

Acceptance, Installation and Uninstallation: Literature Review on the Use of Mobile Apps in Personal Coaching

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Abstract:

This paper examines the acceptance, usage, and abandonment of mobile applications in the context of personal coaching. It is primarily based on research published between 2015 and 2025 in journals rated by Scimago (Q4 or higher) and summarizes the findings of several studies. Key drivers for app acceptance and continued usage include performance expectancy, habit formation, personal empowerment, satisfaction, and low perceived effort. Personality traits, mobile learning readiness, and demographics such as age and smartphone experience also influence usage behavior. The willingness to pay for mobile coaching apps is shaped by utilitarian motives (security, usefulness, ease of use) and hedonic motives (entertainment, emotional attachment). Conversely, app deletion is often triggered by poor usability, low personalization, unmet expectations, and the absence of gamification elements. Practical recommendations emphasize the importance of immediate and sustained value delivery, personalization, and emotional engagement. Future research should focus on enhancing personalization through adaptive technologies, integrating behavior change theories, and developing standardized human coaching protocols to improve scalability and user outcomes.

Keywords:

Blended Counseling, Coaching, Personal Coaching, Smartphone Apps, Mobile Technologies.

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Introduction

In an increasingly complex world characterized by poly-crisis, personal coaching is becoming more and more relevant. In the G20 countries alone, revenue will be around USD 11.5 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow by 8.97% annually until 2029 (Statista Market Insights, 2024b). At over USD 6 billion, the G7 countries account for more than half of the market, with the market volume in the USA alone estimated at almost USD 4 billion (Statista Market Insights, 2024a). The target group of the coaching market, i.e. those who make use of coaching, also known as coachees, place great value on education and learning, self-development and career progress (Statista, 2025b, 2025c, 2025a). In line with this, the demand for qualified human capital is also constantly increasing in the economy (Giebe, 2021). The complexity of the world of work requires appropriately qualified managers (Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2024).

In the new world of work, the use of digital media has become the norm. Digital coaching has now earned its place alongside traditional face-to-face coaching. The trend is moving towards digital coaching as an equal form of coaching alongside face-to-face coaching. Combining the two forms of coaching offers great potential for adapting coaching to the new, digital world of work in which coachees operate (Hasenbein & Kraiss, 2021). Blended counselling refers to a counselling concept in which face-to-face counselling is meaningfully combined with digital counselling (Hörmann & Engelhardt, 2022). As the time resources of coaches and the monetary possibilities of potential coachees are limited, mobile apps represent a possible alternative or supplement to personal coaching.

Mobile apps are already being used in numerous areas such as retail (Ho et al., 2022; Wohllebe & Prignitz, 2024), banking (Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2017; Thusi & Maduku, 2020) and sports betting (Ezema et al., 2025). Apps are also used in the digitalization of healthcare in general (Radtke & Wohllebe, 2025), in health education (Alsayed et al., 2019) or by health insurance companies (Lange & Wohllebe, 2025). Apps are not always the only way to access patients: In tele-audiology, it has been shown that although apps are perceived as helpful, patients are also looking for personal support (Ross et al., 2022).

Research into mobile apps in the specific context of personal coaching is still a relatively new field of research. At the same time, there are already many research findings from related subject areas. Against this background, this paper aims to provide an overview of the current state of research and answer the following research questions:

- What drives acceptance and usage of mobile apps in personal coaching?
- What drives users to pay for mobile apps in personal coaching?
- What will make users delete a mobile app for personal coaching?
- What should future research on mobile apps in personal coaching focus on?

Methodologically, this article is primarily based on a compilation of recent research findings since 2015, considering journals published in a journal with a Scimago ranking of Q4 or better. In addition, journal articles were taken into consideration to provide a practical component.

Results and Discussion

Drivers of User Acceptance and Usage

The acceptance and usage of mobile applications in the domain of personal coaching are shaped by multiple key factors that interact to influence user behavior. Among the most critical determinants are performance expectancy, habitual use, and the feeling of personal empowerment, all of which have been shown to significantly impact both behavioral intention and actual usage behavior (Salgado et al., 2020). These factors play an essential role in motivating users of coaching apps not only to adopt an app initially but also to integrate it into their regular routines.

In addition to these initial drivers, satisfaction with the application, the establishment of usage habits, expectations regarding the app's performance, and perceived effort required for effective use are particularly influential in shaping continuance intention - that is, users' motivation to persist in using an application over time (Carlos et al., 2018). High levels of user satisfaction and a perception of low effort are therefore crucial to ensuring long-term engagement with mobile coaching interventions.

Furthermore, there is evidence that active and sustained usage of mobile interventions correlates with improved psychological outcomes. For example, regular engagement with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)-based applications has been associated with increased psychological flexibility, demonstrating the potential of active app use to promote meaningful personal development (Mattila et al., 2016).

