

Intention to Book Open Trip Packages Among Novice Travelers: A Trust-Based Approach in Tourism Context

Marceilla Suryana^{*1}, Eko Susanto²

¹Tour and Travel Business
Program, Politeknik Negeri
Bandung

²Tourism Destination
Program, Politeknik Negeri
Bandung

Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing novice travelers' intention to book open trip packages by proposing and testing a trust-based model in a digital tourism context. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Consumer Trust Theory, and Destination Image Theory, the research integrates seven key constructs: ease of access to travel platforms, functional benefits, perceived travel risks, digital travel reviews, destination attractiveness, trust in tour operators, and booking intention. Data were collected from 291 Indonesian respondents using a structured online survey and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results reveal that trust in tour operators significantly mediates the relationship between functional, technological, and experiential antecedents and booking intention. Destination attractiveness, functional benefits, and digital travel reviews emerged as strong predictors of trust, while perceived travel risks showed a marginal effect. Additionally, ease of access plays a dual role in enhancing functional perceptions and destination appeal. The study contributes to tourism Theory by contextualizing digital trust mechanisms for novice users and offers practical guidance for tour operators and travel platforms in designing user-centered trust-building strategies.

Keywords: Trust in Tour Operators; Open Trip Packages; Novice Travelers; Digital Tourism Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly evolving sectors of the global economy, driven mainly by digital innovation and the shifting preferences of younger generations such as Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z). Digital platforms fundamentally transform how trips are researched, planned, and experienced, leading to the proliferation of flexible and socially engaging travel formats. Among these, open trip packages—pre-arranged group tours marketed through digital platforms—have gained popularity for their affordability, convenience, and capacity to facilitate social interaction, aligning closely with Gen Z's experiential and community-driven values (Terzić et al., 2022). As digital natives born between 1997 and 2012, Gen Z travelers prioritize authentic experiences over material goods and exhibit a growing affinity for spontaneous, culturally immersive travel (Chang et al., 2024; Daşkın & Tumatı, 2024; Rahjasa et al., 2023). Social media plays an instrumental role in shaping their travel preferences, not only as a source of inspiration but also as a means of self-expression and social validation (Rahjasa et al., 2023; Seyfi et al., 2024). Representing more than 23% of global travelers, Gen Z significantly contributes to tourism expenditure and increasingly favors sustainable and ethically conscious travel experiences (Nguyen et al., 2024; Pinho & Gomes, 2023), reinforcing the relevance of open trip packages that align with both budget and values.

The open trip model has grown in popularity in the Indonesian context, particularly among novice travelers seeking affordable and low-commitment alternatives to independent travel. However, this demographic remains vulnerable

Correspondence address:

Marceilla Suryana

Email : marceilla@polban.ac.id

Address : Tour and Travel Business Program, Politeknik Negeri Bandung

to various uncertainties, with many expressing reluctance to engage because of concerns about trust, transparency, and service quality. Their limited travel experience often exacerbates these concerns, rendering them more sensitive to information asymmetries and perceived risks. Factors such as digital travel reviews, user-friendly platform accessibility, destination image, and perceived travel risks significantly shape their booking decisions (Oliver et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2022; Sarja et al., 2022). Trust has consistently been identified as a critical determinant of online travel bookings, often mediating the relationship between external cues—such as user-generated content—and consumers' behavioral intentions (Christin & Nugraha, 2023; Kumar et al., 2020). For novice travelers, trust serves as a psychological safeguard, mitigating uncertainty and enhancing confidence in decision-making. Concurrently, destination attractiveness has been shown to significantly influence booking intentions, particularly when travelers are exposed to appealing visual content or culturally rich narratives that help counterbalance perceived risks (An & Öztürk, 2022; Farrukh et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2022; Nazir et al., 2021; Neuburger & Egger, 2020).

Although prior research in tourism and e-commerce has extensively applied behavioral models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) to explore online booking intentions, these frameworks have primarily centered on experienced users or general digital consumers. As a result, the nuanced decision-making processes of first-time travelers—who may be navigating digital platforms for the first time—remain underexplored. Moreover, existing studies often overlook the interplay between trust and tourism-specific constructs, such as perceived travel risks and destination imagery, particularly in open trip models. Recent studies also underscore the growing importance of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in shaping trust and guiding purchase behavior, especially among those with limited prior exposure to travel products (Mahat & Hanafiah, 2020; Shin et al., 2022). Building on these gaps, there is a pressing need to examine how digital and psychological antecedents jointly shape novice travelers' booking decisions.

