

Earning Trust Through Clarity: A Sequential Model of ChatGPT Clarification, Uncertainty Reduction, and Destination Visit Intention

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Abstract

Tourism decisions are uncertainty-intensive, committing resources to experiential outcomes only knowable after consumption. Grounded in Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), we position ChatGPT as a conversational tool tourists use to clarify uncertain travel decisions. We test a sequential model in which tourism decision uncertainty — a higher-order construct spanning choice, knowledge, needs, and outcome facets — increases clarification seeking from ChatGPT, which enhances perceived uncertainty reduction, strengthens trust in ChatGPT recommendations, and raises destination visit intention. Survey data analyzed via two-stage PLS-SEM support this chain: uncertainty reduction and trust both directly predict visit intention, with trust partially mediating the uncertainty reduction–intention link. Findings inform destination managers, travel agencies, and chatbot developers designing and governing AI-based decision support. The study extends URT to generative conversational AI, identifying clarification seeking as its mechanism, trust as the main bridge to action, and uncertainty reduction alone as sometimes sufficient to prompt intention before full trust forms.

Keywords

Tourism decision uncertainty, clarification seeking, trust, destination visit intention, uncertainty reduction theory

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1. Introduction

Tourism decisions are structurally uncertainty-intensive: travellers must invest time, money and social commitment in experiential products, the quality of which can only be known after their consumption (Maser & Weiermair, 1998; Williams & Baláž, 2015). This uncertainty is multidimensional — spanning choice, knowledge, needs, and outcome dimensions — and acts as a decision friction that increases cognitive effort, slows down evaluation and, on some occasions, may lead an individual to postpone commitment despite the availability of attractive alternatives (Quintal et al., 2010; Yang & Wibowo, 2025). The growing fragmentation of travel information across online travel agencies, social platforms, and review ecosystems compounds this problem by producing competing narratives and shifting reference points on what is true and what is best (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). This friction is theoretically most diagnostic in markets where information is abundant

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but poorly consolidated across institutions and platforms, because URT locates uncertainty in the gap between available cues and their interpretability rather than in the sheer volume of information on offer (Berger & Calabrese, 1974; Brashers, 2001). Indonesia illustrates this configuration: a large, mobile-first traveller base navigates a densely platform-mediated but loosely curated travel information ecosystem, so choice, knowledge, needs, and outcome uncertainty are simultaneously salient rather than isolated (DataReportal, 2024; Setiawan et al., 2024) — a theoretical rationale for the setting, not merely an empirical convenience, that is developed further below. Generative conversational AI (Gen-AI), ChatGPT in particular, reconfigures this decision environment: instead of extracting meaning from scattered sources, travellers can engage in back-and-forth exchanges to ask follow-up questions, test contingencies, and compare options — a qualitative shift from browsing to asking (Gursoy et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2023).

Yet the same fluency that makes ChatGPT useful for clarification also introduces a risk specific to gen-AI. Large language models are well documented to hallucinate, producing fluent, confident outputs that describe facts, sources, or recommendations that do not exist, or that misrepresent what is known (Ji et al., 2023). For a traveller, a hallucinated recommendation is hard to distinguish from an accurate one, so hallucination is less a technical flaw than a source of uncertainty in its own right, one that can arise even after, and partly because of, a seemingly clarifying exchange with ChatGPT (Kim et al., 2025). Section 5 returns to this risk and its bearing on the mechanism tested here. Nor should this risk, or ChatGPT's broader influence on travel decisions, operate uniformly across travellers. Tourists are a heterogeneous population whose decision-making varies with individual differences in values, motivations, personality, and prior experience with technology (Cohen et al., 2014), so clarification seeking's effect on uncertainty, trust, and hallucination risk likely differs across segments. The relationships modelled below should be read as population-level tendencies, not a claim that ChatGPT affects every traveller identically, a scope condition revisited in the Limitations and Future Research section (Section 7).

Trust has long been central to tourism consumer behaviour research, since travel is an experiential purchase whose quality cannot be verified before consumption, leaving travellers reliant on the reliability of whatever information or advice they act on (Maser & Weiermair, 1998; Wang et al., 2014). Empirical evidence across tourism contexts confirms trust directly shapes travellers' choices under such uncertainty, including attitudes toward a destination and willingness to visit, a link that holds under both ordinary and crisis conditions (Shin et al., 2022). Trust plays a parallel role at the level of advice itself. Travellers who trust a recommendation's source, whether a peer review, a travel agent, or a curated platform, are more likely to adopt and share it, underscoring trust's role as the gatekeeper between information and behavioural response in tourism decisions (Filiari et al., 2015). This well-established role of trust across human and institutional advice sources raises the question of whether the same logic extends to a fundamentally different advisor, gen-AI, the specific gap this study addresses.

A growing body of work examines how tourists interact with ChatGPT and other AI tools when making travel decisions. Recommendation usefulness, credibility, and trust are key predictors of intention to use ChatGPT for travel planning, with trust functioning as the main link between recommendation quality and outcomes such as destination visit intention (Ali et al., 2023; Seyfi et al., 2025). Trust is also fragile: exposure to inaccurate AI outputs can quickly erode it and suppress behavioural intention, making it highly context dependent (Kim et al., 2025). Beyond tourism, work on Gen-AI and chatbot services links iterative clarification to lower uncertainty and higher satisfaction (Alharbi et al., 2026; Chang et al., 2025), and accessibility-diagnostics perspectives suggest ChatGPT reduces uncertainty by turning users' constraints into options that are easier to evaluate (Stergiou & Nella, 2024). This positions ChatGPT less as a novel technology and more as a tool for interactive reasoning under uncertainty (Sigala et al., 2024).

Despite this body of work, three gaps remain, each mapping onto a path in the model below. First, clarification seeking has not been separated from constructs that dominate prior explanations of AI-assisted travel decisions. General information seeking passively extracts content from static sources, perceived usefulness judges a system's value retrospectively, and interactivity is a property of the technology itself, its capacity for two-way exchange, not a user behaviour. Clarification seeking is none of these. It is a traveller-initiated, iterative strategy triggered by felt ambiguity and aimed at turning uncertain cues into a workable basis for choice (Brashers, 2001), a motivated response to uncertainty, not a system feature or outcome evaluation.

Second, existing studies explaining AI adoption through usefulness, credibility, or engagement (Ali et al., 2023; Seyfi et al., 2025) do not test whether uncertainty drives this dialogic strategy, the gap H1 addresses, tourism decision uncertainty and clarification seeking. Even where clarification behaviour is acknowledged, URT, the most precise account of how communication restores predictability and control (Berger & Calabrese, 1974; Brashers, 2001), has not been tested on whether dialogue with a non-human agent works the way it assumes interpersonal clarification does, rather than merely resembling information delivery (Chang et al., 2025). Without this test, it is unclear whether clarification seeking genuinely reduces felt uncertainty or only creates a sense of having done something about it, the gap H2 addresses, clarification seeking and perceived uncertainty reduction.

Third, prior research prioritises trust and perceived usefulness as the main constructs linking AI use to travel outcomes, largely bypassing whether reduced uncertainty is itself a precursor to trust. This matters because tourism outcomes are

experiential and hard to verify before travelling, so trust cannot take hold until the traveller first feels the ambiguity has resolved, the gap H3 addresses, perceived uncertainty reduction and trust in ChatGPT travel recommendations. Together, these three gaps call for a mechanism-focused model tracing uncertainty through clarification and reduction to trust, rather than treating AI use as one undifferentiated antecedent.

URT is well-suited to this problem because it conceptualises uncertainty as a motivational trigger for clarification-oriented communication aimed at restoring predictability and control (Berger & Calabrese, 1974). Subsequent uncertainty management perspectives sharpen this: individuals do not seek more information per se, but actionable meaning — coherence, controllability, and a workable basis for choice — particularly under ambiguity and competing cues (Brashers, 2001). In a gen-ai context, this translates into AI-based clarification seeking: asking follow-up questions and progressively narrowing options until the decision becomes manageable. Trust enters the model as the link between reduced uncertainty and behavioural commitment, because travel decisions require reliance on advice whose quality is difficult to verify in advance, making perceived competence and reliability essential for intention formation (Ali et al., 2023; McKnight et al., 2002). As introduced above, Indonesia's combination of high mobile connectivity, platform-mediated travel content, and heterogeneous destination conditions operationalises this uncertainty-intensive configuration empirically, amplifying all four uncertainty dimensions — precisely the setting in which iterative AI-based clarification should be most valued as a means of converting ambiguity into actionable plans (DataReportal, 2024; Setiawan et al., 2024).

This study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it extends URT from interpersonal settings to human-GenAI interaction, treating uncertainty reduction as dialogue-based clarification rather than passive information provision. Empirically, it tests a sequential mechanism, from tourism decision uncertainty to clarification seeking, uncertainty reduction, trust in ChatGPT recommendations, and visit intention, as an integrated chain unexamined in the GenAI tourism literature. Contextually, it draws on evidence from Indonesia, a high-connectivity Global South market where platform-mediated travel decisions are common but GenAI tourism research remains sparse (Seyfi et al., 2025; Sigala et al., 2024). It asks: RQ1: Does tourism decision uncertainty increase clarification seeking from ChatGPT?

RQ2: Does clarification seeking produce perceived uncertainty reduction?

RQ3: Does uncertainty reduction strengthen trust in ChatGPT recommendations and visit intention?

