

A Systematic Review of Continuance Intention to Use Mobile Health (2020–2024)

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technologies in healthcare has led to the widespread adoption of mobile health (mHealth) applications, offering users convenient access to health services. However, despite increasing downloads, many users discontinue usage after initial adoption, highlighting the issue of low continuance intention. This paper aims to systematically review the empirical literature to identify the key factors influencing users' continued use of mHealth applications. A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted using the PRISMA 2020 protocol and structured with the PICO framework. A total of 20 peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2024 were analyzed. The review identified that perceived usefulness, satisfaction, ease of use, and trust are the most frequently studied and influential factors. Several theoretical models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Expectation-Confirmation Model (ECM), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), were also widely applied. Additionally, the findings suggest that contextual elements like age, digital literacy, and chronic health conditions significantly affect continuance intention, especially among the elderly and specific user groups. The results of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional determinants of sustained mHealth usage and offer valuable insights for application developers, healthcare providers, and researchers to design more user-centered and effective digital health solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation in the health sector has encouraged the development of various technology-based innovations, one of which is the mobile health (mHealth) application. This application provides health services that can be accessed anytime and anywhere, from monitoring health conditions and medication consumption reminders to online consultations (Soni, 2021; Han & Zo, 2023). As the adoption of mHealth increases globally, challenges arise regarding the low intention of users to continue using the app (Wu et al., 2022; Gaber, 2022). Studies show that although many download mHealth apps, only a small percentage of users continue to use them in the long term (Gaber, 2022; Sharma, 2024). This issue is important to note, as the effectiveness of digital health interventions is highly dependent on their continued use. A systematic review also shows that trust is a significant factor in strengthening continuance intention, especially in developing countries that face data privacy challenges (Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding continuance intention, i.e., the intention to continue using the app after initial adoption, is an important indicator of the success of mHealth technology (Tian & Wu, 2022; Honglin et al., 2024).

To understand user behavior in maintaining the use of mHealth applications, a number of theoretical approaches have been widely adopted. One of the earliest and most widely used

approaches is the Expectation-Confirmation Model (ECM), which emphasizes that user satisfaction after initial use and confirmation of system benefits are the main factors in determining continuance intention (Tam et al., 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2001; Chiu et al., 2021). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is also often used in mHealth studies. This model explains that perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) of a system are the main determinants in shaping behavioral intentions toward technology (Davis, 1989; Belay et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) provides a broader framework by including variables such as social influence and facilitating conditions (Fraile Navarro et al., 2023). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) also discusses the importance of intrinsic motivation in sustained use behavior, which is particularly relevant to digital health applications (Alberts et al., 2024).

In addition to these models, the IS Success Model introduced by DeLone and McLean is also widely used to evaluate the success of information systems, including mHealth applications. This model identifies six interrelated factors: system quality, information quality, service quality, use, user satisfaction, and net benefits. In the context of mHealth, these factors are used to measure how well an application supports user needs, as well as how much it contributes to the sustainability of system use (DeLone & McLean, 2003).

As research has progressed, these models have been widely integrated with other approaches to capture the complexity of user behavior. For example, hedonic and utilitarian motivations are known to contribute to mHealth user satisfaction and loyalty (Tian & Wu, 2022; Sowon, 2020). In addition, behavior change techniques are also used to increase the effectiveness and retention of users in health applications (Wu, 2022). Other factors such as health value, system quality, and information quality have also been shown to have significant effects on perceived benefits and sustained use (Honglin et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2021). The quality affordances of applications for chronic disease management also contribute greatly to the continuance intentions of mHealth users (Liu et al., 2021).

In empirical reviews, several factors have been consistently found to influence continuance intention, such as perceived usefulness, user satisfaction, ease of use, trust, and concerns about data privacy (Rasul, 2023; Almulhem, 2023; Yin et al., 2021). Values such as functional, emotional, and social value also influence continuance intentions, as shown by Wang and Cao (2023). In addition, social support, intrinsic motivation, and user engagement in digital interactions also play roles in strengthening users' ongoing intentions to use apps (Xu et al., 2022; Yan, 2021). Contextual factors such as age, chronic health conditions, digital literacy, and social norms also have significant influence, especially among older adults and pregnant women (Tian & Wu, 2022; Almulhem, 2023; Kim & Han, 2021). Furthermore, digital literacy and eHealth literacy are increasingly recognized as important elements in strengthening continuance intention in app use (Ukaegbu & Mingyue, 2024).

