

Research Article

Destination Hyperreality through Generative Artificial Intelligence: Shaping Tourist Expectations, Satisfaction, and Loyalty

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Abstract: The advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has completely changed how travelers obtain information about destinations and create pre-trip impressions. Destination simulations produced by GenAI may produce hyperrealistic depictions of destinations that deviate from travelers' true experiences, perhaps impacting expectations and subsequent assessments. The purpose of this study is to investigate how hyperreal destination pictures are shaped using GenAI-based destination simulations and how this affects visitor expectation formation, the expectation–reality gap, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty. Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used as a quantitative method. 420 respondents who have used GenAI to research tourist destinations participated in the study. The links between Generative AI Destination Simulation, Hyperreal Destination Image, Tourist Expectation Formation, Expectation–Reality Gap, Destination Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty were investigated by the suggested model. The results show that Hyperreal Destination Image is positively impacted by Generative AI Destination Simulation, which in turn improves the construction of visitor expectations. The Expectation–Reality Gap is widened by higher expectations, which has a detrimental impact on destination satisfaction and loyalty. Destination satisfaction has a favorable impact on Destination loyalty and the Expectation–Reality Gap are mediated by loyalty. These results imply that GenAI serves as a method for creating symbolic destination realities that influence travelers' assessments of their genuine experiences in addition to being an information medium.

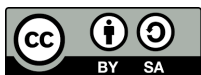
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1. INTRODUCTION

The quick advancement of digital technology has completely changed how travelers look for information, create preferences, and decide where to go. In the last twenty years, the tourism industry has changed from being dominated by travel agents, traditional media, and face-to-face contact to becoming a more digital environment with online platforms, social media, and data-driven technologies. According to Buhalis & Law (2008), information and communication technologies are becoming a crucial component of travel experiences and decision-making procedures due to digitization. This change has affected not just how travelers obtain information about locations but also how they envision, assess, and understand them before to traveling. Because travelers are initially exposed to images, videos, stories, suggestions, and other digital representations that mold their impressions and expectations of a site, the tourist experience may start long before they ever arrive.

Baudrillard's (1994) concept of hyperreality, which characterizes a situation in which simulations and representations no longer only reflect reality but may create alternative realities deemed more appealing or significant than the actual conditions they represent, can help explain this phenomenon. This idea is especially pertinent to travel since places are often consumed through symbolic and visual representations prior to being physically seen. By highlighting desired features and downplaying unfavorable ones, social media, influencers,

promotional materials, and user-generated content can depict places in highly esthetic, dramatic, and appealing ways (Urry & Larsen, 2011; Featherstone, 2007). As a result, rather than focusing only on the destination's objective features, travelers may assess their actual experiences using pre-constructed representations of the location. An expectation-reality gap may occur when the expected image and the actual experience diverge, which could have an impact on visitors' satisfaction and future behavioral intentions. This association is in line with Chen & Tsai's (2007) findings that visitors' assessments, levels of satisfaction, and behavioral intentions are influenced by the destination's image.

The creation of destination representations undergoes a dramatic change with the advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). Algorithmic curation, in which algorithms chose, ranked, personalized, and disseminated content mostly created by human users, was a defining feature of earlier digital environments. On the other hand, GenAI is capable of producing text, photos, videos, and narratives on its own using human input and massive databases. The potential of GenAI to enhance information search, personalization, service delivery, and travel decision-making has been the main focus of research (Dwivedi et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2023). But its creative power also makes it possible to create destination representations that could not accurately reflect real-world circumstances. For example, AI-generated content can depict more frictionless travel experiences, cleaner beaches, more beautiful scenery, or perfect weather than visitors would actually experience. This suggests a conceptual change from algorithmic curation to generative simulation, where AI actively creates new symbolic renditions of destinations rather than just distributing preexisting representations. Therefore, GenAI can be seen as an emerging generator of destination realities that might influence travelers' expectations and impressions before to trip, in addition to being an information-support technology.