This study proposes a tourism-contextualized conceptual framework that extends TAM by integrating consumer trust and destination image theories. Central to this framework is trust in tour operators, which is theorized to mediate the relationship between key antecedents—including perceived travel risks, digital travel reviews, and destination attractiveness—and travelers' intention to book. The model also conceptualizes ease of access to travel platforms as a technological enabler that shapes the perceived value of tour packages and the destination's appeal. Notably, the study redefines general constructs such as perceived usefulness and e-WOM as domain-specific variables—e.g., the functional benefits of tour packages and digital travel reviews—to better reflect the realities of tourism consumption. By focusing on the often-overlooked population of novice travelers, this research advances tourism and consumer behavior theory. It offers actionable insights for digital travel platforms and tour operators aiming to enhance trust, reduce friction, and stimulate engagement within the open trip market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Functional Benefits and Trust in Tour Operators

Functional benefits in tourism refer to the tangible advantages travelers perceive when utilizing tour services, including cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, itinerary convenience, and streamlined planning. These benefits are particularly significant for novice travelers, who often lack the knowledge or confidence to organize complex travel arrangements independently. When such benefits are effectively communicated and reliably delivered, they enhance perceptions of service reliability and operational competence—two critical foundations for trust (Jannah et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). Research further suggests that emphasizing operational efficiencies, such as transparent pricing and user-friendly booking systems, plays a key role in building consumer confidence, particularly for first-time users navigating unfamiliar service environments (Ramírez et al., 2023; Sutapa et al., 2022). Tour providers who consistently demonstrate these advantages are likelier to inspire a sense of security, fostering trust and long-term loyalty (Andersen et al., 2023).

Trust, in this context, is defined as the traveler's belief in the tour operator's ability, integrity, and dependability in fulfilling promised services. For novice travelers—often marked by limited experience and heightened uncertainty—trust becomes an essential factor in engaging with organized travel formats such as open trip packages. Studies indicate that articulating functional benefits can reduce perceived risk and foster trust, particularly when paired with positive digital endorsements (Kaewkitipong et al., 2021; Kolenberg & Pankham, 2024). This is especially relevant in the open trip context, where consumers rely on operational clarity and peer validation to navigate their choices. As such, functional benefits not only improve the travel experience but also serve as tangible proof points that reinforce trust, thereby playing a pivotal role in shaping novice tourists' behavior.

Hypothesis H1: Functional benefits of tour packages positively affect trust in tour operators.

Perceived Travel Risks and Trust in Tour Operators

Perceived travel risk encompasses multiple dimensions of concern, including physical safety, financial loss, and the potential for service failure—factors that can be particularly daunting for novice travelers. Due to their limited experience with travel logistics and unfamiliarity with destinations, first-time travelers are more vulnerable to uncertainty and doubt. As a result, elevated perceptions of risk can significantly diminish their confidence in the overall travel experience and the service provider's credibility (Duan et al., 2021; Matiza, 2020). These perceived risks are further intensified in a post-pandemic context, where heightened awareness of health and safety concerns has made travelers more cautious in selecting travel services (Ye et al., 2023).

To mitigate these concerns, tour operators must actively manage trust-building mechanisms through transparent communication, clearly defined safety protocols, and consistent delivery of reliable services (González-Torres et al., 2021; Yeap et al., 2021). Research shows that effective risk communication alleviates customer anxiety and reinforces perceptions of professionalism and accountability. Conversely, when risk is perceived as high and insufficiently addressed, travelers are less likely to feel secure or committed, leading to hesitation or outright refusal to book open trip packages (Choy & Kamoche, 2021; Das & Tiwari, 2020). Thus, for novice travelers, managing perceived risk is a critical prerequisite for cultivating trust, with direct implications for travel engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty (Matiza, 2020; Yeap et al., 2021).

Hypothesis H2: Perceived travel risks have a negative effect on trust in tour operators.

Digital Travel Reviews and Trust in Tour Operators

Digital travel reviews, especially those generated by peers, serve as crucial informational cues that help travelers assess the credibility and service quality of tour operators. This is particularly important for novice travelers, who often lack firsthand experience and rely heavily on the shared experiences of others to navigate unfamiliar decision-making environments. Positive, detailed, and authentic reviews reduce ambiguity and provide reassurance that the tour provider can meet expectations (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Zelenka et al., 2021). The perceived credibility of these reviews significantly influences trust formation, as they serve as social proof of service reliability and quality (Mahat & Hanafiah, 2020). When reviews are seen as trustworthy, they mitigate perceived risks and enhance users' confidence in engaging with open trip packages (Khare et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the authenticity and relatability of peer-generated content strengthen its persuasive impact. When travelers encounter genuine stories from previous users, they are more likely to believe the tour operator can deliver on its promises (Huang et al., 2022). This trust, established through digital narratives, directly contributes to perceptions of provider reliability and fosters favorable behavioral intentions (Muharam et al., 2021). Negative reviews also play a formative role, alerting prospective customers to potential service shortcomings. Operators who proactively manage both positive and negative feedback—by responding transparently and addressing issues—can reinforce trust and strengthen relationships with their audience (Anagnostopoulou et al., 2020; Ara et al., 2021). Thus, digital travel reviews serve as a powerful mechanism for shaping trust, especially for less experienced travelers navigating the uncertainties of online tourism.

Hypothesis H3: Digital travel reviews positively influence trust in tour operators.