Despite these advancements, a significant research gap remains. The urgency of this research stems from the lack of a comprehensive systematic literature review that classifies the determinants of continuance intention based on both theoretical frameworks and recent empirical findings. Most prior research has been fragmented, focusing on individual models or specific populations without synthesizing findings across the growing body of literature from 2020 to 2024 in *A Systematic Review of Continuance Intention to Use Mobile Health (2020–2024)*. For instance, a multi-subgroup meta-analysis by Wang et al. (2022) highlighted the

importance of identifying key factors across different country and population contexts, but it did not provide a qualitative synthesis of theoretical applications. Furthermore, while factors like perceived usefulness and satisfaction are well documented (Rasul, 2023; Almulhem, 2023; Yin et al., 2021), the interactions between contextual factors (e.g., age, digital literacy) and technological factors remain underexplored within a unified framework.

To facilitate the systematic preparation of this research, this study uses the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework. This framework has been shown to be effective in compiling evidence-based literature reviews in the health field, including mHealth (Nishikawa-Pacher, 2022). Using the PICO framework, this study focuses on mHealth application users, factors influencing continuance intention, and outcomes in the form of continuance intention. Although many studies have been conducted, there is still no systematic literature review that comprehensively classifies the determinants of continuance intention based on theoretical frameworks and recent empirical findings. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR).

METHOD

This research is a systematic literature review (SLR) conducted by reviewing several journals related to application development in the health sector to identify and synthesize factors that affect continuance intention in mobile health application (mHealth) users. The entire review process was compiled with reference to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines and formulated using the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework (Nishikawa-Pacher, 2022).

This study is designed to answer the main questions regarding the factors that affect the continuance intention of mobile health (mHealth) applications. Based on extraction data from 20 selected scientific articles and the resulting trend visualization, the formulation of the research questions is prepared as follows:

Tabel 1. Research Question

Q	RQ	Purpose
RQ1	What are the most frequently researched factors in the continuance intention study of mHealth application users over the past five years?	Exploring the types of dominant factors such as perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), trust, and satisfaction.
RQ2	What is the most widely used theoretical model in explaining continuance intent in mHealth applications?	Identify the most widely used models, such as TAM, ECM, UTAUT, and other combinations.
RQ3	How does the trend of publication of continuance intention studies on the mHealth application develop from 2020 to 2024?	Explain research trends in response to the development of digitalization of health services.
RQ4	Which country is most active in publishing studies related to continuance intention on the mHealth application?	Identify the geographical distribution of publications and potential bias or dominance of a particular country.
RQ5	What is the most dominant research method used in mHealth continuance intention studies, and what are the implications for the form and quality of the data produced?	To find out what research methods are most predominant used in mHealth continuance intention studies.

The PICO framework is used to limit the scope of search and selection of relevant journals, with the following details:

Table 2. PICO Framework

Components	Description
Population (P)	Users of the mobile health (mHealth) application, both from the general public, students, the elderly, to patients with certain health conditions.
Intervention (I)	Factors that affect the continuous use of the application, such as <i>perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust, satisfaction, etc.</i>
Comparison (C)	There were no explicit comparison groups in this study.
Outcome (O)	<i>Continuance intention</i> , which is the user's intention to continue using the mHealth application.

Several studies have also included eHealth literacy variables into the TAM framework to enrich the understanding of usage behavior (Ukaegbu & Mingyue, 2024). Based on the PICO framework above, the main question in this SLR is "What factors (I) affect continuance intention (O) in mobile health (P) application users?" This question is the basis for formulating search strategies, study selection, and data analysis systematically.

Literature searches were conducted on three reputable scientific databases: Scopus, PubMed, and Web of Science (WoS). Search keywords are developed based on standard terminology for mHealth, continuance intention, and influencing factors, using the following boolean operators:

Table 3. Search Strategy

Keywords	Search String
Mobile Health apps	"Mobile health" OR "mHealth" OR "Healthcare app" OR "Digital health app" OR "Telemedicine app"
Factor	"Factors" OR "Determinants" OR "Drivers" OR "Antecedents" OR "Influencing factors" OR "Predictors" OR "Motivators" OR "Conditions" OR "Attributes"
Continuance Intention	"Continuance intention" OR "Continued usage" OR "Continued use" OR "Retention" OR "Sustained use" OR "User retention" OR "User loyalty" OR "Intention to continue" OR "Re-use intention" OR "Behavioral Continuance"

The study of Wang et al. (2022) also shows the importance of a multi-subgroup meta-analysis approach in identifying key factors of continuance intention in various country and population contexts. The study search followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines in 2020 resulted in a total of 1050 studies in 3 databases. The following diagram of PRISMA can be seen in figure 1.

