


AI Chatbot Acceptance and Self-Disclosure among Guidance and Counseling Students: Testing the Technology Acceptance Model in Counselor Education

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INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counseling services in higher education fundamentally depend on students' willingness to engage in self-disclosure. However, in the digital era, integrating artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly urgent, as traditional face-to-face approaches alone are insufficient to address students' psychological barriers. Guidance and Counseling students are expected to demonstrate high levels of self-disclosure to internalize core professional values (Chalidaziah, 2019; Nasyar & Ahmad, 2020; Ristianti et al., 2022). Yet fear of criticism, shame, and discomfort in interpersonal interactions continue to inhibit openness (Chen & Kok, 2015; Islahuddin, 2021; Nofianti et al., 2020). Without technology-mediated support, these barriers risk limiting the development of essential counseling competencies. In this context, AI-based counseling chatbots offer a critical, scalable solution by providing a non-judgmental, accessible, and psychologically safe environment that effectively facilitates students' self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure is a natural, universal, yet deeply personal process that every counseling student must master. According to Jourard, self-disclosure is an essential element in building

healthy interpersonal relationships and professional competence. Without sufficient openness, future counselors cannot fully develop the empathy and relational skills required in their future practice. Everyone experiences moments of hesitation when revealing personal thoughts and feelings, but for Guidance and Counseling students, this hesitation carries long-term professional consequences.

As artificial intelligence advances rapidly, chatbots conversational systems capable of simulating human dialogue have emerged as a promising alternative to overcome these psychological obstacles (Cao et al., 2023). Because chatbots are impartial and non-human, they create a uniquely safe, non-judgmental environment that encourages users to disclose personal thoughts and feelings without fear of evaluation (Entenberg et al., 2023; Gennaro et al., 2020). This characteristic is especially valuable for students who must cultivate self-disclosure as a core professional competency.

Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor) explains that self-disclosure develops gradually through an increase in the breadth and depth of topics. In the chatbot context, this gradual process can be deliberately facilitated through reciprocal, progressive interaction design, mirroring the natural progression observed in human relationships (Skjuve et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2022). Chatbots specifically designed to promote self-disclosure have been shown to facilitate deeper self-reflection, reduce psychological pressure, and support students facing academic stress (Pitts et al., 2025; Park et al., 2023; Trappey et al., 2022).

Empirical evidence further demonstrates that chatbot interactions can increase self-disclosure in therapeutic simulations more effectively than certain human-counselor encounters in specific contexts (Liu et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2019). Anthropomorphic and emotionally intelligent chatbots enhance perceptions of intimacy and emotional closeness, thereby encouraging even deeper personal disclosure (Kang & Kang, 2024; Ma et al., 2025; Chin et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023). These features allow students to practice openness in a low-risk setting before applying it in real counseling relationships.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides a robust theoretical framework to explain how Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Attitude toward Use (AUse) shape students' engagement with chatbots, which in turn influences the extent of self-disclosure (Saif et al., 2024; Bilquise et al., 2024; Aldraiweesh, 2025). When students perceive a chatbot as both easy to use and useful, their willingness to disclose personal and sensitive information increases significantly.

Despite growing global evidence supporting the potential of chatbots, research examining the relationships between PEOU, PU, AUse, and self-disclosure among Guidance and Counseling students remains scarce, particularly in Indonesian higher education institutions such as Universitas PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS). In the post-pandemic digital era, flexible, personalized, and stigma-free support mechanisms have become increasingly relevant (Kim et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2022). Chatbots can fill this gap by offering accessible, low-cost, and reciprocal platforms for students to practice professional self-disclosure skills.

The Hyper-personal Communication Model further suggests that text-based computer-mediated communication can produce more intense and intimate relationships than face-to-face interactions, due to selective self-presentation and idealization (Blümel et al., 2024; Cox et al., 2025). When combined with emotional support features, chatbots become powerful tools for building trust and encouraging voluntary disclosure of academic or emotional burdens (Beattie & High, 2022).

This study, therefore, applies the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to investigate the relationships between Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Attitude toward Use (AUse) with Self-Disclosure (SD_Total) among Guidance and Counseling students at

UPGRIS Semarang. The research also explores how these three TAM variables collectively relate to students' openness when interacting with counseling chatbots.