RQ4: Does trust mediate the link between uncertainty reduction and visit intention?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT)

URT originated in interpersonal communication, explaining how people manage uncertainty in early encounters through information seeking that builds predictability and understanding (Berger & Calabrese, 1974). Predicted Outcome Value theory later recast early interaction as outcome oriented, arguing people seek information mainly to maximise anticipated benefits (Sunnafank, 1986). Uncertainty reduction is not universal, however: people do not always want less uncertainty when acquiring it carries cognitive, relational, or strategic costs (Kellermann & Reynolds, 1990). A further extension treats uncertainty as contextually valued, shifting focus from how much uncertainty exists to which types matter and what communication fits (Goldsmith, 2001). Most relevant here, uncertainty management theory holds that people seek not just information but actionable meaning and a workable basis for choice under ambiguity (Brashers, 2001).

Uncertainty is inherent in tourism because travellers decide with incomplete information and variable service outcomes, shaping which sources they consult and how much they search (Maser & Weiermair, 1998; Williams & Baláz, 2015). This uncertainty is often multidimensional, spanning alternatives, knowledge sufficiency, needs fit, and likely outcomes, raising the value of clarification oriented inquiry. Unlike the human interlocutors assumed by original URT, generative AI like ChatGPT reduces uncertainty through on demand, iterative dialogue without relational costs, raising the question of whether the mechanism holds with a non-human interlocutor (Chang et al., 2025). In online accommodation research, URT-based studies find clarifying information cues help travellers feel more certain about quality and fit, strengthening intention-related responses (Yan & Gong, 2023). Recent tourism and hospitality research similarly treats ChatGPT as a practical decision aid that lowers search effort by letting users ask follow-up questions and narrow down options, though its impact depends on whether travellers find it useful and trust its recommendations (Gursoy et al., 2023; Sigala et al., 2024; Stergiou & Nella, 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Extending URT to human-AI contexts requires care, since ChatGPT departs from the interlocutors it was built around in three ways. First, it has no relational intent. It does not seek predictability about the user, so uncertainty reduction here is unilateral rather than the mutual process URT describes (Berger & Calabrese, 1974). Second, it carries no accountability.

Unlike a travel agent or friend whose advice carries reputational consequences, ChatGPT bears no cost for being wrong, removing the social risk that disciplines interpersonal quality (Gefen et al., 2003). Third, it offers no genuine social presence. Its responses can simulate conversational cues, but there is no co-present other whose nonverbal or accountability cues a tourist can read (Chang et al., 2025). What still holds is URT's central claim that uncertainty pushes people toward action aimed at restoring predictability and control, whether or not the interlocutor can reciprocate relationally (Berger & Calabrese, 1974; Brashers, 2001). Tourists do not need ChatGPT to have intent or accountability, only a responsive interlocutor that processes and answers questions that reduce felt ambiguity. This reframes URT's dialogic mechanism as a property of the traveller's behaviour rather than mutual social exchange, the move this study operationalises through clarification seeking below.

2.2. *Tourism decision uncertainty (TDU) on AI-based seeking clarification (SC) from ChatGPT*

Before developing the hypotheses, SC is defined here to distinguish it from related but separate constructs. It differs from general information search, locating content across sources (Tafesse & Mamo, 2026; Urbany et al., 1989), which needs no responsive interlocutor or uncertainty trigger. It differs from prompt refinement, iterative changes to how a query is phrased to improve output quality (Naser, 2025), which can occur independently of decision uncertainty. It differs from decision support, the recommendations a system generates for a choice problem, rather than the traveller's own act of seeking clarification (Kim et al., 2023). It differs from perceived interactivity, an evaluative judgment about a system's responsiveness rather than a behaviour the user enacts (Lu et al., 2026). SC is defined as a traveller-initiated, iterative behaviour in which follow-up questions, counterfactual probes, and constraint refinements are directed at ChatGPT to resolve felt ambiguity about a travel decision. This specificity justifies treating clarification seeking as the mechanism linking uncertainty to resolution, rather than undifferentiated ChatGPT adoption. It is not that tourists use ChatGPT that reduces uncertainty, but how they use it that does. TDU is a traveller's felt lack of predictability when forming a travel choice, seen as multi-dimensional (Rogers, 1995; Stewart, 2021; Yang & Wibowo, 2025). Travellers may be unsure what an option will bring (outcome), what they actually want (needs), how to choose among alternatives (choice), and whether they have enough clear information (knowledge) (Littler & Melanthiou, 2006; Shiu et al., 2011; Urbany et al., 1989; Yang & Wibowo, 2025). Consistent with URT, heightened uncertainty should drive clarification seeking, since people gather information to improve predictability when the benefits outweigh the costs (Berger & Calabrese, 1974; Kellermann & Reynolds, 1990; Sunnafrank, 1986). This fits tourism, where choices involve imperfect information and variable outcomes (Williams & Baláž, 2015), and generative AI lowers this burden through iterative questioning and rapid comparison (Sigala et al., 2024; Stergiou & Nella, 2024). Accordingly, higher TDU across its four facets should increase tourists' clarification seeking from ChatGPT.

H1. TDU positively affects SC from ChatGPT.

2.3. *SC from ChatGPT on perceived uncertainty reduction (PUR)*

Tourists' SC from ChatGPT can be framed as an interactive uncertainty-reduction strategy: rather than piecing together scattered travel content, travellers use follow-up questions to obtain tailored, decision-relevant cues and progressively narrow options. From an accessibility–diagnosticity perspective, ChatGPT reduces uncertainty most when it converts user constraints into information that is easy to access and genuinely useful for evaluating alternatives, thereby improving decision clarity (Stergiou & Nella, 2024). Evidence from online accommodation contexts similarly shows that uncertainty-reduction cues are particularly effective when they address core fit and quality concerns, lowering hesitation and supporting intention-related evaluations (Yan & Gong, 2023). Recent reviews of gen-AI in tourism likewise highlight that iterative clarification and personalisation can reduce search burden, but only when users judge the advice as clear and genuinely useful (Alharbi et al., 2026). Finally, qualitative evidence suggests that travellers may value ChatGPT's convenience while remaining cautious about “machine-like” advice, implying that ChatGPT reduces uncertainty most effectively when its answers feel helpful rather than mechanical (Jin & Han, 2025).

H2. SC from ChatGPT positively affects PUR.

2.4. *PUR on trust (TR) in ChatGPT's travel recommendations*

When tourists' own understanding of a decision becomes clear enough to act on, they have more reason to judge ChatGPT itself as dependable, not merely convenient. Recent evidence suggests this trust-building pathway is largely cognitive: feeling clearer about a decision leads tourists to read that clarity as a signal that ChatGPT's guidance is worth relying on,

especially when information is delivered in richer, easier-to-process formats that aid credibility judgments (Kang et al., 2026). Related work on AI transparency similarly finds that trust grows when system outputs increase users' certainty, though transparency must be calibrated, since too much detail can overload users and blunt trust gains (Ngo, 2025). This link is not automatic, however, as even occasional inaccurate outputs can quickly erode trust by reintroducing doubt and perceived risk (Kim et al., 2025). Qualitative tourism evidence further shows users may appreciate ChatGPT's efficiency while still feeling uneasy about machine-like advice (Jin & Han, 2025). In short, tourists judge ChatGPT as trustworthy when it genuinely helps them feel less confused, and that judgment remains fragile enough to break when the tool falls short (Alharbi et al., 2026).

This relationship also requires a clear conceptual boundary between PUR and TR, since both constructs describe how confident a tourist feels after interacting with ChatGPT. PUR is self-referential that captures whether the tourist's own understanding of the decision, including the available options, trade-offs, and likely outcomes, has become clear enough to act on, independent of any judgement about ChatGPT as a source. TR is agent-referential that reflects an evaluative judgement of ChatGPT's reliability and competence as a recommender, consistent with the ability, benevolence, and integrity dimensions through which trust in advisory technologies is typically defined (McKnight et al., 2002). A tourist can therefore feel that a decision has become clear without yet being convinced that ChatGPT itself is a dependable source, for instance when that clarity comes from having narrowed down the options rather than from confidence in the accuracy of what ChatGPT provided.

This conceptual separation is preserved operationally: PUR items ask tourists to evaluate their own decisional clarity, whereas TR items ask them to evaluate ChatGPT's reliability and competence, and the discriminant validity tests reported in Section 4.3 confirm the two constructs are empirically distinct rather than overlapping facets of the same underlying state. On this reading, PUR functions as a decision-readiness signal that precedes and informs trust, rather than as a lower-order component of trust itself.

H3. PUR positively affects TR in ChatGPT travel recommendations.

2.5. PUR on Destination Visit Intention (DVI)

PUR should strengthen DVI because travel choices are made under incomplete information and intangible outcomes, so feeling more certain lowers hesitation and eases commitment. Clearer, more diagnostic destination cues support more favourable evaluation and destination image, an established pathway shaping visitation intention (Baloglu, 2000). When key cues are missing, tourists rely on inference and may postpone commitment, whereas more complete information reduces ambiguity and raises intention to visit (Khozaei et al., 2023). At the market level, destinations that feel uncertain attract fewer visitors (Park, 2025), and in crisis conditions, uncertainty reduction restores confidence in tourism recovery, which is linked to travel intentions across pandemic phases (Sun et al., 2024). Reducing uncertainty around financial and human induced risks should likewise support intention formation (Setiawan et al., 2024).

H4. PUR positively affects DVI.