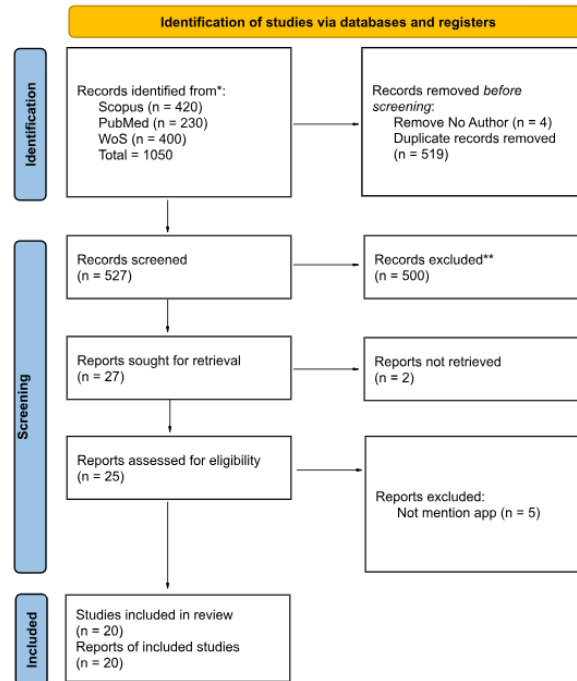


Figure 1. Diagram PRISMA

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that only studies relevant to the research objectives and meeting methodological standards were included in this review. The inclusion criteria in this study were as follows: (1) research involving mobile health application (mHealth) users; (2) containing a discussion or examination of factors affecting continuance intention; (3) using empirical approaches, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods; (4) published between 2020 and 2024; (5) written in English; (6) published in a scientific journal or conference proceeding; and (7) available in full text.

Meanwhile, studies were excluded from the SLR if they met any of the following exclusion criteria: (1) did not directly involve mHealth application users; (2) did not discuss or examine factors affecting continuance intention; (3) were review articles, commentaries, editorials, preprints, or abstracts without full text; (4) were published before 2020 or did not specify the year of publication; (5) were written in a language other than English; (6) did not specify or describe the type of mobile application used in the study; or (7) did not identify the authors.

The data extraction process was carried out after the final selection of journals that met the inclusion criteria. Each study was systematically analyzed to identify key information supporting the objectives of this SLR. The information was extracted and recorded in a table format based on publications relevant to the topic of continuance intention in mobile health (mHealth) applications. Data extraction was conducted using Microsoft Excel and was organized based on twelve main components, namely: (1) study identification (No and Study ID), (2) author and journal title, (3) year and country of study, (4) study type (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), (5) respondent population, (6) type of mHealth application used, (7) data collection method, (8) theoretical model used, (9) interventions or exposure factors studied, (10) observed outcomes (especially continuance intention), (11) main findings, and (12) conclusions of each study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the systematic results of the literature review process on studies that discuss continuance intention in the use of mobile health (mHealth) applications. All journals were originally obtained from three leading scientific databases, namely Scopus, PubMed, and Web of Science. The search process generates a total of 1,050 journals, which are then imported into the Zotero app for advanced reference management and filtering processes.

Through the elimination of duplication and selection by title and abstract, the number of journals was reduced to 527. Furthermore, the follow-up selection process is carried out based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria that have been set, including the involvement of mHealth application users, discussion of factors that affect continuance intention, year of publication, and the availability of complete text. After the final selection, as many as 20 journals were declared eligible and included in this systematic review. The discussion in this chapter is prepared based on five formulations of research questions that have been designed beforehand. Each subsection describes the results of data analysis, literature trends, and interpretation of the findings patterns to answer each question in a structured and in-depth manner.

Answering RQ1: What are the most frequently researched factors in the continuance intention study of mHealth application users?

Based on the analysis of 20 journals reviewed, there are a number of factors that are consistently researched as determinants of continuance intention in the use of mobile health applications. The most frequently analyzed factor was perceived usefulness, which appeared in 8 journals. Next are satisfaction (6 journals), perceived ease of use (PEOU) (5 journals), and trust (5 journals). Other factors such as attitude, information quality, service quality, and system quality each appeared in 3 journals. Especially for the elderly population, information overload can be a negative factor that decreases continuance intention even though applications are considered useful (Xie et al., 2020; Kattari et al., 2020).