This study provides one of the first empirical examinations of AI chatbot acceptance as a predictor of self-disclosure within counselor education, extending the Technology Acceptance Model beyond traditional technology adoption contexts into professional training environments.

Study Aim and Hypothesis

This study aims to examine the correlations between Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Attitude toward Use (AUse) with Self-Disclosure (SD_Total) among Guidance and Counseling students. The hypothesis is that PEOU, PU, and AUse are significantly correlated with Self-Disclosure.

METHODS

Design

This study used a correlational design with a cross-sectional survey. It aimed to examine relationships between Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Attitude toward Use (AUse) with Self-Disclosure (SD_Total) among Guidance and Counseling students. This design allowed the researcher to determine the strength and direction of correlations among the three independent variables and the dependent variable, without manipulating any conditions.

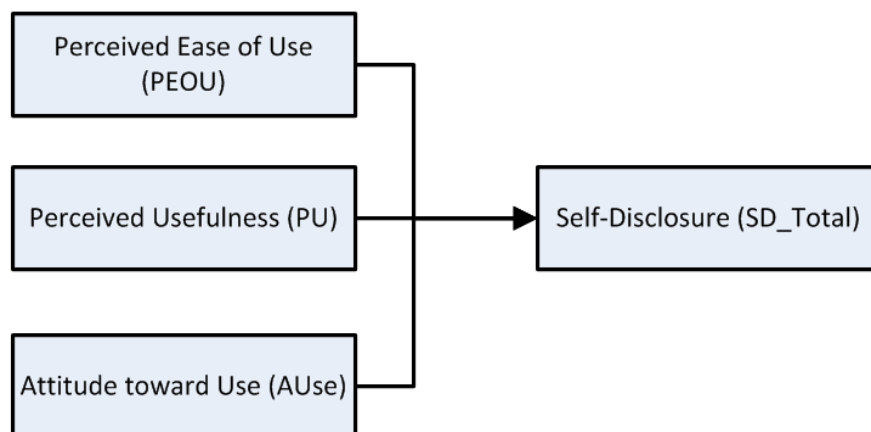


Figure 1. Research Model of Technology Acceptance Factors Influencing Self-Disclosure

Participants

Participants were active undergraduate students in the Guidance and Counseling program at Universitas PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS), Indonesia. Undergraduate students were deliberately selected because they are in a critical developmental stage of acquiring foundational counseling competencies, particularly self-disclosure, which is essential for professional readiness. At this stage, students are actively transitioning from theoretical knowledge to early practical application, making them an appropriate population to examine the role of AI-based counseling chatbots in skill development. In contrast to postgraduate students or practicing counselors, undergraduates represent the primary target of counselor education interventions and are more sensitive to structured training support. Additionally, as digitally native users, they are highly familiar with interactive technologies, enabling a more valid assessment of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) variables. Proportionate stratified random sampling ensured representation across all academic years. A total of 76 students (N = 76), aged 18–24 and with prior experience using counseling chatbots, were included in the final analysis.

Instruments

Data were collected using four adapted Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Before the main study, all instruments were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Values closer to 1 indicated higher internal consistency (Azwar, 2012).

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) refers to the degree to which students believe using the counseling chatbot is effort-free. It was measured with an 8-item scale adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework (Saif et al., 2024). Sample items included statements about the chatbot being easy to learn and user-friendly. The reliability coefficient was .837.

Perceived Usefulness (PU) refers to the extent to which students believe that using the counseling chatbot enhances their learning or counseling practice. PU was assessed with a 7-item scale also adapted from TAM (Saif et al., 2024). Sample items focused on whether the chatbot improved learning or counseling practice. The reliability coefficient was 0.822.

Attitude toward Use (AUse) represents students' overall positive or negative feelings about using the counseling chatbot. It was measured with a 5-item scale adapted from TAM (Saif et al., 2024). Sample items reflected positive feelings toward using the chatbot. The reliability coefficient was .829.