Destination Attractiveness and Trust in Tour Operators

Destination attractiveness refers to the perceived appeal of a place, shaped by factors such as visual beauty, cultural richness, available activities, and the effectiveness of promotional efforts. For novice travelers, this perceived allure serves as a strong motivational factor, influencing their attitudes not only toward the destination itself but also toward the tour operator facilitating the experience (Sriboonlue, 2023). A well-promoted, desirable destination reinforces the belief that the tour operator delivers high-quality travel experiences, thereby fostering greater trust in the provider. In this way, destination attractiveness operates as an indirect cue of service quality, especially when the operator is perceived as a reliable gateway to an enjoyable and meaningful travel experience.

Moreover, the image of a destination serves as a mediating factor in how travelers form expectations and behavioral intentions. Strong destination imagery—enhanced by emotional resonance and cognitive appeal—can significantly reduce uncertainty, particularly for novice travelers who are more vulnerable to perceived risks (Caber et al., 2020). Promotional content that effectively highlights the destination's unique qualities and emotional value helps build a sense of legitimacy and excitement, which, in turn, enhances trust in the organizing tour operator (Sriboonlue, 2023). When operators successfully align themselves with attractive

destinations through compelling branding and communication, they not only strengthen their perceived reliability but also increase their appeal to travelers seeking reassurance and quality.

Hypothesis H4: Destination attractiveness positively influences trust in tour operators.

Ease of Access to Travel Platforms, Functional Benefits, and Destination Attractiveness

Ease of access to digital travel platforms includes elements such as usability, intuitive navigation, simple interfaces, and fast loading speeds. These factors are especially important for novice travelers, as they help reduce cognitive load, eliminate barriers to entry, and facilitate confident decision-making (Damanik et al., 2022; Zhang, 2023). A platform that is easy to navigate enhances users' perceptions of system reliability and usability, which, in turn, increases the perceived functional benefits of the tour packages it promotes. Features such as clearly labeled buttons, responsive design, and efficient booking processes contribute to a smoother planning experience, reducing frustration and building positive associations with both the platform and the travel services it offers (Deiniatur & Cahyono, 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

Beyond usability, ease of access also enhances the perceived attractiveness of destinations, particularly when visual content and key travel information are seamlessly integrated into the user experience. Immersive design elements and intuitive layouts enhance how users engage with destination information, potentially evoking emotional responses and reinforcing cognitive appeal (Cooper et al., 2021; Meng & Feng, 2022). Studies have shown that well-presented imagery and well-structured content on travel platforms significantly shape how travelers perceive and value potential destinations (Cheung et al., 2023; Wan et al., 2020). For novice users, such representations are critical in influencing both destination appeal and booking intent, underscoring the pivotal role of platform design in trust-building and travel motivation (Kristensen & Bro, 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Hypothesis H5: Ease of access positively influences perceived functional benefits.

Hypothesis H6: Ease of access positively influences destination attractiveness.

Trust in Tour Operators and Booking Intention

The trust serves as a critical psychological enabler in consumer decision-making, particularly in online tourism, where services are intangible and guarantees are limited. For novice travelers, this trust becomes especially vital, as their lack of experience often leads to heightened caution and reliance on external cues. When travelers trust a tour operator, they are more inclined to believe that promises regarding itinerary accuracy, service quality, safety standards, and overall reliability will be fulfilled (Andrian et al., 2021). This belief reduces uncertainty and increases confidence, thereby facilitating the shift from passive consideration to active booking behavior. Higher levels of trust have consistently been shown to correlate with stronger booking intentions, particularly among users navigating digital travel platforms for the first time.

For inexperienced travelers, perceived credibility becomes a decisive factor in overcoming hesitancy. Trust helps mitigate perceived risk and provides emotional assurance, creating a more seamless and secure decision-making process (Kaewkitipong et al., 2021; Mahliza, 2020). This effect is amplified in high-risk or unfamiliar environments where users face multiple alternatives and must choose based on limited personal experience. Emotional trust—characterized by feelings of safety, dependability, and reassurance—has been found to shape purchase decisions in tourism settings significantly (Huang et al., 2022; Zelenka et al., 2021). Furthermore, clear communication of service quality and visible track records can bolster trust, especially when reinforced by online reviews and testimonials, which serve as social proof of reliability (Kaewkitipong et al., 2021; Zelenka et al., 2021). Thus, trust is not only a mediating force but a direct driver of behavioral intention in booking open trip packages.

Hypothesis H7: Trust in tour operators positively influences the intention to book open trip packages.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the factors influencing novice travelers' intention to book open trip packages. The conceptual framework integrates constructs from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), consumer trust theory, and destination image theory, adapted to the tourism context. The model includes seven key latent variables: ease of access to travel platforms, perceived functional benefits, perceived travel risks, destination attractiveness, digital travel reviews, trust in tour operators, and intention to book open trip packages. The target population consisted of Indonesian individuals aged 18–35 who had limited or no prior experience with organized travel or open trip packages but expressed interest in participating. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure the sample matched the characteristics of novice travelers. To screen for eligibility, three filtering questions were included at the

beginning of the questionnaire: 1) "Have you ever participated in an organized open trip package before?"; 2) "How would you describe your travel experience?"; and 3) "Are you interested in joining open trip packages in the near future?". Only those who reported never or rarely participating and rated their experience as limited, and who answered "Yes" to the interest question, were included in the analysis.

Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms, travel communities, and university forums over 4 weeks. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: demographic information and measurement items for each construct. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The indicators for each variable were adapted from previously validated instruments in the domains of tourism, digital behavior, and consumer trust, with contextual modifications to suit novice travelers and open trip services. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to assess the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire items, resulting in minor wording adjustments. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0, which is appropriate for complex models with multiple constructs and suitable for both exploratory and confirmatory analysis. The measurement model was assessed using composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity assessed via the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. The structural model was evaluated based on path coefficients, R^2 values, and predictive relevance (Q^2). Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was performed to test the significance of hypothesized relationships between constructs. Ethical considerations were upheld by ensuring voluntary participation and respondent anonymity. An informed consent statement was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire, outlining the study's purpose, participants' right to withdraw at any time, and assurances of data confidentiality. No personal identifiers were collected, and the data were used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

A total of 291 valid responses were collected and analyzed in this study. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1. The data indicate a balanced distribution across key sociodemographic variables relevant to novice travelers. Regarding gender, 56.7% of respondents were female ($n = 165$), while 43.3% were male ($n = 126$). The majority of participants were aged 21–25 years (48.5%), followed by 26–30 years (31.3%) and 18–20 years (15.1%). A smaller proportion (5.1%) was between 31 and 35 years. This age distribution aligns well with the study's focus on young adult novice travelers.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 291)

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	126	43.3%
	Female	165	56.7%
Age	18–20 years	44	15.1%
	21–25 years	141	48.5%
	26–30 years	91	31.3%
	31–35 years	15	5.1%
Education Level	High School	27	9.3%
	Diploma (D3)	50	17.2%
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	196	67.4%
	Postgraduate (S2/S3)	18	6.2%
Monthly Income	< IDR 3 million	113	38.8%
	IDR 3 – 5 million	85	29.2%
	IDR 5 – 7 million	53	18.2%
	> IDR 7 million	40	13.8%
Ever Joined Open Trip	Never	245	84.2%
	1–2 times	46	15.8%
Interest in Open Trip	Yes	269	92.4%
	No	22	7.6%

Source: Research data, 2025

Regarding education level, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (S1) (67.4%), followed by diploma holders (17.2%), high school graduates (9.3%), and a smaller portion with postgraduate degrees (6.2%). In terms of monthly income, the largest group (38.8%) earned below IDR 3 million, followed by 29.2% earning between IDR 3–5 million, 18.2% between IDR 5–7 million, and 13.8% earning more than IDR 7 million. In line with the study's sampling criteria, 84.2% of respondents reported never joining an open trip package, while 15.8% had joined once or twice but still identified themselves as inexperienced travelers. Furthermore, 92.4% expressed

active interest in joining open trip packages in the near future, confirming their suitability as the study's target population.

Measurement Model Evaluation

To assess the reliability and validity of the reflective measurement model, this study followed the evaluation criteria proposed by (Henseler et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2021) for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis involved examining indicator reliability (outer loadings), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted or AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT ratio). Indicator reliability was established by assessing each indicator's outer loadings on its associated latent variable. As shown in Table 2, all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable levels of individual reliability. Additionally, the Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs ranged between 0.865 and 0.919, exceeding the recommended cut-off value of 0.70, which confirms strong internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's Alpha values also exceeded 0.70 for all constructs, further supporting the reliability of the measures. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was above 0.50, confirming convergent validity, as each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.

Table 2. Reflective Items, Loadings, and Construct Reliability

Construct	Loading	α	CR	AVE
Destination Attractiveness		0.826	0.896	0.742
DA1: The destination offered in the open trip appears visually attractive.	0.826			
DA2: The destination's cultural and natural uniqueness attracts me to join the trip.	0.880			
DA3: The destination seems worth visiting based on what I have seen or read.	0.877			
Digital Travel Reviews		0.868	0.919	0.791
DTR1: I trust other travelers' online reviews about open trip packages.	0.864			
DTR2: I consider peer reviews helpful when evaluating an open trip service.	0.914			
DTR3: I tend to rely on digital reviews when making booking decisions.	0.890			
Ease of Access		0.809	0.886	0.722
EA1: I find it easy to access open trip booking platforms.	0.793			
EA2: Navigating open trip booking websites or apps is straightforward for me.	0.867			
EA3: The online platform for booking open trips loads quickly and works smoothly.	0.886			
Functional Benefits		0.845	0.906	0.763
FB1: Booking an open trip saves me time and effort in planning.	0.826			
FB2: Open trip packages offer practical benefits that make travel easier for me.	0.899			
FB3: Using open trip services is more convenient than arranging trips independently.	0.894			
Intention to Book		0.828	0.897	0.744
IB1: I intend to book an open trip package in the near future.	0.859			
IB2: I would choose an open trip if I had the opportunity to travel soon.	0.899			
IB3: I am likely to book an open trip for my next vacation.	0.829			
Perceived Travel Risks		0.835	0.901	0.751
PTR1: I worry that the open trip may not meet my expectations.	0.832			
PTR2: I am concerned about the safety and reliability of open trip services.	0.911			
PTR3: Booking an open trip feels somewhat risky to me.	0.856			
Trust in Tour Operators		0.766	0.865	0.681
TTO1: I believe the open trip operator is honest and trustworthy.	0.792			
TTO2: I feel confident that the tour operator will deliver the promised services.	0.862			
TTO3: I trust the open trip operator to handle my travel plans professionally.	0.819			