The most frequently researched factors in the sustainability intention of using the mHealth application are perceived usefulness, satisfaction, perceived ease of use (PEOU), and trust. Perceived usefulness has been shown to be a major predictor in increasing users' sustainability intentions (Xu et al., 2022; Fei, 2024). Satisfaction was also found to be an important mediating variable linking user experience to ongoing intent (Honglin et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2020). The ease of use and interaction with the mHealth application has a direct impact on perceived usefulness, which ultimately increases user loyalty (Han & Zo, 2023; Xu et al., 2022; Shemesh & Barnoy, 2020). Meanwhile, trust is especially important in digital environments that involve sensitive data, such as in studies examining pregnant women and chronic patients (Sowon, 2020; Wu, 2022). Recent research also confirms that concerns about the data privacy of mental health apps significantly affect trust and long-term use intentions (Zhu et al., 2023).

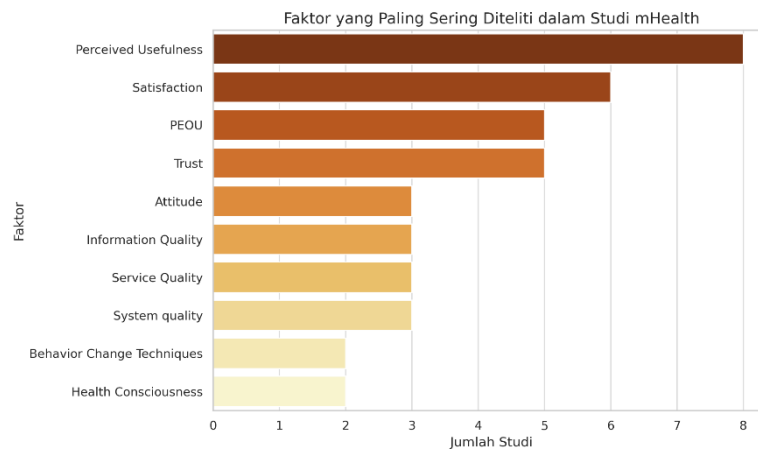


Figure 2. Intervention Factors

Answering RQ2: What is the most widely used theoretical model in explaining continuance intention?

The distribution of theoretical models used in twenty journals shows that the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is the most widely adopted theoretical framework, with 9 journals using this model. The Expectation Confirmation Model (ECM) ranks second with 6 journals, while other models such as the IS Success Model and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) are used in 2 journals each. The UTAUT and UTAUT 2 models each appeared in 1 journal, and the rest were grouped in the Other category which includes a variety of alternative and integrative models (6 journals).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is widely used to explain how users' perceptions of the ease and benefits of an application affect users' intention to continue using the service (Xu et al., 2022; Fei, 2024; Handayani, 2020). On the other hand, the Expectation Confirmation Model (ECM) is an important framework in explaining the influence of expectation and post-use satisfaction on continuance intention (Sharma, 2024; Honglin et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022). Some studies have also combined ECM with motivational models such as the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to capture broader psychological dimensions, such as intrinsic motivation and source credibility (Han & Zo, 2023; Xie et al., 2020; Handayani, 2020).

The high adoption of TAM and ECM suggests that research on continuance intention is still heavily influenced by classical models that focus on usability perception, ease of use, expectation confirmation, and satisfaction. However, the existence of the "Other" category also indicates the exploration of additional models that consider affective, social, or motivational aspects of users. In general, this trend suggests that a quantitative approach based on technology adoption theory remains the dominant framework, although there are indications of the need for a more contextual and multidimensional theoretical model to explain the ongoing behavior of mHealth users more comprehensively. In several recent studies, flow experience and intrinsic motivation have also been used as additional variables in the TAM and SDT models to explain the long-term engagement of mHealth users (Wang et al., 2021).