2.6. TR in ChatGPT's travel recommendations on DVI

TR in ChatGPT's recommendations should raise DVI because it helps travellers feel safer committing to a choice where services are intangible and information is incomplete. When users perceive ChatGPT's advice as relevant, credible, useful, and smart, they trust it more, and that trust carries into stronger intention outcomes (Ali et al., 2023). Trust also builds more easily when recommendations are presented in richer, decision friendly formats that raise perceived value and justify acting on the advice (Kang et al., 2026). Informative chatbot interactions can improve destination image and support visit intention (Tosyali et al., 2025), while human-like relational experiences strengthen perceived expertise and trustworthiness (Xu et al., 2024). This link is not guaranteed, however, as privacy and data security concerns can weaken how trust translates into future intentions (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024), and a few inaccurate outputs can undermine trust and reduce willingness to follow them.

H5. Trust in ChatGPT's travel recommendations positively affects DVI.

2.7. The mediating effect of TR in ChatGPT travel recommendations on the relationship between PUR and DVI

PUR is unlikely to translate into DVI directly, its effect should instead operate through trust in the recommending agent. When ChatGPT makes a traveller's choice feel clearer, more predictable, and better aligned with their constraints, they infer the system is competent and dependable, strengthening trust in its recommendations. This fits evidence that AI advice reduces

uncertainty most when accessible and useful for evaluating alternatives, improving decision confidence (Stergiou & Nella, 2024). As trust builds, reduced uncertainty becomes actionable, credible, useful, personalised recommendations support stronger intentions (Ali et al., 2023), and richer media formats reinforce perceived credibility and trust (Kang et al., 2026). This can break down, since privacy and data security concerns can inhibit trust even when information seems helpful (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024), and incorrect outputs can erode trust and reduce follow-through (Kim et al., 2025). PUR is therefore expected to increase DVI indirectly through TR, consistent with H6.

H6. Trust in ChatGPT travel recommendations mediates the relationship between PUR and DVI. All this study's hypotheses are displayed in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Measurement Development

A cross-sectional survey examined relationships among TDU, SC, PUR, TR, and DVI. Constructs were measured via respondents' perceptions and self-reported intentions, using multi-item scales adapted to the ChatGPT travel context, on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Table 1 presents definitions, items, and sources. Items were translated into Indonesian by a bilingual academic and back-translated into English by a second translator, with discrepancies reconciled to preserve meaning. The instrument was pretested with 30 respondents matching the target population, with minor wording adjustments before distribution.

PUR was operationalised as tourists' perceived, self-referential reduction in uncertainty after ChatGPT use, assessed via retrospective self-report items in a single cross-sectional survey (e.g., "I have confidence that ChatGPT's responses reduce uncertainty"), rather than uncertainty scores measured before and after the interaction. This follows the validated scale of Chang et al. (2025) and matches how the construct is defined here, a tourist's own sense that a decision has become clearer and easier to act upon. The items capture felt uncertainty reduction rather than the magnitude of an actual within-person change over time. This distinction, and its implications for interpreting H2 through H4, is addressed as a limitation in Section 7.

3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to ensure all respondents had direct experience using ChatGPT for travel purposes. Participants needed to be 18 years old, possess at least high-school qualification, and have already used ChatGPT to seek information regarding travelling. The first questions were used to screen at the beginning of the survey, those who failed to meet the requirements were excluded before getting to the actual questionnaire. The survey was constructed using Google Forms, which were shared using WhatsApp, Facebook, and LINE. By design, this purposive approach concentrates the sample among younger, well-educated, digitally active Indonesian users with substantial prior ChatGPT experience. The findings

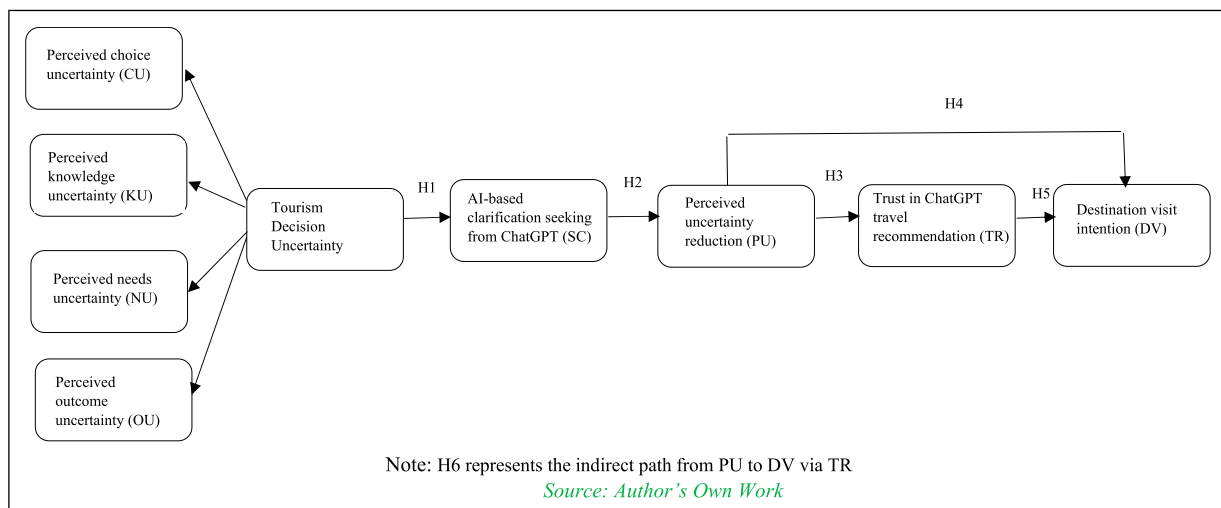


Figure 1. Research Framework.

Note. H6 represents the indirect path from PU to DV via TR. Source: Author's Own Work

Table 1. Operationalization and Measurement Items

Constructs	Definition	Author	Measurement Items
Reliability		Wixom and Todd (2005)	1. ChatGPT operates reliably 2. ChatGPT performs reliable 3. The operation of ChatGPT is dependable
Accessibility		Wixom and Todd (2005); Zhuo et al. (2025)	1. ChatGPT allows information to be readily accessible to me 2. ChatGPT makes information very accessible 3. ChatGPT makes information easy to access
Flexibility		Wixom and Todd (2005); Zhuo et al. (2025)	1. ChatGPT can adapt to my various needs 2. ChatGPT can flexibly adjust to my anticipated needs 3. ChatGPT can meet my various needs.
Timeliness		Zhuo et al. (2025)	1. ChatGPT provides tourism information in a timely fashion. 2. ChatGPT returns answers to my requests quickly
Seeking Clarification	Actively seeking information and clarification directly from ChatGPT (individual – system level of clarification).	Chang et al. (2025)	1. When planning trips, I actively seek clarification from ChatGPT to ensure I understand its responses 2. I request clarification from ChatGPT to make its travel-related responses clearer and more understandable 3. I ask follow-up questions to ChatGPT to reduce my uncertainty and enhance my understanding of its travel recommendations
Perceived uncertainty reduction	The extent to which a tourist feels that using ChatGPT has made their travel decision clearer, more structured, and easier to act upon, based on the tourist's own retrospective judgement of felt uncertainty rather than a directly measured change in uncertainty	Chang et al. (2025)	1. When planning trips, I have confidence that ChatGPT's responses reduce uncertainty 2. When I use ChatGPT for travel-related questions, I feel that my uncertainty about its responses is low 3. There is low uncertainty when I rely on ChatGPT's responses for travel information or decisions
Trust in ChatGPT's Travel Recommendations	The degree to which users perceive ChatGPT's travel advice as dependable and accurate	Tedjakusuma et al. (2025)	1. I think ChatGPT's travel recommendations are reliable 2. I think ChatGPT's travel recommendations are trustworthy 3. I think ChatGPT's travel recommendations are correct
Destination Visit Intention	The likelihood or willingness of a person to visit a particular destination	Tedjakusuma et al. (2025)	1. I plan to visit the destination in the future 2. I am willing to visit the destination in the future 3. I intend to visit the destination in the future

Source: Author's Own Work.

reported below should accordingly be interpreted as bounded by this demographic and cultural context: uncertainty tolerance and trust dynamics in human–AI interaction may differ meaningfully among older, less-educated, or less digitally engaged users, and among travellers from other cultural and information-ecosystem contexts (see Section 7, Limitations and Future Research).

Respondents were recruited through the researchers' personal and professional networks via convenience and snowball sampling, with no monetary or material incentives offered. Data collection ran from December 2025 to February 2026. Of 600 survey starters, 492 passed screening and completed the survey. Google Forms' response-limiting setting, requiring sign-in and one submission per account, prevented duplicate responses, and response patterns were further reviewed for straightlining or implausibly short completion times. Ethical review was waived under the National Guidelines and Ethical Standards for Health Research and Development ([Komite Etik Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan Nasional, 2021](#)), issued by Indonesia's Ministry of Health, which exempts anonymous, non-sensitive survey research posing no risk of harm. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before the questionnaire.

3.3. Common Method Bias

Since all variables came from a single questionnaire, several steps were taken to reduce common method bias ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)). Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, items were worded clearly, and the questionnaire was divided into separate sections to create some distance between predictors and outcomes and reduce carryover responding.