Self-Disclosure (SD_Total) was measured with a 16-item scale adapted from Wheelless (1978) and updated for digital contexts (Chocarro et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2025). The scale assessed the breadth, depth, positivity, and intentionality of disclosure. Sample items included willingness to share personal feelings and experiences with the chatbot. The reliability coefficient was .851. All scales met the minimum reliability threshold of .70 and were therefore considered reliable for this study.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis testing was conducted using quantitative multiple linear regression analysis. Prior to the main analysis, classical assumption tests were conducted to assess normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. The scales had already been validated and tested for reliability. All data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 for Windows. The analysis examined the overall model significance (F-test), individual predictor contributions (t-tests and standardized beta coefficients), and the proportion of variance explained (R^2 and adjusted R^2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 indicate that the minimum score for the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) variable was 1.50, the maximum was 4.75, the standard deviation was 0.6700, and the mean was 3.38. For the Perceived Usefulness (PU) variable, the minimum score was 1.57, the maximum was 5.00, the standard deviation was 0.71, and the mean score was 3.46. For the Attitude toward Use (AUse) variable, the minimum score was 1.00, the maximum was 4.80, the standard deviation was 0.8085, and the mean score was 3.18. For the self-disclosure variable (SD_Total), the minimum score was 1.13, the maximum was 4.63, the standard deviation was 0.64, and the mean score was 2.94.

The correlation analysis in Table 3 revealed a significant positive relationship between Perceived Ease of Use and self-disclosure ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that PEOU is positively associated with self-disclosure among Guidance and Counseling students. Furthermore, the correlation between Perceived Usefulness and self-disclosure was 0.33 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant positive relationship between PU and self-disclosure among Guidance and Counseling students. The correlation between Attitude toward Use and self-disclosure was 0.39 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant positive relationship among Guidance and Counseling students.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	76	1.50	4.75	3.38	0.67
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	76	1.57	5.00	3.46	0.71
Attitude toward Use (AUse)	76	1.00	4.80	3.18	0.81
Self-Disclosure (SD_Total)	76	1.13	4.63	2.94	0.64

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), Attitude toward Use (AUse), and Self-Disclosure (SD_Total)

Variable	PEOU	PU	AUse	Self-Disclosure
PEOU	1	0.34**	0.48**	0.20*
PU	0.34**	1	0.39**	0.33**
AUse	0.48**	0.39**	1	0.39**
Self-Disclosure	0.20*	0.33**	0.39**	1

Note: $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (1-tailed). N = 76

The correlation analysis in Table 3 highlighted three key findings: (1) Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) was positively correlated with self-disclosure (SD_Total; $r = 0.20$, $p = 0.04$); (2) Perceived Usefulness (PU) had a stronger positive correlation with self-disclosure ($r = 0.33$, $p = 0.02$); and (3) Attitude toward Use (AUse) showed the strongest positive correlation with self-disclosure ($r = 0.391$, $p = 0.00$). All correlations reached significance at the 0.01 level (1-tailed), indicating that positive perceptions of the chatbot are associated with increased willingness to disclose personal information among Guidance and Counseling students.

Table 4. Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.60	0.36	0.33	0.52

Note: Predictors: (Constant), PEOU, PU, AUse

Table 4 shows a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.60 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.36. The three independent variables Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Attitude toward Use (AUse) explained 35.8% of the variance in self-disclosure (SD_Total) among Guidance and Counseling students. The remaining 64.2% of the variance was due to other factors not in the model. The adjusted R^2 of 0.33 confirms that the model explains the variance, even after accounting for the number of predictors.

Table 5. Significance of F Value in Multiple Linear Regression Test

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10.98	3	3.66	13.39	0.00**
Residual	19.68	72	0.27		
Total	30.66	75			

The results of the analysis in Table 5 showed that the model was significant, $F(3, 72) = 13.39$, $p < .001$. This means that the three factors how easy something is to use, how useful it is, and how often it is used together explain a large part of why people choose to share information.

Table 6 shows the individual regression coefficients. PEOU did not significantly predict self-disclosure ($B = -0.11$, $\beta = -0.12$, $t = -0.92$, $p = .362$). PU was a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.293$, $\beta = 0.33$, $t = 2.11$, $p = .039$). AUse was also a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.31$, $\beta = 0.39$, $t = 2.93$, $p = .005$). AUse showed the strongest standardized effect among the predictors.