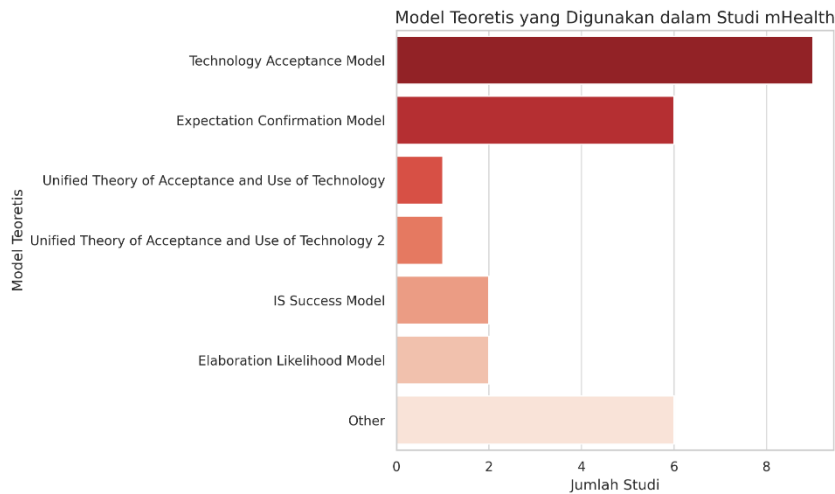


Figure 3. Theoretical Model

Answering RQ3: How did the trend of publication of continuance intention studies on the mHealth application develop from 2020 to 2024?

The distribution of publication years of the twenty journals analyzed shows a fluctuating but relatively active trend over the past five years. The study started in 2020 with 2 publications, then experienced a significant increase in 2021 with 6 journals, which was the peak of the number of publications during the period reviewed. In 2022, the number of journals decreased slightly to 5, then decreased again in 2023 by 3 journals, and again increased to 4 journals in 2024. Recent studies from children's hospitals in Europe also show an increasing trend of post-pandemic telehealth adoption, especially in 2025 (Vannelli et al., 2025). Other research in Indonesia has also shown that telemedicine apps have an impact on adoption behaviors and sustainable intentions during the pandemic (Lu et al., 2023).

This variation shows that academic interest in the issue of continuance intention in the context of mHealth applications has gradually received attention since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The surge in 2021 is most likely triggered by the acceleration of digital transformation in the healthcare sector, where the mHealth application is one of the main solutions in maintaining the sustainability of mobile healthcare (Honglin et al., 2024; Almulhem, 2023). Declines in the following years do not necessarily signal a decline in importance, but rather a possible shift in focus to advanced issues such as quality of use, long-term adoption, or the integration of mHealth in the national health system. Overall, this trend reflects that continuance intention has become one of the important topics in the review of the digital health technology literature, and continues to evolve as society adapts to application-based healthcare.

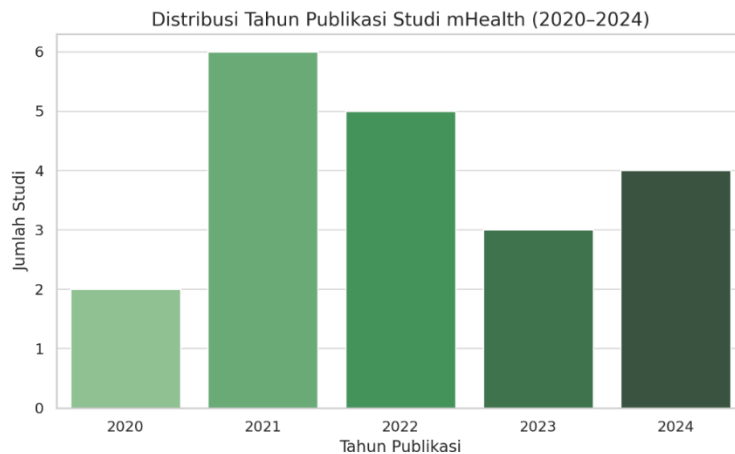


Figure 4. Distribution of the Year of Publication

Answering RQ4: Which country is most active in publishing studies related to continuance intention on the mHealth application?

A geographical analysis of 20 journals shows that publications on the continuance intention of the mHealth application are dominated by countries in Asia. The country with the most contributions is China, followed by South Korea and Indonesia. In addition, some studies also came from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other countries in the Asian and Middle East regions. The high number of publications from China and South Korea shows a strong commitment to the development and research of digital health technologies. This also reflects the investment of governments and academics in these countries in accelerating the adoption of digital solutions in the health sector, especially post-pandemic. Meanwhile, the emergence of studies from developing countries such as Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt shows that the sustainability intention of using the mHealth application is starting to become an equal global concern, not only limited to countries with advanced digital infrastructure.

This distribution also opens up opportunities to expand cross-cultural research. The factors that affect continuance intention can differ from one country to another, depending on the cultural context, level of digital literacy, and the applicable healthcare system. Therefore, further exploration of contextual differences between countries will be important in the development of more inclusive and adaptive mHealth applications.