As a post hoc check, inner-model VIF values in SmartPLS ranged from 1.000 to 2.314 — well below the $VIF < 3.3$ threshold ([Hair et al., 2017a, 2019](#)) — suggesting collinearity is unlikely to have distorted the results. However, inner-model VIF evaluates only whether the hypothesised predictor–criterion paths are inflated by predictor overlap; it does not test for a shared method factor affecting the model as a whole and cannot, on its own, rule out common method bias ([Kock, 2015](#)). To address this more directly, a full collinearity test ([Kock, 2015](#)) was additionally conducted, treating every construct in the model as a predictor of an unrelated criterion and examining the resulting variance inflation factors; this captures method-related collinearity that the inner-model VIF check cannot detect. Results of this test are reported alongside the inner-model VIF check in Section 4.1.

3.4. Data Analysis

PLS-SEM was run in SmartPLS 4.1.1.2, fitting this prediction-oriented, multi-construct model ([Hair et al., 2017a, 2019](#)). Measurement model. Outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha (CA), and composite reliability (CR) assessed reliability, AVE assessed convergent validity, and HTMT assessed discriminant validity ([Hair et al., 2017a; Henseler et al., 2015](#)). Structural model. Inner VIF was checked, paths estimated via bootstrapping (10,000 resamples), mediation tested via bootstrapped confidence intervals, R^2 and f^2 reported ([Hair et al., 2019](#)). Predictive performance. PLSpredict checked out-of-sample performance, where positive Q^2_{predict} values and lower prediction errors than the linear benchmark indicate generalisability ([Hair et al., 2019; Shmueli et al., 2019](#)).

3.5. TDU as a Higher-Order Construct

TDU reflects tourists' overall sense of ambiguity when planning a trip, spanning four dimensions, choice uncertainty (CU), knowledge uncertainty (KU), needs uncertainty (NU), and outcome uncertainty (OU). A two-stage PLS-SEM procedure estimated this structure. Stage 1 assessed the first-order constructs and obtained latent variable scores. Stage 2 used those scores to model TDU as a second-order reflective construct, with CU, KU, NU, and OU as indicators. This reflective specification fits because TDU is a general latent condition that causes all four facets, so a tourist experiencing high overall uncertainty tends to score highly on all four ([Hair et al., 2017a](#)).

This manifestation logic differs from a constitutive account, in which the four facets would be treated as separate sources that build up overall uncertainty, each an independent piece of ambiguity rather than an expression of a shared underlying state. The constitutive reading is coherent in principle, but fits less well with how TDU is theorised here, following uncertainty reduction theory. A tourist does not experience the four facets as separable inputs to be added together, but as different expressions of a single felt sense that the trip-planning situation is unclear. A constitutive specification implies removing one facet would change TDU's meaning, since each supplies a unique component. The manifestation account adopted here instead implies all four facets should respond together to the same underlying state, the pattern evaluated empirically below.

A formative specification, in which CU, KU, NU, and OU are treated as defining characteristics that jointly form TDU rather than as manifestations of it, is conceptually plausible and was the alternative we weighed most seriously before settling on the reflective model reported here. This choice was evaluated against [Jarvis et al.'s \(2003\)](#) criteria for distinguishing reflective from formative specifications, namely causal direction, facet interchangeability, and covariance. Conceptually, CU, KU, NU, and OU are treated as manifestations of a single underlying condition rather than separate ingredients that combine to define it. A tourist experiencing greater overall uncertainty should feel more uncertain about all four facets

together, not just one, so they should be interchangeable and covary. This held empirically. Correlations among the first-order latent variable scores for CU, KU, NU, and OU (Table 4) ranged from 0.526 to 0.761, showing consistent positive covariation rather than the weak or divergent pattern expected under a formative specification.

We recognise a formative specification as defensible if the facets prove driven by distinct antecedents or diverging consequences. In that case, each facet would be retained separately, with formative diagnostics such as outer weight significance and indicator collinearity applying instead (Coltman et al., 2008). We tested this using confirmatory tetrad analysis (CTA-PLS), treating CU, KU, NU, and OU as TDU's indicators in the Stage 2 model (Gudergan et al., 2008). This yields two non-redundant tetrads. One vanished (CU, KU, OU, NU, tetrad = -0.030, $t = 0.969$, $p = .332$, Bonferroni-adjusted 95% CI [-0.091, 0.030], including zero), consistent with reflective measurement, the other did not (CU, KU, NU, OU, tetrad = 0.066, $t = 2.870$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [0.021, 0.112], excluding zero).

Because CTA-PLS requires all non-redundant tetrads to vanish for unambiguous support of a reflective specification (Gudergan et al., 2008), this result does not unanimously confirm reflective measurement. We nonetheless retain the reflective specification as the primary model: it remains the better-supported option overall given the strong first-order measurement properties for all four facets (loadings above 0.80, AVE above 0.60, composite reliability above 0.85; Table 3) and the consistently positive, substantial correlations among the facets (Table 4). Outer VIF values for the four facets in the Stage 2 model (CU = 2.225, KU = 1.658, NU = 2.706, and OU = 3.143) all fall below the conventional threshold of 3.3 (Hair et al., 2017a, 2019), ruling out problematic collinearity among the facets. The one significant tetrad indicates a partial rather than a complete departure from interchangeability. We report this boundary condition explicitly rather than treating the reflective specification as fully confirmed, and flag re-estimating TDU under a formative specification as a natural robustness check for future research.

The strong correlations supporting a reflective specification raise a related question, whether the two most correlated facets, NU and OU, remain empirically discriminant as separate constructs. The HTMT ratio for this pair (Table 5) is 0.828, the highest of the six pairwise ratios linking CU, KU, NU, and OU, but stays below both the conservative 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015) and the more lenient 0.90 threshold applied elsewhere in this study. We read this as consistent with, not against, the reflective specification. A tourist unsure what they need from a trip is often also unsure what outcome it will produce, so a high but sub-threshold correlation is the expected signature of two related manifestations, not evidence of conceptual redundancy. We flag NU and OU as warranting closest attention in any future re-specification of TDU, including the formative check above.

4. Results

4.1. Common Method Variance

We used inner-model VIF values in SmartPLS to check whether common method variance posed a threat to the findings. All VIF values fell between 1.000 and 2.314, comfortably below the 3.3 cut-off commonly applied in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017a, 2019). While this is not a substitute for a full method-factor test, values this low suggest the results were not meaningfully distorted.

As a further assessment, a full collinearity test was conducted following Kock (2015) using the Stage 2 latent variable scores for TDU, SC, PU, TR, and DV. Full-collinearity VIF values ranged from 1.937 (SC) to 3.058 (TDU), with DV, PU, and TR falling between 2.209 and 3.281. All five constructs met the conservative 3.3 threshold recommended by Kock (2015). TDU returned the highest value of the five, consistent with its position as the most central, exogenous construct in the model: it exhibits substantial correlations with the other four Stage 2 constructs (Pearson correlations among the Stage 2 latent variable scores: 0.694 with SC, 0.734 with DV, 0.791 with TR, and 0.797 with PU), so a comparatively higher full-collinearity VIF for TDU is expected given this shared nomological variance. As all values remained within Kock's recommended bound, common method variance is not indicated as a serious threat to the findings. As an additional confirmatory check, the inner-model VIF for the only structural path in which TDU functions as a predictor — $TDU \rightarrow SC$ — was 1.000, further supporting that multicollinearity does not affect estimation of the hypothesised structural relationships.

4.2. Sample Profile

The final sample consisted of 492 ChatGPT users; just over half were male (56.50%). Most respondents were in their twenties or thirties — the 21–30 age group made up 41.87% and the 31–40 group 37.20% — so younger, digitally active adults dominated the sample, which is consistent with who tends to use ChatGPT. Education levels were relatively high: 44.92% held a master's degree and 34.15% a bachelor's degree. In terms of work, the biggest groups were private sector employees (31.91%) and civil servants (27.44%). Most respondents had been using ChatGPT for 6–10 months (33.33%), followed by 1–

5 months with 30.28%. Income was concentrated in the Rp. 6,000,001–12,000,000 range (41.06%), followed by Rp. 12,000,001–18,000,000 (33.13%). Full demographic figures are in [Table 2](#).

4.3. Validity and Reliability

Outer loadings were generally at or above 0.70 across all constructs, indicating that each item was capturing what it was supposed to ([Hair et al., 2017a](#)). AVE values all cleared the 0.50 threshold ([Table 3](#)), and both CR and CA exceeded 0.70 throughout, confirming that the scales held together well ([Hair et al., 2017a](#)).

Discriminant validity. We ran three checks to confirm the constructs were measuring distinct things. The Fornell–Larcker criterion showed that each construct’s AVE square root was larger than its correlations with all other constructs ([Table 4](#)), which is the standard requirement ([Fornell & Larcker, 1981](#)). HTMT ratios were all below 0.90 ([Table 5](#)); the highest ratio, 0.828 between needs uncertainty and outcome uncertainty (Section 3.5), also cleared the more conservative 0.85 threshold recommended by [Henseler et al. \(2015\)](#). Finally, cross-loadings confirmed that every item scored highest on its own construct rather than on any other ([Table 6](#)). Taken across all three tests, the constructs were clearly distinct from one another.

4.4. Model Fit and Predictive Performance

Model fit was assessed using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The SRMR value for the saturated model was 0.060, below the 0.08 threshold associated with an adequately specified model ([Henseler et al., 2016](#); [Hu & Bentler, 1999](#)); the corresponding value for the estimated model was 0.239, reflecting the additional constraints imposed by the hypothesized structural paths. Because the saturated-model SRMR is the value most directly comparable to the 0.08 benchmark, the model is judged to be adequately specified.

