

Why are People Willing to Pay for Cloud Storage Service?

Chen-Shu Wang

Department of Information and Finance Management)
National Taipei University of Technology
Taipei, Taiwan
wangcs@ntut.edu.tw

Shiang-Lin Lin

Department of Management Information Systems
National Chengchi University
Taipei, Taiwan
shiang0623@gmail.com

Abstract—Cloud service has created the opportunity for a new business model. Among all of them, cloud storage service is one of the frequently adopted by the Internet user to create, keep and share their files. This study aims to realize customers' willingness to pay for cloud storage service from the mediating effect of perceived value through perceived service quality, perceived sacrifice and conformity. A survey is implemented and analyzed by partial least squares (PLS) method. The research results indicate that the perceived service quality and conformity positively affect the perceived value and then increases the user's willingness to pay indirectly. This study provides cloud service providers with some references on cloud storage service development and marketing in the future. This would also enable these providers to enhance the factors affecting customers' willingness to pay.

Keywords—cloud storage service; willing to pay; service quality; conformity

I. INTRODUCTION

Compared to the past, the information generated by users daily is increasing exponentially, resulting in more challenge for information management. Leavitt [1] pointed out that information generated by individual users is increasing by 35% every year. With the rapid popularization of smart mobile devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets), users have easy access to a variety of apps featuring SoLoMo (Social, Local, Mobile) services. As a result, a large number of user log files are being created, which necessitates the storage of these files. Therefore, various cloud services have emerged as a response.

A typical cloud service offers cloud storage, which is a kind of service in which service providers take advantage of the economies of scale of cloud service, and enables the users to enjoy all kinds of services through the Internet, without the need for purchasing expensive software or equipment. This commercial mode could enable smaller companies to utilize resources in a more effective way. IT cost will be reduced [2], and problems of system installation and maintenance could also be avoided [1].

Moreover, the payment method based on usage will provide organizations with more remarkable cost advantages. However, some key research topics pertaining to cloud services, such as customer purchase behavior and user acceptance to cloud computing, have not been frequently discussed. From the IT perspective, the introduction of a new technology or information

system has to be first accepted by the users before the users are willing to use it. On the other hand, if an enterprise aims for profit maximization, they have to ensure that their products meet customers' needs and that the customers are willing to pay. Monroe and Krishnan [3] suggest that perceived service quality (PSQ) and perceived sacrifice (PS) together form perceived value (PV), which has a further impact on customers' willingness to pay (WP). Parasuraman and Grewal [4] believe that service quality promotes perceived value, which is a vital factor that determines customer loyalty. Consequently, service quality could produce greater competitiveness.

This study aims to discuss customers' willingness to pay for cloud service apps from the perspective of marketing and the quality of cloud service. By analyzing the reasons for which customers would use and pay for cloud-based office software, we aim to provide cloud service providers with some references on cloud app development and marketing in the future. This would also enable the cloud service providers to increase their market share and profit, and fix the deficiencies of cloud computing in the areas of IT, IS, and marketing by enhancing customers' willingness to pay.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Cloud Storage Service

Cloud computing is a conceptual model. The National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) defines cloud computing as a model for enabling on-demand network access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources that can be rapidly provisioned and released with minimal management effort¹. Cloud storage is one of the cloud service. Currently, there are many cloud service providers who offer this service to consumers, such as Google, Apple, Dropbox, and so on.

Cloud storage service means consumers could pay an amount of payment for leasing storage capacity they required from the cloud service providers [5]. By means of this manner, consumers can be connected to the cloud storage space via Internet from anywhere and anytime through desktop or mobile device to access and back up their data flexibly [6]. Furthermore, cloud storage service not only allows consumers to synchronize

¹ NIST, <http://www.nist.gov/itl/cloud/index.cfm>, 2016.

different devices' files and in real time, but shares these documents with others immediately.

B. Willingness to Pay

Spears and Singh [7] defines willingness to buy as an individual's intention to pay money to buy products. Monroe and Krishnan [3] suggest that perceived sacrifice, perceived quality, and perceived value have an impact on customers' willingness to buy. Sirohi et al. [8] put forward that customers' willingness to buy should be measured by their repurchase intention, future willingness to pay for more products, and willingness to recommend to a friend. Since buying is an action for paying, the willingness to buy in this study is expressed as the willingness to pay.