In summary, although the overall regression model was highly significant, only PU and AUse contributed meaningfully and positively to predicting self-disclosure, whereas PEOU did not show a statistically significant relationship.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression – Beta Coefficients and t-values of Independent Variables on the Dependent Variable

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.31	0.34	–	3.90	0.000**
PEOU	-0.11	0.12	-0.12	-0.92	0.362
PU	0.29	0.14	0.33	2.11	0.039*
AUse	0.31	0.11	0.39	2.93	0.005**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ Dependent Variable: Self-Disclosure

Discussion

The present study provides strong empirical validation for the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). In explaining chatbot adoption among Guidance and Counseling students, with a particular focus on TAM's usefulness in predicting self-disclosure. Descriptive statistics showed moderate levels of technology acceptance and engagement: Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) had a mean of 3.38 (SD = 0.67), Perceived Usefulness (PU) had a mean of 3.46 (SD = 0.71), Attitude toward Use (AUse) had a mean of 3.18 (SD = 0.81), and Self-Disclosure (SD_Total) had a mean of 2.94 (SD = 0.64), all on a five-point Likert scale. These moderate scores suggest that students found the chatbot useful and easy to use. However, self-disclosure was lower, suggesting that basic acceptance is insufficient for deeper personal engagement without further relational development (Xue et al., 2026; Kleine et al., 2025).

Pearson correlation analyses further substantiated significant positive associations between all TAM constructs and self-disclosure, albeit with notable variation in magnitude. The weakest relationship emerged between PEOU and self-disclosure ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.043$), followed by PU ($r = 0.33$, $p = 0.02$), and the strongest linkage with AUse ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). Such bivariate patterns align closely with contemporary extensions of TAM in AI chatbot contexts, in which favorable technological perceptions systematically translate into greater willingness to share personal information (Pitts et al., 2025; Alghasab, 2025).

The multiple linear regression model proved statistically significant overall, $F(3, 72) = 13.39$, $p < .001$. It accounted for 35.8% of the variance in self-disclosure ($R = 0.60$, $R^2 = 0.36$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.33$). Only PU ($B = 0.29$, $\beta = 0.33$, $t = 2.11$, $p = 0.04$) and AUse ($B = 0.31$, $\beta = 0.39$, $t = 2.925$, $p = 0.005$) were significant positive predictors. AUse had the strongest standardized influence. In contrast, PEOU was not statistically significant ($B = -0.110$, $\beta = -0.115$, $t = -0.917$, $p = 0.362$). This pattern aligns with recent TAM work in educational and mental-health chatbot research. In these studies, perceived usefulness and attitudinal factors are more influential than ease of use for digitally native students (Vidarshika et al., 2025; Saif et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2025).

The non-significance of PEOU in the current model plausibly reflects the sample characteristics Guidance and Counseling students who are already proficient with digital interfaces who treat basic usability as a given rather than a salient differentiator (Xiao et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025). Systematic reviews of mental-health chatbots corroborate this interpretation: while ease of use facilitates initial adoption, sustained engagement and self-disclosure are predominantly anchored in perceived usefulness and emotional and relational acceptance (Kuhail et al., 2025; Peng et al., 2026; Naji et al., 2025). Similarly, Peng et al. (2026) demonstrated that self-disclosure toward AI psychological support agents is more strongly driven by psychological acceptance and perceived relational value than by functional ease, thereby mirroring the preeminent role of AUse observed herein (Kelly et al., 2025; Békés & Aafjes-van, 2026).

These results offer substantive implications for designing and integrating chatbots in counselor training curricula. To enhance self-disclosure among prospective counselors, developers should focus on features that clearly convey usefulness. These features include contextually accurate, scenario-relevant responses. They should also nurture positive attitudes through empathetic dialogue, personalization, and affirmative interaction feedback (Li et al., 2024; Park et al., 2023; Ballesteros et al., 2025). The strong internal consistency of the instruments (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82\text{--}0.85$) further increases interpretive confidence.

