
The Role of Generative Artificial Intelligence (such as ChatGPT) in Reshaping Destination Choice Decisions: A Theoretical and Methodological Analysis of AI-Driven Travel Marketing

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Abstract

The tourism sector has undergone a radical transformation with the emergence and development of generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI - GAI) applications, with models like ChatGPT representing a strategic force disrupting the landscape of tourism marketing. This paper aims to explore the pivotal role of generative artificial intelligence in reshaping destination marketing strategies and its direct impact on the complex process of making travel decisions. The research adopts a comprehensive critical and analytical literature review methodology covering tourism, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence. As a result, the paper presents an integrated conceptual framework linking the unique characteristics of generative artificial intelligence—such as contextual personalization and creative content generation—with established theories in the field, chiefly the Experience Economy theory and the Destination Image theory. The paper systematically analyzes the empowering role of generative artificial intelligence across the three main stages of travel decision-making (pre-trip, evaluation, and post-purchase), highlighting the mechanisms of influence at each stage. It also deeply discusses the accompanying ethical and cognitive challenges, such as algorithmic bias, "hallucinations" of models, and intellectual property issues. The study concludes that generative artificial intelligence is not merely an auxiliary technological tool, but a fundamental strategic driver for reshaping the competitive advantage of tourism marketing entities. Finally, the paper provides a systematic research agenda to guide future research in this emerging knowledge field.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, Destination Marketing, Tourist Choices, Experience Economy, Destination Image, AI Ethics.

Introduction

The tourism sector, as one of the pillars of the global economy, reflects deep human interaction and the narration of inspiring stories that spark the passion for discovery. Despite experiencing a series of successive digital transformations, from online booking to social review platforms, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) represents an unprecedented leap that surpasses all previous developments in its dimensions (Dwivedi et al., 2023). The ability of these models, such as ChatGPT, to simulate human voices, generate coherent and creative narratives, and

provide real-time customized content, goes far beyond the operational or analytical artificial intelligence that previous research focused on, ushering us into a new era of "generative marketing."

1.1. Research Context and Problem Statement

The fundamental importance of generative artificial intelligence lies in its ability to reshape the mechanisms of value creation and distribution within the tourism market. While traditional tourism marketing relied on promoting a unified and standardized image of the destination (Unified Destination Image) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), generative artificial intelligence enables the deconstruction of this image and the provision of countless highly personalized images, each specifically designed to match the context, preferences, and unique mood of each individual user. This radical shift from the collective to the individual generative model poses a fundamental challenge requiring a comprehensive reassessment of the theoretical foundations that explain how marketing efforts affect the process of travel decision-making. Here, the central problem of the study arises from the fact that current academic literature, despite increasing interest in artificial intelligence, lacks an integrated and organized conceptual framework clarifying the nature of the causal relationship between the unique generative advantages of generative artificial intelligence and its direct and indirect consequences on the multi-stage and complex process of tourist decision-making. Moreover, the systematic impact of generative artificial intelligence differs qualitatively at each stage of the tourist's decision, which has not been addressed systematically and comprehensively in previous studies.

1.2. Knowledge Gap, Importance, and Contribution

In line with the study problem, this paper seeks to bridge the mentioned knowledge and methodological gaps by achieving the following research objectives:

1. Providing a critical analysis of how the enabling characteristics of generative artificial intelligence (such as creative and contextual generation) are integrated with the foundational theories in tourism studies, especially the Experience Economy theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and the Destination Image Formation theory (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).
2. Identifying and describing the methodological mechanisms and behavioral impacts that generative artificial intelligence exerts on the sequential stages of tourist decision-making (awareness and exploration, evaluation and comparison, and purchase and post-purchase).
3. Analyzing the main ethical and legal challenges and risks arising from adopting generative artificial intelligence in destination marketing, focusing on issues of algorithmic bias, information reliability ("hallucinations"), and data protection and intellectual property. The expected contribution of this paper is to build a robust operational theoretical framework serving as a roadmap for both researchers and practitioners, as well as to provide a clear and systematic research agenda to guide future research efforts in the context of this deep technological transformation.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Theoretical Foundations and Tourist Decision-Making

2.1.1. Experience Economy Theory and the Shift to Generative Tourism

The Experience Economy theory emphasizes that true economic value is no longer found in goods or services themselves, but in designing and delivering exceptional, unforgettable experiences for the consumer (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Under generative artificial intelligence, this principle is achieved through a qualitative leap from recommendation-based personalization to what can be called "generative personalization." · From Recommendation to Creation: The role of technology is no longer limited to suggesting a hotel or flight from a pre-existing list. Generative artificial intelligence can now initiate the creation of a complete, personalized travel experience from scratch, based on real-time contextual analysis of the tourist's desires, location, current events, and even mood inferred from the nature of the dialogue. This transformation is known as "predictive generative tourism," which fundamentally enhances the expected experiential value (Anticipated Experiential Value) (Dogru et al., 2023). · Co-Creation: The tourist shifts from a passive recipient to an active partner in the design of their trip. Through natural conversational interaction, the "prompt" provided by the user becomes a creative input shaping the model's outputs. This transforms the relationship between marketer and tourist from a one-way directive to a shared creative process, thereby enhancing emotional engagement and brand loyalty for the destination (Zhang & Prebensen, 2024).