Looking at R^2 , the model accounted for 60.8% of the variance in TR, 48.2% in SC, 44.3% in DVI, and 31.4% in PUR — all well above the 0.10 floor for PLS-SEM.

Effect sizes indicated where the model exerted its strongest influence. The path from TDU to SC produced a large f^2 of 0.931, as did SC to PU ($f^2 = 0.458$). The effect of PU on TR was particularly large ($f^2 = 1.552$), which confirms that feeling

Table 2. Sample Demographics

Measure	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	278	56.50%
	Female	214	43.50%
Age Group	18-20 years old	62	12.60%
	21-30 years old	206	41.87%
	31-40 years old	183	37.20%
	≥40 years old	41	8.33%
	Senior High school	87	17.68%
Educational Background	Bachelor’s degree	168	34.15%
	Master’s degree	221	44.92%
	Doctoral degree	16	3.25%
Occupation	Businessman	83	16.87
	Engineer	19	3.86%
	Student	31	6.30%
	Civil servant	135	27.44%
	Private-sector worker	147	31.91%
Experience of using ChatGPT	Others	67	13.62%
	< 1 month	26	5.28%
	1-5 month(s)	149	30.28%
	6-10 months	164	33.33%
	11-15 months	80	16.26%
	> 15 months	73	14.85%
	≤ Rp. 6,000,000	24	4.88%
	Rp. 6,000,001-Rp. 12,000,000	202	41.06%
Monthly Income	Rp. 12,000,001-Rp. 18,000,000	163	33.13%
	Rp. 18,000,001-Rp. 25,000,000	76	15.45%
	> Rp. 25,000,000	27	5.49%

Source: Author’s Own Work.

Table 3. Convergent Validity and Reliability

Constructs	Items	FL	CA	CR	AVE
Perceived Choice Uncertainty (CU)	CU1	0.907			
	CU2	0.944	0.904	0.940	0.839
	CU3	0.897			
	KU1	0.833			
Perceived Knowledge Uncertainty (KU)	KU2	0.813	0.752	0.857	0.666
	KU3	0.802			
	NU1	0.868			
	NU2	0.884			
Perceived Needs Uncertainty (NU)	NU3	0.835	0.827	0.897	0.744
	OU1	0.879			
	OU2	0.900			
Perceived Outcome Uncertainty (OU)	OU3	0.862	0.855	0.912	0.776
AI-based clarification seeking from ChatGPT (SC)	SC1	0.832			
	SC2	0.911	0.850	0.908	0.767
Perceived Uncertainty Reduction (PU)	SC3	0.883			
	PU1	0.844			
	PU2	0.925	0.854	0.912	0.775
	PU3	0.869			
Trust in ChatGPT travel recommendation (TR)	TR1	0.846			
	TR2	0.891	0.825	0.896	0.741
	TR3	0.845			
	DV1	0.856			
Destination Visit Intention (DV)	DV2	0.818	0.779	0.872	0.693
	DV3	0.824			
Constructs	First Order	FL	CA	CR	AVE
Dimensions	CU	0.855			
Tourism Decision Uncertainty (TDU)	KU	0.774	0.871	0.912	0.772
	NU	0.873			
	OU	0.893			

Note. FL: Factor Loading ≥ 0.7 ; CA: Cronbach Alpha ≥ 0.7 ; CR: Composite Reliability ≥ 0.7 ; AVE: Average Variance Extracted ≥ 0.5 . Source: Author's Own Work.

less uncertain is the main thing driving tourists to trust ChatGPT's recommendations. Further down the chain, the effects on DV were more modest — PU $\rightarrow$ DV sat at $f^2 = 0.074$ and TR $\rightarrow$ DV at $f^2 = 0.102$ — though neither is trivial.

Predictive assessment used PLSpredict with 10-fold cross-validation repeated 10 times, following Shmueli et al. (2019). Out-of-sample prediction returned positive Q^2_{predict} scores for all four endogenous constructs (SC = 0.478, TR = 0.387, PU = 0.468, DV = 0.295), indicating that the model predicts better than a naïve mean-based benchmark. When benchmarked against a linear regression (LM) model as recommended by Shmueli et al. (2019), however, the PLS-SEM prediction errors (RMSE) exceeded the LM benchmark for all four constructs (DV: 0.841 vs. 0.630; PU: 0.731 vs. 0.587; SC: 0.725 vs. 0.723; TR: 0.785 vs. 0.602), indicating that the model does not yet exhibit high predictive power in an absolute sense even though it

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CU	DV	KU	NU	OU	PU	SC	TR
CU	0.916							
DV	0.534	0.833						
KU	0.526	0.737	0.816					
NU	0.619	0.631	0.596	0.862				
OU	0.722	0.608	0.540	0.761	0.881			
PU	0.626	0.622	0.615	0.779	0.693	0.880		
SC	0.639	0.504	0.552	0.567	0.595	0.561	0.876	
TR	0.626	0.634	0.586	0.759	0.719	0.780	0.573	0.861

Source: Author's Own Work.

Note. The diagonal and bold values are the square roots of AVE.

Table 5. The Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	CU	DV	KU	NU	OU	PU	SC	TR
CU	0.633							
DV	0.619	0.817						
KU	0.714	0.783	0.745					
NU	0.820	0.744	0.659	0.805				
OU	0.710	0.762	0.758	0.828	0.811			
PU	0.716	0.609	0.679	0.660	0.679	0.648		
SC	0.836	0.837	0.834	0.804	0.802	0.833	0.762	
TR	0.722	0.788	0.729	0.819	0.826	0.827	0.671	0.807

Source: Author's Own Work

clearly exceeds the naïve mean-based benchmark implied by the positive Q^2_{predict} values. We report this pattern transparently as a boundary condition on the model's out-of-sample predictive performance. As additional robustness checks, Section 3.5 reports a confirmatory tetrad analysis that provides partial support for the reflective specification of the higher-order TDU construct, and Section 4.1 reports inner-model VIF values ruling out common method variance as a serious threat to the path estimates.

Table 7 summarises these PLSpredict results in full, reporting Q^2_{predict} alongside the PLS-SEM and LM RMSE/MAE values for all four endogenous constructs so that the comparison against the LM benchmark reported above can be verified directly.

4.5. Hypothesis Testing

All six hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples, and all were supported. TDU was a strong predictor of SC ($\beta = 0.694$, $t = 23.995$, 95% CI [0.635, 0.749], $f^2 = 0.931$), supporting H1 — tourists who felt more uncertain were notably more likely to turn to ChatGPT for help. SC raised PUR ($\beta = 0.561$, $t = 14.392$, 95% CI [0.481, 0.634], $f^2 =$

Table 6. Cross-Loadings Matrix

	CU	DV	KU	NU	OU	PU	SC	TR
CU1	0.907	0.465	0.477	0.551	0.637	0.531	0.601	0.530
CU2	0.944	0.486	0.477	0.560	0.649	0.580	0.567	0.565
CU3	0.897	0.516	0.491	0.591	0.696	0.608	0.587	0.622
DV1	0.490	0.856	0.612	0.546	0.507	0.554	0.393	0.508
DV12	0.473	0.818	0.626	0.551	0.548	0.499	0.494	0.578
DV13	0.365	0.824	0.602	0.476	0.461	0.499	0.367	0.494
KU1	0.474	0.626	0.833	0.515	0.450	0.537	0.476	0.493
KU2	0.482	0.602	0.813	0.506	0.499	0.512	0.468	0.532
KU3	0.297	0.569	0.802	0.423	0.347	0.441	0.392	0.385
NU1	0.533	0.536	0.508	0.868	0.671	0.667	0.470	0.630
NU2	0.580	0.581	0.548	0.884	0.674	0.675	0.542	0.683
NU3	0.486	0.514	0.484	0.835	0.623	0.674	0.452	0.650
OU1	0.692	0.499	0.428	0.644	0.879	0.598	0.521	0.624
OU2	0.629	0.570	0.524	0.662	0.900	0.637	0.576	0.663
OU3	0.586	0.538	0.473	0.705	0.862	0.596	0.475	0.614
PU1	0.495	0.526	0.514	0.674	0.598	0.844	0.426	0.636
PU2	0.615	0.584	0.593	0.719	0.642	0.925	0.531	0.719
PU3	0.538	0.530	0.514	0.663	0.589	0.869	0.518	0.700
SC1	0.450	0.367	0.442	0.377	0.366	0.416	0.832	0.396
SC2	0.553	0.448	0.519	0.497	0.523	0.500	0.911	0.521
SC3	0.647	0.493	0.485	0.586	0.634	0.541	0.883	0.564
TR1	0.549	0.505	0.467	0.634	0.617	0.675	0.481	0.846
TR2	0.590	0.582	0.539	0.676	0.656	0.702	0.547	0.891
TR3	0.475	0.549	0.506	0.651	0.583	0.635	0.449	0.845

Source: Author's Own Work.

Table 7. PLSpredict Results: Q^2 predict and RMSE/MAE Comparison with the Linear Model (LM) Benchmark

Construct	Q^2 predict	PLS-SEM RMSE	LM RMSE	PLS-SEM MAE	LM MAE
Clarification Seeking (SC)	0.478	0.725	0.723	0.524	0.518
Perceived Uncertainty Reduction (PU)	0.468	0.731	0.587	0.584	0.435
Trust (TR)	0.387	0.785	0.602	0.640	0.434
Destination Visit Intention (DVI)	0.295	0.841	0.630	0.677	0.452

Note. Q^2 predict values are derived from the latent variable scores; a positive value indicates the model predicts out-of-sample better than a mean-based benchmark. PLS-SEM and LM (linear regression) RMSE/MAE are reported per Shmueli et al. (2019): a PLS-SEM value lower than its LM counterpart indicates higher predictive power, while a higher value (as observed here for all four constructs) indicates the model does not yet outperform a simple linear benchmark. Source: Author's Own Work.