Furthermore, Zeithaml et al. [9] think that perceived value is the tradeoff between perceived quality and perceived sacrifice based on the perception obtained and given by customers, serving as a measure of evaluation of the overall effect. Lapierre [10] defines perceived value as the balance between benefit (obtained) and sacrifice (made). Since customers have to consider what will be obtained and lost when they trade, perceived value could be viewed as the source of product competitiveness for companies. Besides, perceived sacrifice is the price that consumers have to pay in order to get the goods or service. Zeithaml [11] suggests that perceived sacrifice includes perceived monetary cost and non-monetary cost. Perceived monetary cost is the money cost that consumers pay for goods and services, while perceived non-monetary cost includes the time cost, search cost, and psychological cost that consumers pay for completing the trade.

Cloud computing is an intangible service offered to customers. The generation of service could be or could not be related to physical goods, and it is more difficult than physical goods to be measured in terms of quality. Therefore, the perceived quality discussed in this study will be mostly limited to perceived service quality.

C. Service Quality

Zeithaml et al. [9] indicate that perceived service quality is obtained by comparing consumer expectation and their actual experience. It also represents the consumer assessment of the level of excellence of the enterprises. Therefore, service quality should be considered as the perceived quality by customers. Further, Zeithaml et al. [12] documented the five dimensions measuring service quality and developed the SERVQUAL model, and there are two parts of this model. The first part is to identify the customer's expectation for the service, and the second part is the actual service experience received. Service quality is determined by calculating the difference between two scores of perceptions and expectations (P-E) where better service quality results in a smaller gap.

Barnes and Vidgen [12] argue that previous studies on website service quality have been focusing on identifying measurement dimensions mostly pertaining to hardware and

website function, and ignoring the consumer needs. Then, they proposed the WEBQUAL1.0 model. WEBQUAL 1.0 has an emphasis on the service quality of information. The interactive function is more valued with the advent of network B2C era. Thus, WEBQUAL 1.0 has some deficiencies in this respect. Barnes and Vidgen [13] integrated WEBQUAL 1.0 into the SERVQUAL model, and proposed a model that measures service quality of websites, known as WEBQUAL 2.0. It has five dimensions, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Since our present study focuses on users' willingness to pay for cloud software and WEBQUAL 2.0 is designed to measure the service quality of websites, it is selected herein to measure the perceived service quality.

D. Conformity

The conformity effect refers to the effect of a thought or behavior that frequently influences people to act like the majority and consequently follow the majority. The conformity was first introduced by Banerjee in 1992 [14]. It suggests that all people are subjected to conformity effect psychologically, which tends to make people follow blindly, and therefore suffer from failure as a result. Conformity is an example of social influence, which can be described as the tendency of changing an individual's decision to align with a group's decision, no matter whether it is voluntarily or not.

By reviewing various concepts proposed by different scholars from the perspective of marketing, Lascu & Zinkhan [15] defines conformity as a phenomenon where an individual changes his/her own production evaluation, willingness to buy, and purchasing behavior when they refer to the purchasing behavior of the group, so as to live up to the expectations of the group. The source affecting conformity can be grouped into two categories, namely, information influence and normative influence [16]. The former means that consumers tend to obtain information about goods or services from other consumers having such knowledge or experience, which will subsequently influence their attitude and decision making toward these goods and services [17-20]. The latter means like subjective norms, it can change people's attitude towards certain behaviors [21] and willingness to perform certain actions [22]. Such a norm makes individuals change their behavior for the sake of catering to others, getting group recognition, or fitting to the group [23]. The norms can make individuals publicly comply with the group's requirements, however, not necessarily with private acceptance [24-25].

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

With reference to different ideas proposed by many researchers in the area of marketing, and to investigate users' acceptance and willingness to pay for cloud storage service, this study adopts three key factors that affect consumers' willingness to buy as the framework of its research. These three key factors are "perceived service quality", "perceived sacrifice", and "perceived value".

A. Variables and Their Operational Definitions

The operational definitions of variables and measurement items are listed as follows.

