

Summary Report: Dal Mobile App Study

Research Team:

Dr. Colin Conrad, Mr. Gabriel O. Diaz, Ms. Lisa Holmes and Ms. Rachel Moylan

School of Information Management

Dalhousie University

1. Study Goals & Data Collection

Like most universities around the world, Dalhousie University responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by shifting from face-to-face to online teaching and learning beginning in March 2020. In addition to transitioning scholarly activities to the online environment, the University recognized the need to create a virtual space for students to connect and interact socially. One of Dalhousie's initiatives was the creation of the Dal Mobile app, which was intended to facilitate student social engagement and enhance the online student experience. This was an opportunity to study a new technology use application and we launched a research project officially titled "What factors lead to gainful university mobile community experiences during Covid-19?".

The goals of our study were to identify factors that affect use of the app, to understand if students are using the Dalhousie Mobile application as intended, and to determine whether this use affects student satisfaction with the app. To collect data related to these goals, we conducted a survey of Dalhousie University students during the 2020-2021 academic year. We received 2 368 responses to our survey, though only analyzed results from the 1401 respondents who answered all of the survey questions. For questions that concerned app use, we only investigated 915 students who both reported using the Dal Mobile app and answered all of the survey questions. Of the respondents we analyzed:

- 81% of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.
- 61% of survey respondents identified as women, 35% as men, 3% as either non-binary or another gender, and less than 1% preferred not to disclose their gender identity.
- Most survey respondents (73%) indicated they were in Nova Scotia. 14.5% of respondents indicated they were located in another Canadian province, and 12% indicated they were located in another country.

2. Hypotheses

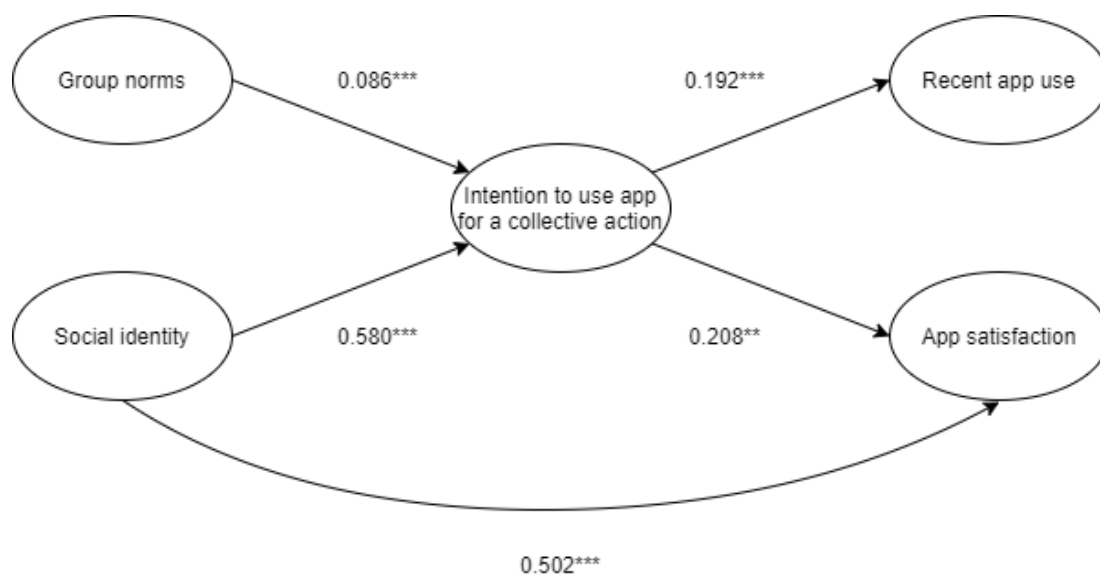
We were interested in understanding several specific factors that have been shown in previous studies to be influential. These included group norms (e.g., the degree of my perception of my peers sharing the collective goal) social identity (i.e., an individual identifying their sense of self with the particular group), intention to use the app for a collective action, recent use of the app, and overall satisfaction with the app.

Our hypotheses were:

- **H1:** Intention to use the university mobile application for a collective action will be positively associated with recent app use.
- **H2:** Intention to use the university mobile application for a collective action will be positively associated with app satisfaction.
- **H3:** Group norms will be positively associated with intention to use the university mobile application for a collective action.
- **H4a:** Social identity will be positively associated with intention to use the university mobile application for a collective action.
- **H4b:** Social identity will be positively associated with app satisfaction.

3. Preliminary Findings

Analysis of the relationship between the various constructs provided evidence to support all of our hypotheses. Our results indicate that students who intend to use the app for a collective action are more likely to have also used the app recently than those who do not intend to use the app for a collective action, and that students in the former group are also more likely to report being satisfied with the app than those in the latter group. In addition, our results indicate that group norms and social identity are both positive predictors of intention to use the app for a collective action, as well as overall satisfaction with the app. The model below illustrates these preliminary findings.





In addition, our analysis yielded relevant findings regarding the ways in which students have used the Dal Mobile app:

- 69% of respondents used the app for informational purposes.
- 52% of respondents reported they had interacted with posted content, however only 18.5% of respondents who indicated they had used the app in the last two weeks also indicated they had interacted with posted content.
- Approximately 1 out of 3 respondents indicated they had posted content using the Dal Mobile app, however only 11% of respondents who indicated they had used the app in the last two weeks also indicated they had posted content.

4. Implications

Overall, our results are consistent with those of prior research. The results of our analysis thus far indicate that student satisfaction with the app and student engagement using the app could be improved by facilitating social identity and group norms. As mentioned above, social identity involves the degree to which an individual student connects their sense of self with a particular group, and group norms involves an individual's perception of their peers sharing a common goal.

By taking steps to provide opportunities for students with common interests to connect, the Dal Mobile app could enhance student satisfaction and improve the online community. Although Dalhousie, like most North American universities, is planning for a return to campus for the Fall 2021 semester, the Dal Mobile app can potentially serve as an online space to supplement face-to-face interactions, enhance student social life, and connect students with common interests in ways that may not happen organically in a physical space.

5. Want to learn more?

When the study is finished, general findings and group results of this research will be posted to the Faculty of Management Content hub as well as Dr. Conrad's personal website: <https://colinconrad.com/study-results/>. Results will also be described and shared in scientific journals, on the Faculty of Management's blog site, and on Dal Mobile.

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Colin Conrad (colin.conrad@dal.ca). Let us thank you once again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Dr. Colin Conrad,

on behalf of our research team

Mr. Gabriel O. Diaz, Ms. Lisa Holmes and Ms. Rachel Moylan