



A Research Report

The AI-thenticity Paradox: How Artificial Intelligence is Reshaping Destination Image and Tourist Desire

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1. Introduction

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into tourism marketing and information delivery is transforming how tourists perceive destinations, assess authenticity, and make travel decisions. Recent research demonstrates that AI-generated content—ranging from images and virtual tours to chatbot interactions and influencer posts—can powerfully influence tourists' cognitive and affective destination images (Xiao et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020), their perceptions of authenticity (Bui et al., 2024; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025), and ultimately their intention to visit or recommend a destination (Luo et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024; Tosyalı et al., 2023). The perceived authenticity of AI-generated content, especially when not explicitly labeled as AI-made, can foster trust and positively impact patronage intentions, though human-generated content still tends to be seen as more authentic overall (Bui et al., 2024; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2022). AI-driven interactive features in travel apps and chatbots enhance user experience, satisfaction, and travel

intentions by providing personalized, informative, and engaging content (Luo et al., 2024; Sultan et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024). However, challenges remain, such as the risk of reinforcing stereotypes, the impact of inaccurate AI-generated information, and the need to balance technological innovation with genuine, culturally rich experiences (Hamdy et al., 2023; Yamagishi et al., 2023; Aksionova et al., 2023). This review synthesizes the latest empirical and theoretical research to provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI-framed content is shaping the future of tourism marketing and tourist behavior.

2. Methods

This review employed a systematic literature review methodology, following a structured process to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing research on the influence of AI-framed content in tourism. The protocol was designed to be transparent and reproducible, aligning

with established guidelines for systematic reviews in social sciences (Page et al., 2021; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

2.1. Search Strategy

A comprehensive electronic search was conducted in August 2025 to capture relevant literature published between January 2019 and August 2025. This timeframe was selected to ensure the review captured the most recent and relevant studies on rapidly evolving AI technologies in tourism. The primary search was executed using the Scopus database, chosen for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals across social sciences, computer science, and business, which is essential for interdisciplinary research topics (Baas et al., 2020). To ensure comprehensive coverage and validate the search strategy, the resulting literature corpus was also analyzed using the AI-powered metasearch engine Consensus. This approach leverages the capability of AI-powered search tools to efficiently scan a broad corpus of interdisciplinary literature, which is crucial for capturing emerging trends in technology-driven fields like AI in tourism (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

The search strategy utilized a combination of keywords and Boolean operators related to four core conceptual domains:

1. AI-generated content: ("AI-generated" OR "artificial intelligence" OR "generative AI" OR "machine learning" OR "chatbot" OR "virtual influencer")
2. Tourism context: ("tourism" OR "travel" OR "destination" OR "hospitality")
3. Psychological constructs: ("destination image" OR "authenticity" OR "perceived authenticity" OR "AI-thenticity")

4. Behavioral outcome: ("travel intention" OR "visit intention" OR "decision-making" OR "behavioral intention")

These terms were searched within the article titles, abstracts, and keywords in Scopus. The final search query was structured as follows:

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(
  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "ai-generated" OR "artificial
  intelligence" OR "generative ai" OR "machine learning"
  OR chatbot OR "virtual influencer" OR "large language
  model" )
  AND
  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tourism OR travel OR destination
  OR hospitality )
)
AND
(
  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "destination image" OR
  authenticity OR "perceived authenticity" )
  OR
  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "travel intention" OR "visit
  intention" OR "decision-making" OR "behavioral
  intention" )
)
AND PUBYEAR > 2018 AND PUBYEAR < 2026
AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) )
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This structured approach within a premier database ensures a transparent and replicable search strategy, minimizing the potential for selection bias and providing a firm foundation for a rigorous systematic review.

2.2. Study Selection and Eligibility Criteria

The study selection process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The retrieved records were screened in three phases based on the following pre-defined criteria (See Figure 1):

- Eligibility Criteria: Included were empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods) and conceptual/theoretical papers published in peer-reviewed journals or conferences that explicitly investigated

AI-generated content in a tourism or destination marketing context.

- **Exclusion Criteria:** Duplicates, non-English publications, editorials, book reviews, and studies not focused on both AI and the key constructs (image, authenticity, intention) were excluded.

The process was as follows:

1. **Identification:** Initial searches yielded 1,036 records.
2. **Screening:** After removing duplicates, 615 records were screened by title and abstract.
3. **Eligibility:** The full text of 421 papers was assessed for eligibility.
4. **Inclusion:** A final set of 50 papers that most directly addressed the research objective and met the quality threshold were selected for in-depth synthesis.

Figure 1: Flow diagram of the search and selection process for included papers.

Nine unique search groups were executed, each targeting a specific aspect of the research question, ensuring a thorough and multi-faceted literature review.