1) *Perceived Service Quality (PSQ)*: Overall evaluation or quality of cloud storage service perceived by users.

a) *Tangibles*: Users think that the cloud storage service is good in terms of aesthetics and navigation.

b) *Reliability*: Users think that the cloud storage service offers reliable information, accurately conducts its service, and completes the service promised.

c) *Responsiveness*: Users think that the cloud storage service is good in terms of access.

d) *Assurance*: Users think that the cloud storage service is good in terms of security and service warranty.

e) *Empathy*: Users think that the cloud storage service is good in terms of personalization and communication.

2) *Perceived Sacrifice (PS)*: Non-monetary cost incurred for cloud storage service perceived by users.

3) *Conformity (CO)*: Situation in which the user's decision about whether or not to use cloud storage service is influenced by social groups around them.

a) *Information influence*: Possibility of being influenced by and following other users, who could offer service information based on their experience and expertise, to use the cloud storage service.

b) *Normative influence*: Possibility of being influenced by the attitude or behavior of surrounding social groups toward the use of cloud storage service and subsequently following them.

4) *Perceived Value (PV)*: Overall evaluation by users, as a trade-off between perceived quality and perceived sacrifice of cloud storage service.

a) *Emotional response*: Users' emotional response when using the cloud storage service.

b) *Behavior value*: Monetary cost and non-monetary cost of using the cloud storage service perceived by users.

c) *Monetary value*: Price of the cloud storage service perceived by users.

d) *Reputation*: Reputation of the cloud storage service perceived by users.

5) *Willingness to Pay (WP)*: Willingness of users to pay for renting cloud storage hard drives.

a) *Repurchase intention*: Users' willingness to purchase and repurchase the cloud storage service.

b) *Buy more products*: Users' willingness to purchase more products related to the cloud storage service.

c) *Recommend to a friend*: Users' willingness to recommend the cloud storage service to a friend.

B. Research Framework

Monroe and Krishnan [3] suggest that perceived quality and perceived sacrifice could affect perceived value and therefore could further affect willingness to buy. Moreover, a large body of literature points out that when purchasing goods or services, consumers would conduct an overall evaluation on the costs to be paid (perceived sacrifice) and the benefits to be obtained (perceived quality). Using willingness to pay as a dependent variable, this study integrates perceived quality, perceived sacrifice, and perceived value as independent variables and mediator variables into the model for willingness to pay. Furthermore, researchers such as Zeithaml et al. [9] and Parasuraman and Grewal [4] proposed that the concept of service quality should be expressed as the service quality perceived by customers. Service quality promotes perceived value, thus enhancing service quality could produce greater competitiveness. As a result, this study replaces perceived quality with perceived service quality.

Bolton and Drew [27] made a statement that service quality is one of the vital factors affecting perceived value. Fassnacht and Kose [28] suggested in their study on online service quality that the higher the service quality, the higher the perceived value. Cristobal et al. [29] indicate that E-service quality has a positive influence on perceived value and customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Perceived service quality of cloud storage would have a positive impact on perceived value.

Ozen et al. [30] confirm that perceived sacrifice has a negative effect on value perception for Turkish online consumers. Kim et al. [31] investigates the factors affecting the intention of using value-added 3G mobile services. It is shown that weakening the characteristics of perceived sacrifice could strengthen users' perceived value. Therefore, our present study proposes the following hypothesis.

H2: Perceived sacrifice on cloud storage service would have a negative impact on perceived value.

Human beings live in groups and they are in the need of being accepted and liked by other members within the group. Hence, while making decisions, individuals would inevitably consider how they are viewed by society and other members in the group, or be influenced by requirements from others [32-35]. In addition, Wilkie [36] thinks that the mentality behind conformity is the intention of achieving group recognition and living up to group expectation. Lascu & Zinkhan [15] showed in their research that when faced with product evaluation, willingness to buy, and usage behavior of the group, individuals are likely to be affected and they make some changes in order to meet the group expectation. Based on these studies, our present study proposes the following hypothesis.

H3: Conformity on cloud storage service would have a positive impact on perceived value.

Monroe and Krishnan [3] demonstrate that perceived value positively influences willingness to pay. In other words, the higher the perceived value, the higher the willingness to pay. Therefore, our present study proposes the following hypothesis.

H4: Perceived value of cloud storage service would have a positive impact on willingness to pay.

According to the hypotheses above, this study built the research model as shown in Fig. 1, and developed the questionnaire for measuring each hypothesis.