Source: Research data, 2025

The results demonstrate that the measurement model meets all criteria for reliability and convergent validity, indicating that the constructs are measured accurately and consistently.

To assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) was evaluated, as suggested by (Ringle et al., 2020). HTMT values below 0.90 indicate adequate discriminant validity between constructs. As displayed in Table 3, all HTMT values fall below this threshold, suggesting that each construct is empirically distinct from the others.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) for Discriminant Validity

Constructs	DA	DTR	EA	FB	IB	PTR
Digital Travel Reviews (DTR)	0.634	—				
Ease of Access (EA)	0.586	0.223	—			
Functional Benefits (FB)	0.737	0.675	0.463	—		
Intention to Book (IB)	0.526	0.540	0.266	0.622	—	
Perceived Travel Risks (PTR)	0.761	0.415	0.641	0.600	0.463	—
Trust in Tour Operators (TTO)	0.728	0.581	0.509	0.695	0.520	0.588

Source: Research data, 2025

The HTMT results confirm that discriminant validity is established, further supporting the adequacy of the measurement model for structural analysis. As an additional step, model fit was assessed using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and other fit indices. The saturated model's SRMR was 0.060, below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a good fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) of 0.786 also suggests an acceptable fit consistent with the standards in PLS-SEM for exploratory research.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated using a series of statistical assessments, including the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and hypothesis testing via path coefficients, as recommended by Sarstedt et al. (. These evaluations provide insights into both the model's explanatory power and predictive capability.

Table 4. R^2 and Q^2 Values

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2
Destination Attractiveness	0.238	0.235	0.168
Functional Benefits	0.151	0.148	0.112
Trust in Tour Operators	0.432	0.424	0.282
Intention to Book	0.177	0.174	0.124

Source: Research data, 2025

The R^2 values indicate the percentage of variance in each endogenous construct that its predictors explain. As presented in Table 4, the R^2 for Trust in Tour Operators is 0.432, suggesting a moderate explanatory power, meaning 43.2% of the variance in trust is explained by destination attractiveness, digital travel reviews, perceived travel risks, and functional benefits. Similarly, Destination Attractiveness ($R^2 = 0.238$) and Functional Benefits ($R^2 = 0.151$) also exhibit acceptable levels of explanation through Ease of Access. The R^2 value for Intention to Book is 0.177, indicating that trust accounts for 17.7% of the variance in booking intention. The Q^2 values, which assess predictive relevance via the blindfolding procedure, also support the model's predictive quality. Q^2 values for all endogenous constructs exceed the threshold of 0.00, confirming that the model has adequate predictive relevance (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

The structural relationships between latent variables were evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. As summarized in Table 5 and Figure 2, all seven hypotheses were supported under a liberal significance level ($\alpha = 0.10$), which is acceptable in exploratory research contexts (Hair et al., 2021). In particular, Ease of Access had a strong and significant influence on both Destination Attractiveness ($\beta = 0.488$, $p < 0.001$) and Functional Benefits ($\beta = 0.389$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5 and H6. Moreover, Functional Benefits ($\beta = 0.262$, $p = 0.009$), Destination Attractiveness ($\beta = 0.269$, $p = 0.002$), and Digital Travel Reviews ($\beta = 0.135$, $p = 0.031$) significantly influenced Trust in Tour Operators, supporting H1, H3, and H4 respectively. While Perceived Travel Risks had a weaker effect on trust ($\beta = 0.129$), the relationship was statistically significant at the 0.10 level ($p = 0.058$), thus supporting H2 under a relaxed error tolerance. Finally, Trust in Tour Operators showed a strong, positive, and highly significant effect on intention to book ($\beta = 0.420$, $p < 0.001$), validating H7.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing and Path Coefficients

Path	β	t-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H1: Functional Benefits → Trust	0.262	2.615	0.009	Supported
H2: Perceived Travel Risks → Trust	0.129	1.893	0.058	Supported*
H3: Digital Travel Reviews → Trust	0.135	2.164	0.031	Supported
H4: Destination Attractiveness → Trust	0.269	3.115	0.002	Supported
H5: Ease of Access → Functional Benefits	0.389	6.403	0.000	Supported
H6: Ease of Access → Destination Attractiveness	0.488	8.018	0.000	Supported
H7: Trust → Intention to Book	0.420	6.589	0.000	Supported