2.1.2. Destination Image and the Blurring of Digital Boundaries

Destination Image refers to the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions an individual forms about a place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Generative artificial intelligence blurs the boundaries between the sources shaping this image—between designed sources (such as official advertising campaigns) and organic sources (such as traveler reviews on social media)—raising profound questions about "perceived authenticity." · Generating the "Designed Organic": Generative artificial intelligence can produce content that appears "organic," "personal," and "authentic," like a post by an ordinary traveler, but is in fact meticulously designed to serve a specific marketing goal. This shift between form and content threatens the integrity of the presented image and makes it difficult for users to distinguish between marketing content and real experience. · Dynamism and Multiplicity of Destination Image: Due to its ability to generate infinitely, each tourist receives a unique narrative and visual framework about the same destination. This leads to the concept of "multiplicity of destination images," where there is no longer a single dominant image, but an endless set of individual perceptions. This poses a new challenge for destination marketing organizations (DMOs), requiring them to manage these multiple, continuously evolving perceptions rather than promoting a single, static image.

2.2. Proposed Conceptual Framework: Generative Artificial Intelligence as Mediator and Value Creator

Based on the critical review, this research proposes a conceptual framework that views the capabilities of generative artificial intelligence as fundamental mediating variables linking traditional marketing inputs (campaign budgets, historical reputation) to the final outputs of tourist

decision-making (booking intention, satisfaction, loyalty). In this model, generative artificial intelligence does not merely act as a transmission channel, but as an active platform for reshaping and generating value.

Theoretical hypotheses within the framework:

- The quality of generative outputs (their accuracy, authenticity, and contextual relevance) positively affects the tourist's perceived trust in the destination and in the information provider.
- The level of hyper-personalization provided by generative artificial intelligence raises the tourist's emotional arousal and positive expectations toward the destination, thereby strengthening booking intention.
- The nature of natural language interaction with generative artificial intelligence interfaces significantly reduces uncertainty and perceived risk associated with complex travel planning processes.

2.3. Precedents in Research: Classification of Generative Artificial Intelligence Applications in Tourism

Applications found in recent literature can be classified into three main axes reflecting the multiple roles of generative artificial intelligence (Ivanov & Soliman, 2023):

1. Content and Creativity: This axis includes the generation of promotional texts, brand storytelling, website and blog content, and even the design of logos and visual advertisements for tourist destinations.
2. Intelligent Interaction: This involves the development of advanced tourism chatbots and virtual assistants capable of simulating complex human dialogue, understanding the user's emotional intent, and managing multi-stage conversations to resolve tourist inquiries.
3. Analysis and Prediction: Generative artificial intelligence is used to extract deep insights from large, unstructured datasets (such as reviews, videos, and social media recordings) to train models to understand emerging trends and generate accurate predictions about market behavior and tourist preferences.

3. The Systematic Impact of GAI on Tourist Decision-Making Stages

3.1. Stage One: Initial Exploration and Awareness (Pre-Trip: Awareness & Consideration)

- Emotional Creative Generation: Generative artificial intelligence can analyze the user's contextual cues (such as searching for "quiet areas" or "family adventures") to generate emotionally engaging content (texts, virtual video scenarios, audio descriptions) directly targeting their psychological state. This not only increases interaction rates but also effectively expands the tourist's "evoked set" of destinations, introducing places they would not have considered otherwise.
- Generative SEO (GSEO): Instead of presenting a list of links, generative artificial intelligence integrated into search engines can provide a comprehensive, convincing narrative answer to a complex query such as "I am planning a week-long diving vacation in December with a medium budget." This comprehensive answer, which generates an initial travel plan, radically improves the user experience and immediately enhances the intention to deeply research the suggested destinations.

3.2. Stage Two: Evaluation and Comparison (Evaluation & Comparison)

- **Biased-Enhanced Comparison:** Based on the user's conversation history, generative artificial intelligence generates intelligent comparison summaries between a selected set of destinations, focusing particularly on addressing the user's expressed "pain points" (such as "I need a quiet hotel away from the noise"). While this increases decision-making efficiency, it raises critical questions about the neutrality and objectivity of the presented information, as the advantages of one destination may be amplified over another based on hidden model biases or commercial motives.
- **Pre-Experience Simulation:** Using text-to-image and text-to-video models (such as DALL-E, Sora), generative artificial intelligence can create realistic and convincing visualizations of a hotel room, a tourist activity, or a natural scene before booking. This simulation not only reduces uncertainty but also creates a pre-emotional attachment and significantly enhances the positive mental image of the destination.