Notwithstanding these contributions, certain limitations warrant acknowledgment. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the modest sample ($N = 76$) from a single Indonesian institution limits generalizability. Self-report measures may also invite social desirability bias, especially regarding self-disclosure (Schmidt et al., 2025). Future research should employ longitudinal designs, use larger and more diverse samples, and apply mixed-methods to clarify mediating pathways such as trust, emotional safety, and anthropomorphism (Xue et al., 2026; Alghasab, 2025; Pitts et al., 2025; Saif et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2025; Kuhail et al., 2025; Peng et al., 2026; Kelly et al., 2025; Békés & Aafjes-van, 2026; Li et al., 2024; Vidarshika et al., 2025).

In sum, the evidence shows that while chatbot acceptance predicts self-disclosure among Guidance and Counseling students, perceived usefulness (how helpful students find the chatbot) and attitude toward use (students' overall feelings about using the chatbot) are the key mechanisms driving this effect (Wu, 2024; Okronipa & Nyame, 2024). These findings extend TAM research to AI-assisted counselor preparation and highlight the need for perceived usefulness and relationship-oriented design to foster self-disclosure skills (Kelly et al., 2025).

The findings extend TAM by demonstrating that in psychologically sensitive contexts such as counseling training, perceived usefulness and affective acceptance outweigh usability considerations. This suggests that technology acceptance in relational professions operates through motivational and emotional pathways rather than purely functional ones.

Implications

This study provides vital insights for counselor education in the digital age by demonstrating that the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is relevant to self-disclosure in counseling, a relationally sensitive domain (Gonzalez & McCalla, 2025), with perceived usefulness and attitude toward use emerging as stronger predictors than perceived ease of use, suggesting that relational value and motivation outweigh basic usability in shaping technology acceptance during counselor training (Srijundaree et al., 2024; Golden et al., 2023). These findings highlight that emotional and interpersonal factors, rather than technical features alone, drive technology adoption in human-service professions. Practically, the results show that AI-based counseling chatbots can effectively supplement future counselors' interpersonal skills training by providing students with a safe, judgment-free space to practice expressing their thoughts and emotions without criticism, which is especially useful for those with anxiety, shame, or hesitation in face-to-face settings, as emotionally responsive chatbots may enhance students' readiness for real counseling relationships and reinforce traditional supervision and peer activities (Schmidt et al., 2025). These findings emphasize that developers and educators should prioritize perceived usefulness and user experience when designing digital counseling tools, using empathetic language, personalization, and relevant feedback to encourage engagement and disclosure (Gonzalez & McCalla, 2025; Sheperis & Sharvit, 2025). More broadly, AI chatbots may expand access to psychological support and training, especially where counseling resources are limited.

Limitations and Further Research

This study is subject to several important limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between chatbot acceptance and self-disclosure. Additionally, restricting

the sample to Guidance and Counseling students from a single university reduces the generalizability of the results. The exclusive use of self-report measures may also introduce social desirability bias. Collectively, these limitations underscore the necessity for more rigorous methodological approaches in future research. Future studies should consider longitudinal or experimental designs, recruit more diverse samples across multiple institutions and cultural contexts, and examine additional variables such as trust in artificial intelligence, perceived privacy, and emotional safety to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of self-disclosure in AI-mediated counseling interactions.

CONCLUSION

Attitude toward Use (AUse) is significantly correlated with Self-Disclosure (SD_Total) among Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas PGRI Semarang, and collectively, the Technology Acceptance Model variables function as meaningful predictors of students' willingness to disclose personal thoughts and feelings when interacting with counseling chatbots. The findings indicate that perceived usefulness and positive attitudes toward chatbot use are the primary drivers of self-disclosure, while ease of use serves mainly as a baseline expectation among digitally native students. These results highlight the importance of integrating well-designed, useful, and emotionally engaging chatbots into counselor training programs, as fostering positive attitudes, and clearly demonstrating their usefulness can position chatbots as effective, stigma-free tools for developing self-disclosure competencies an essential professional skill for future counselors. Overall, the acceptance of chatbot technology extends beyond mere usability and represents a strategic approach to strengthening the relational and reflective capacities of Guidance and Counseling students at UPGRIS and beyond.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Venty, Partono, Eka Sari Setianingsih, and Ismah contributed equally. Venty and Eka Sari Setianingsih designed the research and instruments. Partono and Ismah collected data and analyzed statistics. All authors interpreted results, drafted, revised, and approved the manuscript.

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