Source: Research data, 2025

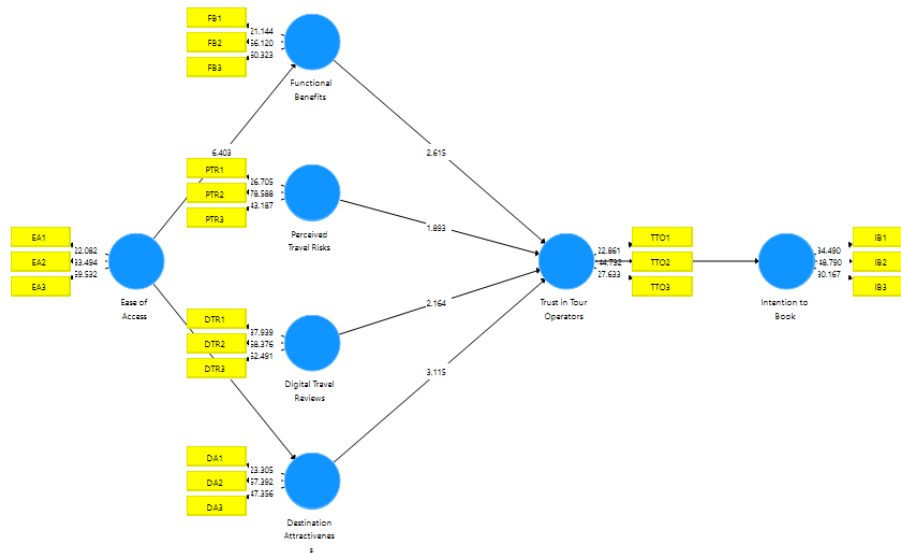


Figure 2. Tested Structural Model
Source: Research data, 2025

Discussion

The findings of this study invite a deeper contemplation on the role of trust as a psychological anchor in the decision-making processes of novice travelers navigating the uncertain terrain of open-trip tourism. Trust emerges not merely as a functional outcome but as a cognitive-emotional construct that reflects how individuals negotiate unfamiliar environments. The statistically significant relationship between trust and booking intention confirms a fundamental axiom in tourism behavior: people do not simply buy trips; they buy the promise of security, structure, and fulfillment. For novice travelers, who inherently possess limited experiential capital, this promise becomes existentially more valuable. In this regard, our findings resonate strongly with previous studies that identify trust as a central mediator in digital travel behavior (Andrian et al., 2021), reaffirming its irreplaceable function in reducing ambiguity and facilitating consumer commitment.

Interestingly, the antecedents of trust in this model—particularly destination attractiveness, functional benefits, and digital travel reviews—underscore a dynamic interplay between cognitive assessment and symbolic meaning-making. Destination attractiveness, while traditionally treated as an independent predictor of travel choice (Sriboonlue, 2023), is shown to contribute meaningfully to trust in this study. This reinforces the argument by (Caber et al., 2020) that aesthetic and cultural perceptions of a destination may function as heuristic cues through which travelers extrapolate expectations of the operator. When a tour provider is associated with a place perceived as beautiful or significant, the operator is symbolically uplifted—perceived as a curator of valuable experiences. Functional benefits, on the other hand, bridge the utilitarian and psychological. Consistent with prior research (Jannah et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023), these benefits offer cognitive assurance: when services appear practical and efficient, the perceived risk of misadventure diminishes, thus nurturing trust. Digital travel reviews also reaffirm their established role as social proof mechanisms, especially for novice travelers who rely heavily on vicarious experiences to make informed choices in the absence of personal precedent.

However, the most thought-provoking aspect of the findings lies in the ambiguous role of perceived travel risk. Contrary to dominant assumptions in tourism risk literature (Choy & Kamoche, 2021; Matiza, 2020), which often position risk perception as a deterrent to trust and intention, this study finds that the effect of risk—though positive—was only marginally significant at conventional levels ($p = 0.058$), but acceptable under an $\alpha = 0.10$ threshold. This result compels us to reconsider the evolving psychology of risk in a post-pandemic digital generation. It is plausible that younger travelers are becoming more acclimated to uncertainty, buffered by the abundance of online information, real-time peer feedback, and platform assurances. Alternatively, risk may now function more as a background concern than a decisive factor—outweighed by the promise of immersive experiences and social connectivity. This divergence from earlier models signals a shifting epistemology: risk no longer halts action; it conditions it.