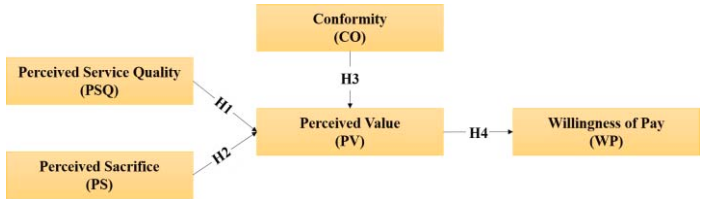


Fig. 1. Framework of present study

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH RESULTS

In this study, the research model proposed was validated through questionnaire survey among cloud storage service users in Taiwan.

A. Research subject and data collection

The questionnaires covered sections on Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) and questions related to cloud storage services. Total 162 questionnaires were collected as the effective sample. Detailed demographic profiles of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE I. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Measure	Sample composition	Quantity	Ratio
Gender	Male	90	56%
	Female	72	44%
Age	< 20	17	10%
	21-25	44	27%
	26-30	40	25%
	31-40	40	25%
	> 41	21	13%
Education level	High/Vocational school	3	1%
	University (college)	89	55%
	Graduate (or higher)	70	44%
Occupation	Student	53	32%
	Service	27	17%
	Manufacturing	19	12%
	IT	36	22%
	Culture/Education	27	17%

In addition, this study conducted a survey on customers' related experience in using cloud storage services. The results showed that most storage users involved in this survey (64%) had at least one year of experience with cloud storage service, which

means that nearly all of the respondents possessed a certain amount of knowledge of cloud storage services. Moreover, as long as users are provided with a network connection, most of them agreed that they would use cloud storage service to back up files (88%), with the main file types being general documents (86%) and images (60%). Finally, the results showed that the most widely used cloud storage services today are Google Drive (75%) and Dropbox (57%).

B. Validation of the measuring model

In this study, the partial least squares (PLS) method was utilized for model validation. First, the measuring model was verified by examining the reliability and validity of the questionnaires, and then the hypotheses proposed in the study were verified by looking into the structural relationships. Reliability can measure the dependability, consistency, and stability of the measuring tools. Cronbach's α value is often adopted for reliability assessment in the Likert scale. It is often suggested that to ensure reliability, the overall question reliability under each dimension be greater than 0.6 [37]. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's α values of each Variable are all larger than 0.6. With the assessed values higher than the accepted standard, the scale employed in this paper is thereby demonstrated to be fairly reliable.

For validity, both convergent validity and discriminant validity were verified. Convergent validity here refers to the degree to which questions derived from a certain variable could convert to the same factor. It can be measured by composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Fornell and Larcker [38] suggest that the CR be greater than 0.6 and AVE be greater than 0.5, for the questionnaire to be accepted as convergent. As shown in Table 2, the CRs of each dimension are all higher than 0.6, and the AVEs higher than 0.5, which illustrates the excellent convergent validity of the research questionnaire.

TABLE II. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ANALYSES

Variable	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
PSQ	0.879	0.883	0.532
PS	0.833	0.901	0.834
PV	0.837	0.900	0.755
CO	0.906	0.948	0.819
WP	0.743	0.824	0.614

Discriminant validity refers to the degree to which a certain question could be discriminated from other questions under different dimensions. Fornell and Larcker [38] and Hair et al. [37] suggest that the square root of AVE for one dimension be greater than the correlation coefficients between this dimension and others. As shown in Table 7, the square roots of AVEs for each dimension are all higher than the corresponding correlation coefficients in the same row, which demonstrates the high-level discriminant validity of the questionnaires in the study.

TABLE III. AVE VALUES AND CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS

Dimension	PSQ	PS	PV	WP	CO
PSQ	0.729				
PS	0.381	0.913			
PV	0.222	0.562	0.932		
WP	0.426	0.605	0.490	0.784	
CO	0.689	0.369	0.283	0.311	0.905

^a Note: The bolded numbers on the diagonal are the square roots of AVEs, whereas the other numbers are the correlation coefficients between each pair of variables

C. Validation of the structural model

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measuring model meet recognized standards, the PLS method proposed by Chin [39] was employed to verify the research hypotheses proposed in the structural model. The path coefficients of each hypothesis in this research are displayed in Fig 2.