0.458), supporting H2. The effect of PUR on TR was the strongest in the model ($\beta = 0.780$, $t = 34.056$, 95% CI [0.732, 0.822], $f^2 = 1.552$), supporting H3 and confirming just how central feeling less uncertain is to trusting ChatGPT's recommendations.

Both direct paths to DVI were significant. PUR predicted DVI ($\beta = 0.325$, $t = 5.049$, 95% CI [0.200, 0.450]), supporting H4, and TR predicted DVI ($\beta = 0.381$, $t = 6.201$, 95% CI [0.260, 0.500]), supporting H5 — though as noted above, both effect sizes were on the smaller side. The mediation test showed that trust carried a meaningful share of uncertainty reduction's influence on intention ($\beta = 0.297$, $t = 6.002$, 95% CI [0.201, 0.395]), supporting H6.

Because the direct effect of PUR on DVI (H4) remained significant alongside the significant indirect effect of PUR on DVI through TR (H6), and both effects were positive, the mediation is complementary (partial) rather than full (Nitzl et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2010). The variance accounted for (VAF) by the indirect path was 47.7% ($0.297 / (0.297 + 0.325)$), which falls within the 20%–80% range conventionally taken to indicate partial mediation (Hair et al., 2017b). Substantively, trust is an important but not exclusive channel through which reduced uncertainty translates into destination visit intention, with uncertainty reduction also exerting a direct effect on intention that trust does not fully account for.

Altogether, the model's explanatory power was strongest in the TDU $\rightarrow$ SC $\rightarrow$ PUR $\rightarrow$ TR chain, with the paths into visit intention being reliable but more modest. Full results are in Table 8 and Figure 2.

5. Discussion

The results tell a fairly consistent story and provide clear answers to the four RQ guiding this study. RQ1 asked whether TDU increases SC — it does, and strongly so ($\beta = 0.694$, H1 supported), confirming that tourists who feel more uncertain across choice, knowledge, needs, and outcome dimensions are meaningfully more likely to turn to ChatGPT for help. RQ2 asked whether that SC produces PUR — it does ($\beta = 0.561$, H2 supported), though the mechanism is not simply about receiving more information but about reaching a point where the decision feels structured enough to act on. RQ3 asked whether PUR strengthens both TR and DVI — both are confirmed ($\beta = 0.780$ for trust, H3 supported; $\beta = 0.325$ for intention, H4 supported), with the effect on TR being by far the strongest in the model. RQ4 asked whether TR mediates the relationship between PUR and DVI — it does, partially ($\beta = 0.297$, H6 supported) - that is, tourists get to intention by two paths and those paths overlap: felt clarity only, and felt clarity translated into trust. Taken together, these findings suggest that ChatGPT's relevance in travel decision-making stems less from its availability and more from tourists' perception that the interaction makes an open-ended, uncertain situation feel more manageable enough to act on (Gursoy et al., 2023; Sigala et al., 2024; Wong et al., 2023). Because the survey captures tourists' self-reported perceptions of clarification and uncertainty reduction rather than the

Table 8. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	β	T-Value	Bootstrapping CI 97.5% (N=10000)		Decision
			Min	Max	
H1 (+) TDU $\rightarrow$ SC	0.694***	23.995	0.635	0.749	Supported
H2 (+) SC $\rightarrow$ PU	0.561***	14.392	0.481	0.634	Supported
H3 (+) PU $\rightarrow$ TR	0.780***	34.056	0.732	0.822	Supported
H4 (+) PU $\rightarrow$ DV	0.325***	5.049	0.200	0.450	Supported
H5 (+) TR $\rightarrow$ DV	0.381***	6.201	0.260	0.500	Supported
H6 (+) PU $\rightarrow$ TR $\rightarrow$ DV	0.297***	6.002	0.201	0.395	Supported

Notes. Significance level with *** $P < 0.001$; ** $P < 0.01$; * $P < 0.05$. Source: Author's Own Work.

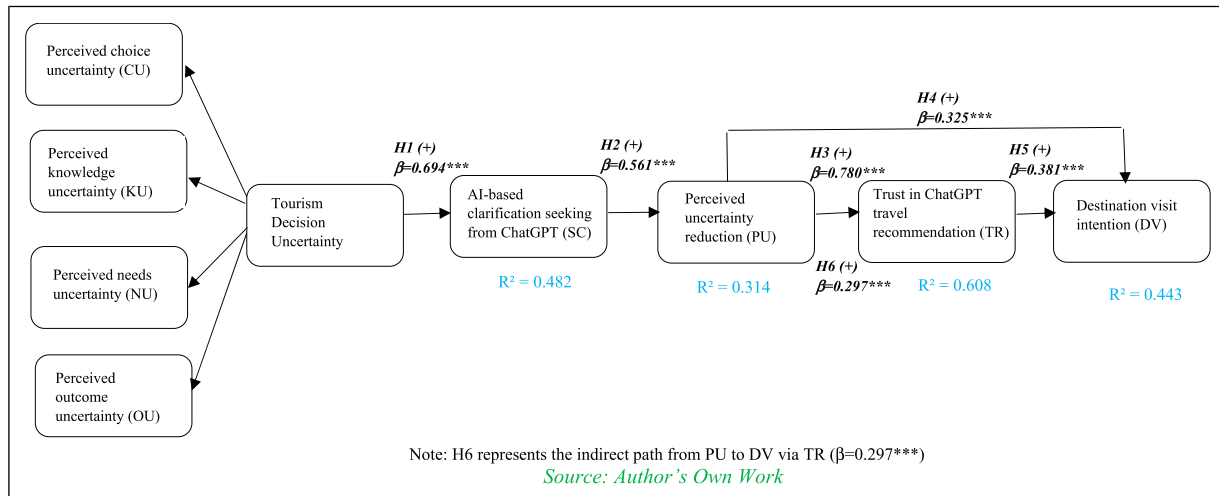


Figure 2. Hypothesis Testing Results.

Note. H6 represents the indirect path from PU to DV via TR ($\beta=0.297***$). Source: Author's Own Work

content of actual ChatGPT conversations or observed behavioural outcomes such as completed bookings, this conclusion is best read as evidence of perceived decision readiness rather than a verified improvement in decision quality or an observed causal process.

H1 fits URT's core argument that uncertainty motivates communication aimed at restoring predictability (Berger & Calabrese, 1974), extended here to a non-human interlocutor. Classic URT assumes uncertainty reduction happens through social interaction shaped by relational costs that limit how much people search. ChatGPT removes most of those costs, letting tourists refine the conversation, test contingencies, and push back without social risk or effort. This shifts the mechanism from passive retrieval toward active, iterative decision structuring, closer to Brashers' (2001) idea of managing uncertainty for actionability, not eliminating it. This pre-trip clarification role differs from ChatGPT's in-trip role, where its value shifts toward on-site decision confidence and reassurance (Tedjakusuma & Kulachai, 2026). H1 is thus better read as uncertainty driving targeted clarification not more tool use, consistent with evidence that ChatGPT acceptance depends on how useful and decision-relevant the interaction feels, not novelty (Chang et al., 2025; Seyfi et al., 2025).

For H2, the key insight is that uncertainty reduction in this context is not about receiving more information — it is about reaching a point where the decision has a workable shape. Although the survey does not capture the content of tourists' actual ChatGPT conversations, the response pattern is consistent with tourists pushing back on suggestions, asking follow-up questions, and narrowing down options until things feel clear enough to act. Importantly, this can happen even when tourists know they cannot fully verify what ChatGPT tells them — what shifts is their subjective sense of decision readiness, not an objective reduction in uncertainty. This distinction matters theoretically because it suggests that PUR functions as a cognitive milestone rather than an information threshold: the decision becomes ready to act on once it feels organised into criteria and constraints, not once all unknowns are resolved (Brashers, 2001; Stergiou & Nella, 2024). Recent ChatGPT tourism studies report a similar pattern — tourists value the tool for making decisions feel more manageable, not simply for adding more content to an already crowded information landscape (Li et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2023). This also converges with evidence that iterative clarification and personalisation reduce tourists' search burden primarily when the advice is judged credible and dependable rather than mechanical (Alharbi et al., 2026; Jin & Han, 2025), underscoring that the H2 mechanism identified here is inferred from perceptual survey measures rather than observed directly from conversational data.

The H3 result is consistent with trust growing out of clarification rather than preceding it, though the cross-sectional design cannot confirm this. When tourists feel an interaction has reduced their confusion, they see ChatGPT as more competent and dependable, consistent with trust in advisory technologies being built through concrete experience rather than abstract sophistication (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002). This fits evidence that uncertainty reduction signals a working recommendation process, especially in richer, easier to process formats (Kang et al., 2026), though transparency must be calibrated to avoid overloading users and blunting trust (Ngo, 2025). This dynamic is particularly consequential in tourism because recommendations cannot be verified before committing time and money. Under those conditions, a helpful interaction serves as a credibility signal — not because tourists are naive, but because demonstrated usefulness is one of the few signals available in advance. Trust is not a free byproduct of using the tool — it has to be earned, and it can erode quickly

when ChatGPT produces inaccurate or misleading outputs, as [Kim et al. \(2025\)](#) have shown empirically in the tourism context.