2.3. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Key data were extracted from each included study into a standardized matrix. The extracted information included: author(s) and year, methodology, sample characteristics, key variables, main findings, and limitations. A thematic analysis approach was then employed to synthesize the findings and identify overarching themes, patterns, and gaps across the selected literature (Xiao & Watson, 2019) (See Table 4). The synthesis focused on aggregating evidence related to AI's impact on

destination image formation, authenticity perceptions, and travel intentions (See Table 1).

Table 1: Key Papers

Paper	Methodology	Main Focus	Key Results	Sample/Context
(Bui et al., 2024)	Experimental	AI vs. human-generated images	AI image authenticity boosts trust and patronage; non-labeled AI images perceived as more authentic	Online experiments with tourists
(Luo et al., 2024)	Quantitative (SEM)	AI travel app interactivity	AI interactivity enhances perceived image and travel choices	Chinese mobile travel users
(Sultan et al., 2021)	Survey (SEM)	AI chatbots and travel intention	Continued chatbot use predicts intention to visit; info quality and enjoyment are key	312 university students
(Lin et al., 2020)	Experimental (SEM)	Chatbot informativeness	Chatbot informativeness increases destination image and visit intention	295 participants
(Zhu et al., 2024)	Image analytics	GenAI and destination stereotypes	GenAI images reinforce stereotypes, limiting diversity in destination image	AI-generated imagery

3. Results

3.1. AI-Framed Content and Destination Image

AI-generated content, including images, virtual tours, and influencer posts, plays a pivotal role in shaping both the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image. Studies using machine learning and computer vision techniques on social media platforms like Instagram and TripAdvisor reveal that AI can identify and cluster destination images, uncovering themes such as wilderness, spirituality, and local culture (Xiao et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020; Asyraff et al., 2023; Dutta & Dixit, 2024; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020a; Zheng et al., 2022; Eman & Refaie, 2023; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020b). AI-generated images can enhance the perceived attractiveness and uniqueness of destinations, but may also risk homogenizing representations and reinforcing stereotypes if not carefully managed (Bui et al., 2024; Tosyalı et al., 2023; Hamdy et al., 2023; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020a).

3.2. Authenticity Perceptions in AI-Generated Content

Perceived authenticity is a critical mediator between AI content and tourist behavior. Research introduces the concept of "AI-authenticity," highlighting that AI-generated content can be perceived as authentic if it faithfully represents the destination and aligns with tourists' expectations (Bui et al., 2024; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Zain et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2023). However, human-generated content still generally scores higher on authenticity, especially when AI content is explicitly labeled as such (Bui et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2022). Augmented reality (AR) and virtual influencers can enhance experiential authenticity and emotional engagement, but the balance between technological novelty and genuine cultural representation remains delicate (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Zain et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2023).

3.3. Influence on Travel Intention and Decision-Making

AI-driven features in travel apps, chatbots, and virtual tours significantly impact tourists' travel intentions and decision-making processes. Interactive, personalized, and emotionally engaging AI content increases user satisfaction, trust, and willingness to visit or recommend destinations (Luo et al., 2024; Sultan et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2024; Hua et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Arefieva et al., 2021; Kim, 2024; Xu et al., 2024). The informativeness, empathy, and interactivity of AI chatbots are particularly influential in driving visit intention (Sultan et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024). However, the presence of inaccurate or misleading AI-generated information can erode trust and reduce travel intention (Yamagishi et al., 2023; Aksionova et al., 2023).

3.4. Challenges, Limitations, and Ethical Considerations

While AI offers substantial benefits for destination marketing and tourist engagement, several challenges persist. These include the risk of reinforcing stereotypes through homogenized AI-generated images (Hamdy et al., 2023), the impact of AI hallucinations and misinformation on decision-making (Yamagishi et al., 2023; Aksionova et al., 2023), and the need to address ethical concerns around transparency, data privacy, and cultural sensitivity (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Tosyalı et al., 2023; Hamdy et al., 2023; Yamagishi et al., 2023; Aksionova et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2020). The literature also highlights the importance of tailoring AI content to diverse personality types and cultural backgrounds to maximize acceptance and positive outcomes (Baber & Baber, 2022; Pan et al., 2021; Arefieva et al., 2021). The leading academic journals contributing to this field of research are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Top Contributing Journals in AI and Tourism Research (2019–2025)

Rank	Journal Title	Number of Articles Cited (in this review)	Example Articles Cited (from reference list)
1	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	10	(Tosyalı et al., 2023; Christensen et al., 2024)
2	<i>Tourism Management</i>	6	(Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020a, 2020b; Pan et al., 2021; Arefieva et al., 2021)
3	<i>Journal of Travel Research</i>	4	(Kim & Kim, 2020; He et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2023)
4	<i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i>	3	(Bui et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2020; Li et al., 2025)
5	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights</i>	3	(Baber & Baber, 2022; Asyraf et al., 2023; Yamagishi et al., 2023)

4. Discussion

The reviewed literature provides robust evidence that AI-framed content is reshaping the tourism landscape by influencing how destinations are perceived, how authenticity is constructed, and how travel intentions are formed (Bui et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2024; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2022; Tosyalı et al., 2023; Sultan et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024). High-quality, personalized, and emotionally engaging AI content can enhance

destination image and foster trust, leading to increased travel intention and positive word-of-mouth (Bui et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2024; Sultan et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of AI-generated content is contingent on its perceived authenticity, informativeness, and alignment with tourists' expectations (Bui et al., 2024; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2022; Zain et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2023).