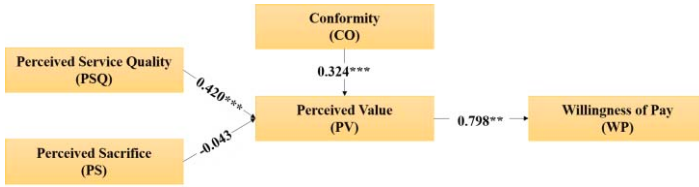


Fig. 2. Analysis results of the structural model

The results show that both perceived service quality (【H1】: established, $\beta = 0.420$, $t = 6.322***$) and conformity (【H3】: established, $\beta = 0.324$, $t = 4.907***$) have a positive effect on perceived value, which is in positive agreement with the authors' expectations. Exploring further into each dimension of perceived service quality, these can be ordered as follows, according to impact on user willingness to pay: tangibles ($\beta = 0.901$, $t = 48.482$), empathy ($\beta = 0.783$, $t = 17.757$), assurance ($\beta = 0.758$, $t = 17.379$), reliability ($\beta = 0.707$, $t = 13.216$), and responsiveness of service quality ($\beta = 0.692$, $t = 11.380$). Taking a closer look at the two most impactful dimensions, tangibles and empathy, we can observe the significance of basic functions and user manuals on cloud storage service. Currently, nearly all the large cloud storage brands, such as Google Drive and SkyDrive, offer robust online information editing and data synchronization functions, and, at the same time, enable users to share files and use cloud service simultaneously on multiple platforms and devices. Hence, most users feel that cloud storage service can offer convenience on daily basis.

At the same time, the results show that the effect of a perceived sacrifice on perceived value is insignificant (【H2】: not established, $\beta = -0.043$, $t = 0.508$). However, as expected, the effect of a perceived sacrifice on perceived value is negative. The potential reason for the failure of this hypothesis could be the fact that we defined perceived sacrifice in this study as non-monetary cost sacrifices for cloud storage (e.g., privacy and security concerns). Nevertheless, as cloud storage has become a very mature technology, most users are willing to embrace it to enjoy its convenience, while accepting its risks to some extent.

Certainly, the storage service value perceived by users has a positive effect on willingness to pay (【H4】: established, $\beta = 0.798$, $t = 2.649**$). This result matches previous conclusions from marketing studies, that is, the fact that perceived value has a positive effect on willingness to pay and could therefore be extended to the case of cloud service.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Cloud service has created the opportunity for a new business model. Among all of them, cloud storage service is one of the frequently adopted by the user to create, keep and share their files. Recently, because of the rapid popularization of smart mobile devices, enable users to access a variety of SoLoMo (social, local, mobile) services that generates lots of user log files and may relate to user's privacy or important data directly. Therefore, users are willing to pay more attention to the services quality for cloud storage service.

Based on the characteristics of cloud storage services, this study aims to explore the relationships among the user perception of service quality, perceived sacrifice, perceived value and willingness to pay for cloud storage services. The results show that the perception of service quality positively affects the perceived value and then increases pay willing indirectly. In detail, to enhance user's willingness to pay, we suggest that cloud storage service providers can improve user's experience by enhancing user interface (UI) design (such as detail guideline) ensuring the stability and security of the server. Additionally, cloud storage service providers should ensure the basic storage mechanisms function well, including: remote access, data file sharing and privacy control.

Furthermore, the research results indicate that conformity affects users' perception of the value positively. We infer that cloud integrated storage (CIS) shifts the actual data storage away from the hardware to the cloud; users rely on the comments from their experienced friends or trusted others greatly. Users can be encouraged to be familiar with the advantages of cloud storage service, enjoy its convenience and instant respond. To increase the user's willingness to pay, we suggest that the cloud storage service providers can invite the domain experts or trusted communities to share their experience about cloud storage service.

Finally, this study finds that although perceived sacrifice affects the perceived value negatively but not significant. Since the literature shows perceived sacrifice includes monetary and non-monetary costs, this study analyzed only for the non-monetary costs such as privacy and data security concerns. The researchers can explore whether monetary costs such as cloud storage service promotion discount will affect perceived value and willingness to pay in the future studies.

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