The H4–H6 pattern reveals something theoretically meaningful about how intention forms. Rather than a single route through trust, tourists appear to move toward commitment in two overlapping ways. Some reach a point where the decision simply feels clear enough to act on even before deep trust is established — the decisional friction of not knowing has dropped enough to move forward. Others rely more heavily on trust before committing, particularly when the stakes feel higher and following advice requires accepting some vulnerability. This distinction matters because trust is not the only gateway to intention — reducing uncertainty has independent value beyond what it contributes to trust, a point that goes beyond what recommendation-system research has typically assumed ([Ali et al., 2023](#); [Benbasat & Wang, 2005](#)). This direct path also converges with tourism evidence that clearer, more diagnostic destination cues independently support favourable evaluation and visit intention before trust-related appraisals come into play ([Baloglu, 2000](#); [Khozaei et al., 2023](#); [Park, 2025](#); [Setiawan et al., 2024](#)), whereas the indirect, trust-mediated path aligns with findings that richer, more credible recommendation formats strengthen trust and, through it, visitation-related outcomes ([Abou-Shouk et al., 2024](#); [Kang et al., 2026](#); [Tosyali et al., 2025](#)). The parallel here with during-trip ChatGPT research is instructive: [Tadjakusuma and Kulachai \(2026\)](#) find that decision confidence — the felt sense that an on-site choice is sound — drives positive destination emotion and ultimately satisfaction, suggesting that felt clarity produces downstream outcomes whether tourists are still planning or already travelling. For the Indonesian context specifically, where destination diversity and heterogeneous information credibility create multiple stacked uncertainties, this dual-route finding suggests that even partial clarity — enough to feel the decision is structured — can move tourists toward intention before trust is fully formed.

One risk the model surfaces is worth taking seriously. A fluent, confident ChatGPT response can leave tourists feeling certain without being better informed, a risk worth taking seriously since that gap between felt clarity and accuracy is well recognised in hard-to-verify, high-stakes situations ([Afroogh et al., 2024](#); [Klingbeil et al., 2024](#)). This is not a peripheral caveat but close to the model's central practical stake. Every path estimated here, from SC through PUR to TR and DVI, is measured at the level of the tourist's perception, not the accuracy of what ChatGPT provides. Nothing in the measurement model, or the psychological process it captures, distinguishes a correct fluent response from an equally fluent but wrong one. Because AI hallucinations carry the same fluency and confidence as accurate answers, they can satisfy the exact input this mechanism runs on. A hallucinated but fluent answer could trigger the same drop in perceived uncertainty and the same downstream movement toward trust and visit intention as a genuinely accurate one. A mechanism this effective at converting felt clarity into booking-relevant commitment can, by the same logic, convert confident misinformation into commitment just as readily. This risk is likely compounded in tourism, where destination conditions, visa requirements, and safety information change regularly and are hard to cross-check. Section 7 develops this concern further, proposing designs that test whether this gap exists and how the model's downstream pathways behave once ChatGPT's advice is wrong.

6. Implications

6.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings speak to several areas of ongoing theoretical discussion, particularly at the intersection of uncertainty management, tourism decision-making, and human–AI interaction. What connects them is a shared gap: existing frameworks describe whether tourists engage AI tools but say relatively little about what the engagement actually does to how they decide. The results here speak directly to that gap. To keep this contribution disciplined, we organise it around three precise extensions to URT, each modifying a single, identifiable assumption of the theory rather than claiming that URT is extended wholesale: the actor and communication process through which uncertainty reduction occurs, the type of uncertainty being managed, and the outcome pathway through which reduced uncertainty translates into downstream behaviour.

The first contribution targets a single, identifiable assumption within URT — the actor involved in uncertainty reduction and the communication process that actor enables — rather than the theory as a whole. The theory's core premise is that uncertainty motivates communicative action aimed at restoring predictability ([Berger & Calabrese, 1974](#)), but it was developed for human interaction where relational costs and social cues shape how much people search. ChatGPT changes this. Tourists can keep refining the same conversation without social risk, test contingencies freely, and adjust constraints until the decision clicks. Uncertainty reduction is therefore not about accumulating more facts — it is about making the decision feel workable, which aligns with [Brashers' \(2001\)](#) argument that individuals seek actionable meaning as much as they seek certainty. Modifying this actor-and-process assumption — from interpersonal uncertainty management to dialogic human–AI decision structuring — is a theoretical move the literature on ChatGPT in tourism has gestured toward but not yet formalised ([Chang et al., 2025](#); [Stergiou & Nella, 2024](#)).

Second, modifying URT's assumption about the type of uncertainty being managed, the study sharpens how uncertainty itself should be conceptualised in tourism research. Treating tourism decision uncertainty as a multidimensional higher-order construct — reflecting choice, knowledge, needs, and outcome uncertainty — moves beyond the single risk-proxy approach that dominates much of the existing literature (Quintal et al., 2010). The finding that all four facets load onto a coherent latent structure, and that this structure drives clarification seeking, suggests ChatGPT is most relevant not when tourists face one clear information gap but when uncertainties are stacked — unclear preferences compounded by incomplete knowledge and outcome unpredictability. This helps explain more precisely when tourists are likely to turn to ChatGPT: not simply when uncertainty is high, but when it is composite and therefore hard to resolve through any single source (Sigala et al., 2024; Wong et al., 2023; Yang & Wibowo, 2025).

Third, and arguably the most novel contribution, targeting the outcome-pathway assumption in trust-centric models adjacent to URT, the dual-route result from perceived uncertainty reduction to visit intention opens a question that trust-centric recommendation research has not fully addressed. The direct path (H4) reflects an actionability mechanism: once ambiguity drops, the decision becomes easier to justify and act on, even when trust is still provisional. The indirect path via trust (H5–H6) reflects a different dynamic — a reliance mechanism in which demonstrated usefulness generates confidence in following the advice when vulnerability is involved. Rather than treating trust as the only route to intention, it is one of two, and the relative weight of each may depend on the stakes of the decision and the tourist's prior experience with the tool. This two-pathway structure challenges recommendation-system research that treats trust as the primary conduit from information quality to behaviour (Ali et al., 2023; Benbasat & Wang, 2005; Tedjakusuma & Kulachai, 2026), and suggests that future models in this space should specify both routes rather than treating them as equivalent or interchangeable.

This outcome-pathway contribution also carries a methodological corollary rather than a separate claim: future research should focus less on whether tourists use ChatGPT and more on what they do with it, since asking follow-up questions, not the adoption decision itself, is where the mechanism lives. This implies shifting the unit of analysis from usage and continuance intentions to specific behaviours such as constraint refinement, counterfactual probing, and clarification depth. It also flags a boundary condition, since the same felt clarity driving commitment can reflect overconfidence rather than genuine decision readiness (Afroogh et al., 2024; Klingbeil et al., 2024). Future work should treat calibration behaviours, cross-checking official sources, requesting justification, consulting multiple tools, as moderators determining whether uncertainty reduction leads to well-grounded trust or misplaced certainty (Kim et al., 2025).

6.2. Practical Implications

ChatGPT shapes booking intention through the conversation itself, not its mere presence. The implications below are directed at destination management organisations (DMOs), online travel agencies (OTAs), and tourism platform developers, each controlling a different part of the decision journey.

For DMOs: the most underused opportunity is treating tourist questions as diagnostic signals. When someone asks ChatGPT about transport, safety, or entry requirements, they are revealing a gap in the destination's own information. This recommendation follows directly from the H1 result ($\beta = 0.694$): because tourism decision uncertainty is the strongest driver of clarification seeking in this model, the content of tourists' questions is a direct behavioural trace of where uncertainty concentrates, rather than a generic engagement metric. DMOs that log and categorise these questions can see where planning breaks down for most travellers. The right response is not a better chatbot answer but fixing the gap, a confusing destination page, unclear visa rules, or missing regional comparisons. Recurring questions are symptoms of fixable content and infrastructure problems, more efficient to fix than to keep answering repeatedly. DMOs should also position ChatGPT access points at physical touchpoints, visitor centres, transport hubs, attraction entrances, where tourists make real-time route decisions. Follow-up questions should be part of the trip itself, not limited to a pre-trip planning page.

For OTAs: Output format matters more than most platforms realise. Because tourists in this study moved toward intention once the decision felt workable — often before trust was fully formed — what ChatGPT produces needs to do cognitive work for the tourist rather than hand it back to them. A structured output — whether that is two options laid side by side with their trade-offs, a single-page plan with a fallback, or a short checklist — gives tourists something they can look at, question, and share with others. A long paragraph of advice does not do that. This recommendation follows directly from H2 ($\beta = 0.561$): because clarification seeking reduces uncertainty only when it leaves tourists with a workable decision shape rather than more raw information, output format is what operationalises that mechanism at the platform level. The difference matters because tourists in this study were already moving toward booking once things felt clear enough, even when they were not yet sure about the tool itself. A visible, scannable output closes that gap. OTAs should also make sure there is something easy to do at exactly that moment — not later, not after more browsing. Holding a provisional booking, saving a draft itinerary, or adding a refundable option directly from the chat gives tourists a concrete next step while trust continues to develop — capturing momentum before it dissipates. This reflects the H4 direct path ($\beta = 0.325$): because perceived uncertainty reduction moves

tourists toward intention independently of trust, OTAs can capture commitment at the point of felt clarity rather than waiting for trust to fully form. Since some tourists are ready to move before deep trust is established, removing the gap between feeling ready and doing something about it is where OTAs have the clearest conversion opportunity.