The dual influence of ease of access to travel platforms—on both functional benefits and destination attractiveness—further illuminates the philosophical centrality of the interface as mediation. In the modern

tourism ecosystem, the platform is not a neutral medium; it is a space of encounter where travelers form aesthetic, cognitive, and emotional impressions. A seamless digital experience, as shown in this study, not only facilitates efficiency but also amplifies the emotional salience of destinations through curated visuals and responsive interactions. This aligns with the growing literature on the affective affordances of digital interfaces (Meng & Feng, 2022), suggesting that the way a destination is presented may matter as much as the destination itself. Altogether, this study contributes theoretically by integrating classical models (e.g., TAM) with tourism-specific constructs (e.g., destination image and peer influence), thereby offering a hybrid framework suited to the complexities of novice digital travelers. It extends the applicability of trust theory into a segment that has been relatively understudied—first-time or inexperienced users—who face high decision uncertainty but are also highly impressionable. Practically, the results call on tour operators and travel platforms to design not just services but experiences of assurance: digital clarity, social validation, and emotional resonance are now part of the trust equation. Moreover, the data hint at a broader societal shift in how young travelers engage with risk and trust, suggesting that tourism scholarship should adopt more fluid, culturally responsive models of behavior.

Of course, this study is not without limitations. Reliance on self-reported data and cross-sectional analysis limits causal inference. Furthermore, the geographic and demographic boundaries—Indonesian respondents aged 18–35—limit generalizability. Future research may benefit from longitudinal designs or cross-cultural comparisons to explore how trust develops over time and across different sociotechnical systems. Finally, while this study focused on cognitive and functional variables, there is significant potential to explore affective and identity-related factors—such as self-image, fear of missing out (FOMO), and digital fatigue—that may also shape intention and trust in the evolving travel landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the mechanisms shaping novice travelers' booking intentions in the emerging open trip market, emphasizing the central role of trust in tour operators as a mediator between tourism-specific antecedents and behavioral intention. By integrating constructs such as destination attractiveness, digital travel reviews, perceived travel risks, ease of platform access, and functional benefits, the research offers a nuanced understanding of how inexperienced users navigate digital tourism environments. The findings highlight that trust is not merely a transactional variable but a multi-dimensional construct rooted in perceptions of competence, credibility, and symbolic association—especially important for travelers lacking prior experience.

Theoretically, the study extends the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and consumer trust theory to a tourism context characterized by low experiential familiarity and high informational dependence. The model demonstrates how digital affordances and emotional cues coalesce to influence trust and intention. In practice, the findings encourage tour operators and digital travel platforms to prioritize transparent communication, user-friendly interfaces, and emotional storytelling across service design and promotional strategies. By reducing perceived uncertainty and enhancing psychological comfort, these elements can significantly increase conversion rates among novice users.

While the results are promising, they also signal a broader shift in how risk, trust, and digital influence operate in the evolving travel ecosystem. Future studies could further explore the emotional, cultural, and technological dimensions of travel decision-making, using mixed or longitudinal methods to capture the dynamics of trust formation over time. In doing so, scholars and practitioners alike can better understand, design for, and empower the next generation of digitally-native travelers.

REFERENCES

- Albrecht, J. N. (Ed.). (2017). *Visitor management in tourism destinations*. CABI.
- Asmelash, A. G., & Kumar, S. (2019). Assessing progress of tourism sustainability: Developing and validating sustainability indicators. *Tourism Management*, 71, 67–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.09.020>
- Ballantyne, R., Slabbert, L., Packer, J., & Sneddon, J. (2023). Negotiating stakeholder solutions to complex visitor management problems: The case of traffic management in the Kruger National Park. *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 78(3), 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0035919X.2023.2214105>
- Bak, I., & Szczecińska, B. (2020). Global demographic trends and effects on tourism.
- Bartula, M., & Radun, V. (2020). Visitor management planning as a tool for sustainable tourism in protected areas in Serbia. In *Tourism International Scientific Conference Vrnjačka Banja–TISC* (Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 77–93). <http://www.tisc.rs/proceedings/index.php/hitmc/article/view/330>
- Cheung, L. T. (2013, November). Improving visitor management approaches for the changing preferences and