Personality traits also play a significant role in shaping mobile app usage. Traits such as conscientiousness, alongside an individual's readiness for mobile learning (m-learning readiness), have been identified as important antecedents to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, both of which directly influence the intention to use m-learning and similar coaching applications (Ching-Hsuan et al., 2021). These personal characteristics can significantly mediate how users perceive the benefits and demands of mobile coaching tools.

Moreover, demographic and experiential variables, such as gender, age, and prior ownership of smartphones, have been shown to affect app usage patterns (Mattila et al., 2016). Such user characteristics must therefore be taken into consideration when designing and targeting mobile coaching solutions.

A deeper understanding of these diverse drivers is essential for developers aiming to create more effective and engaging mobile applications. By aligning app design with the behavioral, psychological,

and demographic factors that govern user interaction, it is possible to enhance acceptance, promote sustained usage, and ultimately improve the outcomes associated with mobile-based personal coaching.

Paying for Mobile Coaching Apps

Mobile applications designed for personal coaching, particularly in the domains of health and fitness, are experiencing growing popularity. Research indicates that the most successful applications are those that integrate clinical expertise, address users' internal drivers such as motivation and self-efficacy, and offer external support mechanisms through informational content and social networking functionalities (Fitzgerald & McClelland, 2016). By combining these elements, such apps are better equipped to foster sustainable behavior change and support long-term user engagement.

For specific user groups, such as breast cancer survivors, personalized physical activity applications must meet particular requirements. They should feature straightforward and accessible tools for monitoring activity, setting realistic goals, and providing individualized feedback on progress (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2020). Simplicity and personalization are key to ensuring usability and relevance, especially for individuals facing health-related challenges that may influence their physical capabilities and psychological readiness. This suggests that coaching apps in general should be simple and customizable. Consumer engagement with branded mobile applications is influenced by a combination of utilitarian and hedonic motivations. Utilitarian motives encompass perceptions of security, overall usefulness, and ease of use, whereas hedonic motives involve factors such as interpersonal utility, emotional attachment to devices, and entertainment value (Stocchi et al., 2018). These motivational dimensions not only drive app engagement but also significantly impact consumers' willingness to pay for the application and to recommend it to others. Hence, understanding and addressing both functional and emotional user needs are critical for achieving commercial success in the mobile coaching market.

As smartphones continue to transform healthcare delivery models, mobile coaching (m-coaching) is anticipated to assume an increasingly central role in offering personalized healthcare support services (Banos & Nugent, 2018). This evolution underscores for developers of coaching apps the necessity to create solutions that are closely aligned with users' individual needs, preferences, and motivational structures, thereby maximizing both engagement and effectiveness.

This development underscores the need to develop solutions that are precisely tailored to the individual needs, preferences, and motivational structures of users in order to maximize both user retention and effectiveness.

Deletion of Mobile Coaching Apps

Mobile application abandonment is determined by a range of interrelated factors, particularly within the domain of personal coaching apps. Research has identified functional value, the fulfillment of information expectations, emotional value, the quality of platform services, user trust, perceived costs, and social influence as major determinants that significantly contribute to users' decisions to discontinue app usage (Shaobo et al., 2024, p. 202). If users of coaching apps perceive a lack of value in any of these dimensions, they are more likely to abandon an application.

Additional factors such as perceived low compatibility with user needs, difficulties regarding ease of use, and concerns over high performance risks further exacerbate the tendency to delete mobile apps (Wei-Chun et al., 2024). Users are particularly sensitive to any friction that disrupts seamless interaction or diminishes their confidence in the coaching app's reliability and security, highlighting the critical importance of intuitive and dependable design.

To counteract abandonment and enhance retention, personalization has been recognized as a central strategy, especially for personal coaching applications. Effective personalization encompasses several key elements, including the provision of tailored feedback, structured goal setting, precise user targeting, and opportunities for meaningful inter-human interaction (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2019). These personalization strategies help to foster a stronger emotional connection between the user and the app, thereby reducing the likelihood of disengagement.

For specific user groups such as breast cancer survivors, the need for personalization becomes even more pronounced. Applications aimed at these populations must be simple, guiding, encouraging, and, above all, trustworthy. They should deliver highly individualized experiences that take into account critical personal information, such as the stage of disease progression, physical limitations, and user preferences (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2020). Apps that fail to adequately address these needs risk becoming irrelevant or even burdensome to their target users. For coaching apps, it is also advisable to be simple, instructive, and encouraging.

Moreover, integrating behavior change theories and gamification elements - such as goal achievements, rewards, and interactive challenges - has been shown to enhance both user engagement and long-term retention (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2019). These elements not only support behavior modification but also increase the perceived enjoyment and motivation when using the respective coaching app.

These elements not only support behavioral changes, but also increase the perceived enjoyment and motivation when using the respective coaching app.

Ultimately, a deep understanding of user needs, expectations, and psychological drivers is essential for developing effective, personalized coaching applications that users are less inclined to abandon.