For tourism platform developers and chatbot designers: trust here builds through experience rather than reputation, so accountability for high-stakes advice matters more than reassurance. This recommendation is anchored in H3, where perceived uncertainty reduction had the strongest effect on trust in the model ($\beta = 0.780$), and in the empirical evidence that trust erodes quickly once ChatGPT produces inaccurate or misleading outputs (Kim et al., 2025); escalation and verification protect the very mechanism the model identifies as most consequential. A practical design response is clear escalation triggers. Visa eligibility, safety-sensitive transport, accessibility, medical concerns, and high-cost bookings should route to human review or carry a visible verified by staff label. The point is not to replace ChatGPT with humans but to signal when it knows to hand off, since tourists who see that happen trust it more when it does not. Developers should set a clear content policy for what the chatbot recommends confidently. Stable, verifiable information such as confirmed hours, schedules, and prices is safe ground for decisive recommendations, while anything less certain should not be presented as settled. A better approach is surfacing two or three realistic options, flagging what each depends on, and prompting the tourist to check what's still uncertain. For everything else, the honest response is simply to say what is known and what still needs verifying. Making this work means keeping trustworthy information current and having a clear handoff process for questions outside it.

7. Conclusions

This study shows how tourists move from feeling uncertain about a travel decision to actually intending to visit a destination — through the specific process of asking ChatGPT for clarification. Uncertainty drives clarification seeking, clarification reduces felt uncertainty, and that reduction builds both trust and intention, with trust carrying part of the effect. What this adds to URT is the demonstration that the same uncertainty-management logic holds when the conversational partner is not human — and that the key outcome is not more information, but a decision that feels ready to act on.

7.1. Limitations and Future Research

The study measures perceptions rather than outcomes — so it can say that tourists felt clearer and more trusting, but not whether the guidance they received was actually accurate. It also focuses on the mechanism rather than its boundary conditions, drawing on a relatively educated, ChatGPT-experienced Indonesian sample recruited through a single-wave, cross-sectional design. The findings may look different among novice users, in lower-connectivity settings, or for genuinely high-stakes decisions like visa applications or medical travel.

First, the cross-sectional design measured tourism decision uncertainty, clarification seeking, perceived uncertainty reduction, trust, and visit intention within the same survey, so the sequential ordering implied by the model reflects a theoretical claim rather than an observed temporal sequence. The data cannot rule out reciprocal relationships: a tourist who already leans toward visiting may recall the ChatGPT interaction as more clarifying than it was, or early trust may shape how much uncertainty a respondent reports in the first place. Because all five constructs came from the same person in the same sitting, this also raises common method considerations that the VIF diagnostics in Section 4.1 only partly address.

Second, respondents were recruited through the researchers' personal and professional networks using purposive, convenience/snowball sampling, and self-selected after passing a screening question requiring prior ChatGPT use for travel purposes; no probability-based sampling frame was used. This was necessary to reach a population with an established basis for judging clarification and trust, but it also means the sample is unlikely to represent Indonesia's broader traveller population. Tourists reached through WhatsApp, Facebook, and LINE, willing to complete an unpaid academic survey, are plausibly more digitally engaged and more comfortable with generative AI than average, which may inflate the reported strength of the uncertainty-to-clarification pathway (H1).

Third, all respondents were Indonesian, and Indonesia's high mobile connectivity, extensive social-platform use, and loosely curated travel-information ecosystem were part of the rationale for the setting. This is a strength for testing the mechanism where it should be most visible, but it means the results cannot yet distinguish a general property of human-ChatGPT interaction from a feature of this particular environment. In markets with more centralised, government-curated travel information, or lower connectivity and AI adoption, the pathways identified here may be weaker.

Fourth, destination visit intention was captured as a self-reported intention rather than an observed booking or completed trip. The gap between stated intention and realised behaviour is well documented in tourism and consumer-behaviour research, and can widen when budget constraints, competing offers, or new information intervene. The path coefficients for H4 and H5 should be read as evidence that ChatGPT-facilitated clarification moves tourists toward wanting to visit, not toward actually visiting.

Fifth, the sample was also relatively educated and ChatGPT-experienced, 44.92% held a master's degree and 34.15% a bachelor's degree, and all had already used ChatGPT for travel information before taking part. This profile suits a study documenting a mechanism where it should be most visible, but the pathways identified here may not hold, or may hold differently, among less-educated travellers, digitally novice users, or those forming a first impression of ChatGPT as a travel source. More broadly, tourists are not a homogeneous group, their behaviour varies with values, motivations, personality, and technology experience (Cohen et al., 2014), so the pathways modelled here, including exposure to and recognition of hallucinated outputs, likely differ across segments rather than hold as a single population-wide effect. Future studies should test the model across segments defined by AI literacy, prior travel experience, and risk tolerance, rather than assuming these average effects generalise uniformly.

Sixth, the perceived uncertainty reduction items asked respondents to evaluate their uncertainty state after ChatGPT use within a single cross-sectional survey, rather than comparing directly measured uncertainty levels before and after the interaction. Consistent with the construct's definition as a felt or perceived state, this operationalisation captures respondents' retrospective judgement of reduced uncertainty but cannot verify the actual magnitude of change. The path coefficients involving perceived uncertainty reduction (H2 through H4) should therefore be interpreted as evidence of felt uncertainty reduction rather than a directly observed decrease in uncertainty.

Future work could address these limitations several ways. Pairing self-reports with independent quality checks, expert review or comparison against official sources, would test whether felt clarity maps onto real decision quality. Testing the model across decision types, trip stages, and experience levels would show when clarification seeking genuinely helps versus when it just inflates confidence. Whether calibration habits such as cross-checking sources or asking ChatGPT to explain its reasoning can narrow the gap between felt and grounded trust is a promising direction (Chang et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2025). Extending the model to less-educated and first-time users would test whether the uncertainty-to-clarification pathway depends on prior AI familiarity.

Moving beyond a single retrospective survey would also help resolve the sequencing and self-report issues raised above. Experimental designs that randomly assign tourists to different types, depths, or formats of ChatGPT clarification — structured comparative outputs versus open-ended conversational responses, for instance — would let researchers isolate the causal effect of clarification style on uncertainty reduction rather than inferring it from cross-sectional covariation. A multi-wave panel design would address several of the limitations above at once: measuring uncertainty immediately before and after a ChatGPT interaction would allow direct calculation of within-person change rather than reliance on a single retrospective report, while a further wave following the same tourists through to an actual booking or travel decision would separate the sequential ordering the model assumes from the reciprocal dynamics it cannot rule out, and would address the intention-behaviour gap directly.

Testing whether this gap exists is a necessary first step, but it leaves the more consequential question untouched, what happens to the model's downstream pathways when ChatGPT's advice is wrong. Future work should manipulate advice accuracy directly, exposing matched groups of tourists to scenario-based tasks with a verifiable answer, where ChatGPT's response is either accurate or subtly incorrect while remaining equally fluent and confident, then test whether perceived uncertainty reduction, trust, and visit intention still form when the information is false. If the mechanism proves largely indifferent to accuracy, as the fluency-driven gap in Section 5 suggests, this would indicate the model captures persuasion or reassurance rather than genuine information, with implications for whether platforms should treat perceived clarity as a proxy for decision quality. Complementary designs could examine what happens after the error is discovered, whether trust and intention collapse once a tourist learns a confident recommendation was wrong, whether the damage generalises to future use, and whether the safeguards proposed in Section 6.2 are sufficient to prevent harm such as missed visa requirements, unsafe transport choices, or wasted bookings. Building this failure-mode perspective into the research agenda would shift the emphasis from confirming the gap exists to understanding how much damage it can do and what stops it.

A further priority concerns sampling and data source. With participants' informed consent, researchers could analyse actual ChatGPT conversation logs rather than relying solely on retrospective self-report, making it possible to observe follow-up questioning and constraint refinement directly rather than infer them from survey items. Cross-country replications drawing on probability-based sampling frames would test whether the uncertainty-to-intention pathway identified in this Indonesian, purposive sample generalises to markets with different information ecosystems, connectivity levels, and regulatory treatment of generative AI, and would let the model's practical value, not only its explanatory power, be assessed.

Consent to Participate

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Ethical Considerations

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study in accordance with the National Guidelines and Ethical Standards for Health Research and Development [*Pedoman dan Standar Etik Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan Nasional*] issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Health, which exempts survey-based research involving anonymous, non-sensitive data with no risk of physical or psychological harm to participants. Komite Etik Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan Nasional. *Pedoman dan Standar Etik Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan Nasional*; Kementerian Kesehatan RI: Jakarta, Indonesia, 2021. Available online: https://repository.badankebijakan.kemkes.go.id/id/eprint/4214/1/Pedoman_dan_Standar_Etik_Penelitian_dan_Pengembangan_Kesehatan_Nasional.pdf.

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The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy concerns.

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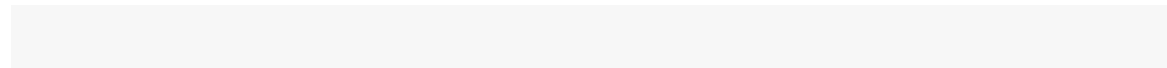
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