Despite these advances, the literature also cautions against over-reliance on AI, as it may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, diminish cultural diversity, or erode trust if content is inaccurate or perceived as inauthentic (Hamdy et al., 2023; Yamagishi et al., 2023; Aksionova et al., 2023). Ethical considerations, such as transparency in labeling AI-generated content and safeguarding user data, are increasingly important as AI becomes more embedded in tourism marketing (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Tosyalı et al., 2023; Hamdy et al., 2023; Yamagishi et al., 2023; Aksionova et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2020) (See Table 3).

Overall, the research underscores the need for a balanced approach that leverages AI's strengths in personalization and engagement while maintaining a commitment to authenticity, diversity, and ethical standards.

Table 3: Claims and Evidence

Claim	Evidence Strength	Reasoning	Papers
AI-generated content can significantly enhance destination image and travel intention	Evidence strength: Strong (9/10)	Multiple experimental and survey studies show positive effects on image and intention, especially with high-quality, personalized content	(Bui et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2024; Sultan et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024)

Perceived authenticity of AI content mediates trust and patronage intentions	Evidence strength: Strong (8/10)	Authenticity, especially when AI content is not labeled, increases trust and intention to visit	(Bui et al., 2024; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2022; Zain et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2023)
AI-generated images risk reinforcing stereotypes and homogenizing destination representations	Evidence strength: Moderate (7/10)	Image analytics reveal GenAI often produces stereotypical, less diverse images	(Hamdy et al., 2023; Tosyalı et al., 2023; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020b)
Inaccurate or misleading AI content can reduce trust and travel intention	Evidence strength: Moderate (7/10)	Experiments show that incorrect AI info lowers perceived trustworthiness and intention to visit	(Yamagishi et al., 2023; Aksionova et al., 2023)
Human-generated content is still perceived as more authentic than AI-generated content	Evidence strength: Moderate (6/10)	Comparative studies consistently find higher authenticity ratings for human content	(Bui et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2022; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025)
Personal innovativeness and personality traits affect acceptance of AI in tourism	Evidence strength: Moderate (5/10)	Survey and SEM studies show personality moderates AI adoption and perceived utility	(Baber & Baber, 2022; Pan et al., 2021; Arefieva et al., 2021)

5. Conclusion

AI-framed content is a powerful force in shaping destination image, authenticity perceptions, and travel intention among tourists. While AI offers significant opportunities for personalized, engaging, and efficient tourism marketing, its effectiveness depends on content quality, perceived authenticity, and ethical implementation. Ongoing research and practice must address

challenges related to stereotype reinforcement, misinformation, and cultural sensitivity to fully realize AI's potential in tourism.

5.1. Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of research, gaps remain in understanding the long-term effects of AI-framed content, cross-cultural differences in authenticity perceptions, and the impact of AI on less-promoted or emerging destinations. There is also a need for more research on the ethical implications of AI in tourism and the development of best practices for transparent and responsible AI content creation.

Table 4: Research Gaps Matrix

Topic/Attribute	Experimental Studies	Survey/SEM	Qualitative	Cross-Cultural	Ethical/Transparenc
Destination Image	8	12	3	2	1
Authenticity Perceptions	5	7	2	1	2
Travel Intention	6	10	2	1	1
Stereotype Reinforcement	2	1	1	GAP	1
Chatbot/AI Interaction	4	6	1	1	1

5.2. Open Research Questions

Future research should explore the long-term behavioral impacts of AI-framed content, the role of cultural and personality differences in authenticity perceptions, and the development of ethical guidelines for AI use in tourism marketing (See Table 5).

Table 5: Open research questions for future investigation in AI-framed tourism content.

Question	Why
How do long-term exposures to AI-generated tourism content affect tourists' destination loyalty and repeat visitation?	Understanding sustained behavioral impacts is crucial for destination management and for evaluating the effectiveness of AI-driven marketing strategies over time.
What are the cross-cultural differences in authenticity perceptions of AI-generated versus human-generated tourism content?	Cultural context may significantly influence how authenticity is perceived, affecting the global applicability of AI marketing strategies.

How can ethical guidelines and transparency standards be developed for AI-generated content in tourism to prevent misinformation and stereotype reinforcement?	Addressing ethical concerns is essential for building trust, ensuring responsible AI use, and protecting destination diversity and cultural integrity.
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In summary, while AI-framed content is revolutionizing tourism marketing and tourist decision-making, ongoing research and ethical vigilance are needed to maximize its benefits and minimize its risks.

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