Current Suggestions for Further Research

Future research on mobile applications within the context of personal coaching must address several critical areas to enhance both the effectiveness and scalability of such interventions. A key priority is the advancement of personalization mechanisms, particularly through the development of self-learning algorithms, enhanced context awareness, and dynamic adaptation to individual user needs and behaviors (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2019). Improving these capabilities is essential for creating more responsive and effective coaching experiences that can meaningfully support behavior change.

Equally important is the integration of behavior change theories and gamification elements into the core design of mobile applications. Theoretical foundations provide a structured approach to influencing user behavior, while gamification can boost engagement and motivation by introducing reward systems, progress tracking, and interactive challenges (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2019). A systematic approach to embedding these components is necessary to maximize user retention and intervention success.

Digital coaching providers often do not develop from within the coaching industry, but rather from the IT sector. This raises the question of whether the development of coaching apps should be left to IT experts from outside the industry or to financial investors (Schermyly 2020). Further research could lead to solutions for addressing this conflict.

Another promising avenue for future research lies in the utilization of fine-grained monitoring technologies, including the collection and integration of objective biomarker data (Willem Jaap Roderick van 't Klooster et al., 2024). By leveraging physiological and behavioral metrics, coaching apps can offer more precise feedback and tailored recommendations, thereby enhancing personalization and intervention effectiveness.

Furthermore, the role of human coaching within app-based therapeutic interventions remains underexplored. There is a pressing need for systematic investigations into how human coaching can be standardized, including the development of protocols for training coaches, the establishment of consistent coaching practices, and rigorous evaluations of how coaching impacts user engagement and outcomes (Bernstein et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2021). Addressing these aspects will be crucial for optimizing the integration of human elements into digital coaching tools, for example into coaching apps.

Research should also tackle the current heterogeneity observed in coaching methods. Many studies lack detailed descriptions of coaching protocols, making replication and scaling difficult (Meyer et al., 2021). Future work should focus on developing replicable, clearly defined coaching frameworks that facilitate both scientific evaluation and broader implementation. Moreover, further exploration of the

digital therapeutic alliance - how relationships are formed and maintained between users and digital or human coaches - will be vital for understanding and enhancing user adherence and satisfaction.

Conclusion

This paper examines the acceptance, installation and uninstallation of mobile apps in the context of personal coaching. For this purpose, relevant research papers from the years 2015 to 2025 are collected from journals that are ranked at least in Q4 at Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR). The collected papers are analyzed and summarized. The results are explained in accordance with the questions raised in the introduction.

The following factors explain the acceptance and use of mobile apps in personal coaching:

- **Performance expectancy, habit formation, and personal empowerment** significantly shape initial behavioral intention and use behavior.
- **Satisfaction, effort expectancy, and habitual usage** are crucial for sustaining long-term engagement.
- **Personality traits, m-learning readiness, and user demographics** such as gender, age, and smartphone experience impact motivation and usage patterns.

The following factors were identified with regard to users' willingness to pay for a mobile personal coaching app:

- **Utilitarian motives** such as perceived security, usefulness, and ease of use enhance user trust and perceived value.
- **Hedonic motives** including interpersonal utility, device attachment, and entertainment increase emotional engagement and loyalty.
- **Personalized features and clinical input** strengthen user satisfaction and perceived relevance, which can positively influence willingness to pay.

According to existing research, the deletion/uninstallation of a mobile coaching app occurs for the following reasons:

- **Low perceived compatibility, poor ease of use, and high performance risks** undermine user trust and engagement.
- **Failure to deliver sufficient functional, emotional, and informational value** reduces the perceived benefits of continued use.
- **Lack of personalization, insufficient behavior change support, and absence of gamification elements** decrease user satisfaction and increase abandonment risk.

Practical Implications

Based on the findings, developers of mobile coaching apps should consider the following aspects:

- Mobile coaching apps must **trigger high expectations** among potential users in the short term and **fulfill these expectations** in the long term.
- In addition to utilitarian motives, users' **hedonic motives** should also be addressed through **gamification** and entertainment.
- **Personalization** and user interface that is individually tailored to the user play an important role.
- The **success of the treatment** in terms of the user's expectations is of central importance.

Theoretical Implications and Further Research

Based on the analyzed literature, three topics for future research on mobile coaching apps are highlighted:

- **Advancing personalization through self-learning, context awareness, and adaptation** to improve user-specific effectiveness (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2019).
- **Integrating behavior change theories and gamification elements** systematically to enhance engagement and support sustained behavior change (Monteiro-Guerra et al., 2019).
- **Developing standardized human coaching protocols and incorporating objective biomarker data** to enable scalable, replicable, and effective app-based interventions (van 't Klooster et al., 2024; Bernstein et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2021).

Future research should attempt to gain further insights into these topics in order to improve the effectiveness of mobile coaching apps for coaches and coachees alike.

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