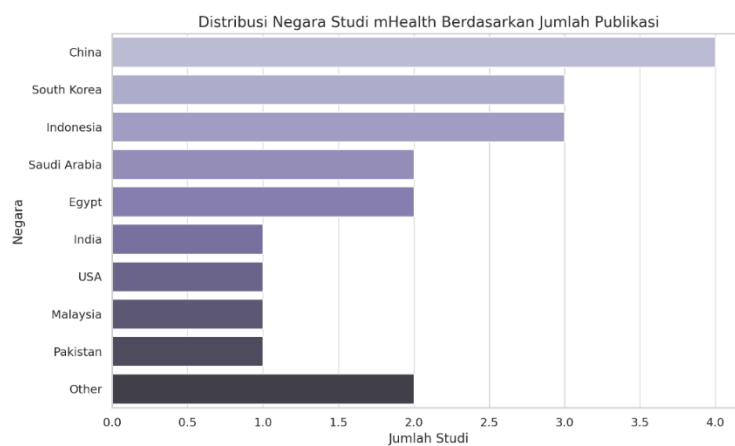


Figure 5. Distribution of Publications

Answering RQ5: What is the most dominant research method used?

The results of the analysis show that the quantitative method is the most dominant approach used in the study of the continuance intention of the mHealth application. Of the 20 journals reviewed, 15 studies used quantitative methods, while 3 studies used qualitative methods, and 2 other studies adopted mixed methods. The dominance of quantitative approaches indicates that the majority of studies are focused on hypothesis testing using survey instruments and statistical analysis, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The use of the PLS-SEM method in combination with ANN has also begun to be widely used, especially in cross-cultural studies such as in China (Honglin et al., 2024). This approach gives power to generalizing findings and testing relationships between variables on a large scale. Nevertheless, the limitations of the quantitative approach lie in its low ability to explore users' motivations, deep perceptions, and emotional dynamics.

In contrast, qualitative and mixed studies make an important contribution in explaining the context of use, personal experience, and social factors that are difficult to reach by quantitative data. Therefore, increasing the use of qualitative or longitudinal approaches can be an important direction in follow-up research so that the understanding of continuance intention becomes more comprehensive and contextual.

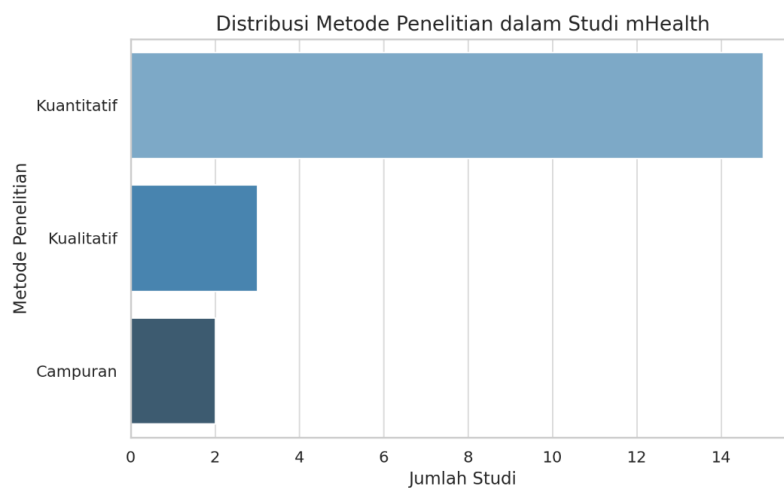


Figure 6. Distribution of Research Methods

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive mapping of the determinants of continuance intention in the use of the mHealth application based on 20 recent studies. It was found that perceived usefulness, satisfaction, ease of use, and trust were the dominant factors that influenced the sustainability of application use. Theoretical models such as TAM and ECM remain the most widely used analytical frameworks, although several studies have begun to adopt additional models such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and investment models (IM) to explain the psychological and social aspects of users. The geographical distribution shows a significant contribution from Asian countries, especially China, South Korea, and Indonesia. This study also shows the importance of considering contextual factors such as age, chronic health status, and digital literacy in understanding continuance intention. Therefore, the results of this review provide a clear direction for researchers and practitioners in designing

sustainable and personalized mHealth-based application design strategies and interventions. Quantitative approaches dominate the methodology used, but there is great opportunity for qualitative and longitudinal exploration in future research.

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