3.3. Stage Three: Decision, Booking, and Post-Booking (Decision, Booking, & Post-Booking)

- **Generative Booking Assistant:** Chatbots evolve from merely answering frequently asked questions to managing a complete, interactive booking process. They can handle instant modifications, intelligently address emotional objections ("I am worried about safety"), and display exclusive offers generated in real time. This greatly reduces "purchase friction" and increases the rate of "conversion" completion.
- **Generative Post-Purchase Relationship:** After confirmation, the role of generative artificial intelligence shifts to a "digital travel companion." It can generate personalized follow-up plans, appointment reminders, packing lists, recommendations for activities near the accommodation, and even teach some basic local phrases. This continuous enhancement of interaction strengthens the relationship with the tourist and raises the level of expected satisfaction before even arriving at the destination.

4. Challenges and Ethical and Regulatory Implications

4.1. Cognitive and Academic Challenges

- **Information Reliability and AI Hallucinations:** The phenomenon of "hallucinations"—where the model produces information that appears convincing but is incorrect or fabricated—poses an existential risk to the credibility of tourism marketing based on generative artificial intelligence. Recommending closed theaters or non-existent restaurants can destroy consumer trust. This requires researchers and practitioners to develop strict standards for verifying the accuracy and reliability of generative content used in the tourism context.
- **Skill Erosion and Loss of Authenticity:** Excessive reliance on generative artificial intelligence for creating marketing content may lead to the "erosion" of creative and editorial skills among human marketers. Moreover, if all destinations rely on the same basic models, this may lead to the phenomenon of "marketing homogenization," where destinations lose their distinctive voice and authenticity in a sea of similar content. There is an urgent need to study the relationship between the intensity of generative content usage and the decline in "perceived authenticity" by tourists.

4.2. Ethical and Legal Challenges

- **Algorithmic Bias and Cultural Representation:** If the large datasets used to train generative

artificial intelligence models contain historical or cultural biases, the model will reproduce and reinforce these biases. For example, the cultural representation of certain local communities may be ignored or stereotypes may be reinforced. This leads not only to "marketing exclusion" but also raises deep ethical questions. Combating this requires the development of strong frameworks for algorithmic accountability and transparency in training processes.

- **Data Privacy and Intellectual Property:** The hyper-personalization offered by generative artificial intelligence requires the collection and analysis of vast amounts of personal and sensitive data from travelers. Strict adherence to the principles of "informed consent" and "privacy by design" must be ensured. On the other hand, the issue of intellectual property for content created by artificial intelligence remains a legal gray area. Who owns the rights to the text or image generated by artificial intelligence in response to a user's "prompt"? These issues require the development of new, clear regulatory and legal frameworks at both national and international levels.

5. Conclusion, Contribution, and Future Directions

5.1. Final Summary and Contributions

This paper confirms that generative artificial intelligence is not just a passing technological development, but a methodological paradigm shift that redraws the map of tourism marketing. It overturns the existing balance by enabling the creation of highly personalized and dynamic tourist experiences, placing concepts such as "destination image" and "experience value" under the microscope of critique and redefinition.

The main academic contributions of the paper can be summarized as follows:

- **Theoretical contribution:** Framing generative artificial intelligence and integrating it into established tourism theories (Experience Economy, Destination Image), providing a solid theoretical foundation for understanding its impact beyond being a technical tool.
- **Analytical-methodological contribution:** Providing a detailed, systematic analysis of how generative artificial intelligence affects each stage of the travel decision, offering a clear "roadmap" for its behavioral and operational impacts.
- **Ethical-proactive contribution:** Identifying and classifying the ethical and legal risks accompanying generative artificial intelligence in tourism, providing a framework for practitioners and policymakers to address these issues proactively.

5.2. Future Research Agenda

Based on the previous analysis, the need for a systematic research program emerges, with its main directions summarized as:

- **Behavioral and Experimental Studies:** Using advanced techniques such as eye-tracking and neuroscience measures like EEG to study the unconscious neural and behavioral responses of tourists when interacting with generative artificial intelligence content, measuring its impact on cognitive load, attention, and trust.
- **Qualitative Research on Perceived Value:** Conducting in-depth ethnographic case studies and long interviews with travelers to explore and understand how individuals perceive concepts such as "service quality," "credibility," and "authenticity" when the main actor in the interaction is a generative chatbot rather than a human being.
- **Business Models and Econometric Modeling:** Developing advanced econometric models capable

of isolating and measuring the "return on investment" (ROI) resulting from the use of generative artificial intelligence in destination marketing campaigns specifically. This includes identifying new qualitative and quantitative "key performance indicators" (KPIs), such as "conversation conversion rate," "personalization satisfaction index," and "impact of visual simulation on booking intention."

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