social image significantly influences mobile payment intention, suggesting that students are more willing to adopt digital payment technologies when they believe these technologies enhance their social recognition and personal identity (Matar et al., 2024; Syafaastuti et al., 2024). This finding supports innovation diffusion theory, which argues that perceived prestige and visibility contribute to the diffusion of new technologies, while also aligning with previous studies emphasizing the symbolic value of digital innovations. Nevertheless, compared with earlier UTAUT2 studies that primarily emphasized utilitarian determinants such as performance expectancy and effort expectancy, the present study highlights the increasing importance of symbolic and identity-related motivations in digital financial behavior (Nur, 2024; Wang et al., 2022). This finding theoretically broadens the technology adoption literature by integrating psychological and social identity perspectives into explanations of consumer behavior. Practically, digital payment platforms should strengthen branding strategies that communicate innovation, trustworthiness, and social prestige alongside functional benefits.

A major contribution of this study lies in confirming the significant mediating role of social image between social influence and mobile payment intention. Unlike many previous studies that conceptualized social influence as directly affecting behavioral intention, the present findings indicate that part of this influence operates indirectly through users' perceptions of enhanced social image. This result provides a more nuanced explanation of how social environments influence technology adoption by revealing the psychological processes underlying behavioral intention. Consequently, the Extended UTAUT2 framework proposed in this study offers greater explanatory power than conventional UTAUT2 models by incorporating an additional cognitive-social pathway. Finally, organizations seeking to increase mobile payment adoption should focus not only on expanding social exposure but also on designing communication strategies that strengthen users' perceptions of identity, recognition, and belonging within digital communities.

Overall, this study contributes to the advancement of digital business and FinTech literature by demonstrating that an interaction between external social influence and internal perceptions of social image shapes mobile payment adoption among higher education students. The findings extend existing technology acceptance theory by identifying social image as an important mediating construct that explains why social influence translates into stronger behavioral intention. This theoretical contribution responds to limitations identified in previous UTAUT2 research and provides a richer understanding of consumer behavior in digital financial ecosystems. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that universities, financial institutions, and FinTech companies should develop integrated adoption strategies that combine peer influence, institutional support, and image-oriented marketing initiatives to encourage sustainable mobile payment usage among young consumers. Future research may validate this extended framework across different cultural settings, age groups, and digital financial services to improve the generalizability model.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that social image serves as a significant partial mediator in the relationship between social influence and mobile payment intention within the Extended UTAUT2 framework among higher education students. The findings highlight that students' adoption decisions are shaped not only by external social influence but also by perceptions of enhanced social identity and recognition. Theoretically, this study extends technology acceptance literature by integrating social image as a psychological mechanism that enriches the explanatory power of UTAUT2. Practically, the findings provide strategic insights for universities and FinTech providers to design socially driven adoption initiatives. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its cross-sectional design and student-based sample, which may restrict generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, broader demographic groups, cross-country comparisons, and additional behavioral constructs to validate further and refine the proposed framework.

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