- behaviors of country park visitors in Hong Kong. *Natural Resources Forum*, 37(4), 231–241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-8947.12025>
- Demas, M., Agnew, N., Fan, J., & Maekawa, S. (2015). Strategies for sustainable tourism at the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang, China. Springer.
- Enseñat-Soberanis, F., Frausto-Martínez, O., & Gándara-Vázquez, M. (2019). A visitor flow management process for touristified archaeological sites. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 14(4), 340–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2018.1529179>
- Eyassu, A. W., Asefa, G. M., & Atlug, A. (2021). Practices and challenges of visitor management implementation for sustainable tourism development in Fasil Ghebbi, Ethiopia. *Journal of Hospitality Management and Tourism*, 12(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.5897/JHMT2020.0294>
- Holmes, A. P., Grimwood, B. S., & King, L. J. (2019). Creating an Indigenized visitor code of conduct: The development of Denesoline self-determination for sustainable tourism. In *Sustainable tourism and Indigenous Peoples* (pp. 111–127). Routledge.
- Ileri, P., Kung'u, J. B., & Muriithi, J. K. (2020). Distribution of the benefits of Ngare Ndare Forest Trust and Il Ngwesi Group Ranch ecotourism enterprises in Kenya. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 9(5), 1178–1192.
- Jodłowski, M., Kruczek, Z., Szromek, A., & Gmyrek, K. (2023). Tourists' attitudes towards visitor management and restrictions in the national parks in the Carpathian Mountains. *Studia Periegetica*, 42(2), 7–30. <https://doi.org/10.58683/sp.385>
- Juma, L. O., Bakos, I. M., & Khademi-Vidra, A. (2020). Nature interpretation and visitor management objectives: A survey of tourist attitudes at Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 7246. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187246>
- Kabiru, A. (2009). Lamu: Is sustainable cultural tourism possible? *Kenya Past and Present*, 38(1), 43–49.
- Kebete, Y., & Wondirad, A. (2019). Visitor management and sustainable destination management nexus in Zegie Peninsula, Northern Ethiopia. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 13, 83–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.03.006>
- Kiş, N. (2019). A strategic approach to sustainable tourism development using the A'WOT hybrid method: A case study of Zonguldak, Turkey. *Sustainability*, 11(4), 964. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11040964>
- Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). (2018). Wildlife conservation policies and management. KWS.
- Leung, Y. F., Spenceley, A., Hvenegaard, G., Buckley, R., & Groves, C. (2018). *Tourism and visitor management in protected areas: Guidelines for sustainability* (Vol. 27). IUCN.
- Mainigi, S. W. (2019). Sustainable tourism certification, local governance and management in dealing with overtourism in East Africa. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 11(5), 532–551. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-06-2019-0034>
- Mason, P. (2020). *Tourism impacts, planning and management*. Routledge.
- Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife. (2022). New tourism strategy for Kenya 2021–2025. <https://tourism.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/New-Tourism-Strategy-for-Kenya-2021-2025.pdf>
- Murungi, T. M. (2020). Determinants of sustainability of community-based ecotourism development projects in Kenya: A case of Northern Rangeland Trust Conservancy, Meru County [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi].
- Mwangi, F., Zhang, Q., & Wang, H. (2022). Development challenges and management strategies on the Kenyan national park system: A case of Nairobi National Park. *International Journal of Geoheritage and Parks*, 10(1), 16–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgeop.2022.02.003>
- Ol Pejeta Conservancy. (2022). Annual report. <https://www.olpejetaconservancy.org/about-us/our-story/annual-report/>
- Ol Pejeta Conservancy. (2024). Ol Pejeta tariff guide: 9th August 2023 to 31st December 2024. <https://www.olpejetaconservancy.org/uploads/assets/uploads/2023/08/>
- Panić, A., Pavlaković, B., & Koščak, M. (2019). Managing a sustainable tourism destination. In *Ethical and responsible tourism* (pp. 359–374). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ime.2018.12.74>
- Petrić, L., & Mandić, A. (2014). Visitor management tools for protected areas focused on sustainable tourism development: The Croatian experience. *Environmental Engineering and Management Journal*, 13(6), 1483–1495.
- Qaddhat, R. M., Fayed, H. A., & Wafik, G. M. (2021). Evaluation of visitor management and its impact on visitor experience and satisfaction at archaeological sites in Jordan (case study: Jerash). *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 10(1), 248. <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2021-0022>
- Shah, P. S., & Irandu, E. (2022). Recreational green spaces as the future for sustainable cities: Case of Karura

- Forest in Nairobi, Kenya. *Journal of Sustainability, Environment and Peace*, 87–95. <https://doi.org/10.53537/jsep.2022.06.001>
- Spenceley, A. (2014). Benefit sharing from natural heritage: Examples and challenges from Africa. In Presentation at the Inkasa Symposium, Cape Town, South Africa, April.
- Spenceley, A., Kohl, J., McArthur, S., Myles, P., Notarianni, M., Paleczny, D., Pickering, C., & Worboys, G. L. (2015). Visitor management. In *Protected area governance and management* (pp. 715–750).
- Tien, N. H., Viet, P. Q., Duc, N. M., & Tam, V. T. (2021). Sustainability of tourism development in Vietnam's coastal provinces. *World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development*, 17(5), 579–598. <https://doi.org/10.1504/WREMSD.2021.117443>
- Tourism Research Institute. (2023). Kenya annual tourism sector performance report 2022. https://tri.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Tourism-Sector-Performance-Report_2022.pdf
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2020). International tourism highlights: 2020 edition. <https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-and-tourism-2020>
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2023). Tourism on track for full recovery as new data shows strong start to 2023. <https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-on-track-for-full-recovery-as-new-data-shows-strong-start-to-2023>
- Wawire, C. R., Muriuki, L. M., & Nkari, I. M. (2023). *East African Journal of Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7849167>
- Wong, C. U. I., McIntosh, A., & Ryan, C. (2016). Visitor management at a Buddhist sacred site. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(5), 675–687. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287514563164>