This change leaves a significant theoretical and empirical void in the study of tourism. The majority of research on GenAI that is now available focuses on its instrumental roles, such as information provision, personalization, efficiency, and decision support, while paying very little attention to its role in creating destination realities. In the meanwhile, research on hyperreality in tourism has mostly focused on user-generated material, social media, advertising, and influencers, all of which include human-produced representations (Urry & Larsen, 2011; Featherstone, 2007). Therefore, little research has looked at what occurs when generative AI systems replace human content creators and algorithmic curators in the generation of destination representations. This disparity is especially significant in developing travel destinations like Lampung, Indonesia, where digital media is widely used to promote attractions like Pahawang Island, Teluk Kiluan, Gigi Hiu Beach, Way Kambas National Park, and coffee tourism sites in West Lampung. It is important to comprehend how these simulations may create idealized destination pictures and consequently affect expectations and assessments of real tourism experiences when travelers come across more and more AI-generated representations of these locations prior to travel.

In order to close this gap, this study presents Hyperreal Destination Image, a conceptualization of destination perception created by generative representations that display a location as more appealing, idealized, and convincing than its real circumstances. By highlighting the role of AI-generated simulations in creating an alternative symbolic reality, the concept expands on the traditional understanding of destination image, which refers to visitors' perceptions of destination attributes and characteristics (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004). This study suggests that Generative AI Destination Simulation creates Hyperreal Destination Image, which in turn effects Tourist Expectation Formation, based on Baudrillard's (1994) hyperreality perspective. In line with the known connection between destination image, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, higher expectations may widen the Expectation-Reality Gap when visitors arrive at the actual location, potentially impacting Destination Satisfaction and ultimately Destination Loyalty (Chen & Tsai, 2007). This study aims to expand the tourism literature by combining GenAI, destination image, and hyperreality perspectives. It does this by presenting GenAI not only as a technological tool for information provision but also as an emerging mechanism through which tourists construct, imagine, and consume destination realities before they actually visit the location.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Traveler behavior and destination image construction have been profoundly altered by the advancement of digital technology. A location's views, beliefs, impressions, and assessments are referred to as its destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004). Although travel agencies and traditional media have historically affected perceptions of destinations, social media, content-sharing websites, and digital recommendation systems

are becoming more and more significant (Buhalis & Law, 2008). With the advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), which can automatically create texts, photos, videos, and customized travel tales, this transition has grown more complicated. GenAI can produce new representations that might not exactly match empirical reality, in contrast to earlier digital technologies that mainly gathered and disseminated already-existing data (Dwivedi et al., 2024). While recent research emphasizes GenAI as a tool for effective, pertinent, and customized travel planning (Kim et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2023), its function in creating destination realities is still largely unexplored.

Baudrillard's (1994) thesis of hyperreality, which contends that simulations and representations can produce realities seen as more significant or genuine than actual circumstances, can be used to further investigate this issue. This viewpoint is extremely pertinent to digital tourism, since travelers increasingly come across narrative and visual depictions of locations before actually visiting them. According to Urry & Larsen (2011), the tourist gaze, which interprets locations based on previously ingested representations, has an impact on visitor experiences. This procedure becomes more complicated in the GenAI era since destination representations can now be created independently by artificial intelligence rather than just by humans. As a result, rather than just curating pre-existing data, GenAI may actively create simulations that influence travelers' expectations, perceptions, and interpretations of destinations prior to their actual visit.

The advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) signifies a change in destination communication from traditional digital representation and promotion to generative simulation. GenAI may actively build new textual, visual, and narrative representations of locations, as contrast to algorithmic curation, which uses algorithms to choose and disseminate human-produced material. These depictions could make places seem more appealing, romanticized, or emotionally compelling than they actually are. As a result, GenAI has the potential to create symbolic destination realities that influence travelers' pre-visit perceptions of locations. The first hypothesis is put out in light of this argument: **H1: Generative AI Destination Simulation has a positive effect on Hyperreal Destination Image.**

A destination perception created by representations that may be more idealized and convincing than actual reality is known as a hyperreal destination image. According to earlier studies (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004), travelers' perceptions, beliefs, and assessments of destination features constitute destination image. Travelers may form impressions of a place that surpass its true qualities if they are frequently exposed to extremely appealing AI-generated representations. Stronger exposure to generative simulations is therefore anticipated to result in a destination image that is more realistic. **H2: Hyperreal Destination Image has a positive effect on Tourist Expectation Formation.**

A destination's image is a crucial foundation for creating expectations for upcoming travel experiences. Chen & Tsai (2007) show that tourists' assessments and subsequent behavioral intentions are influenced by the destination's image. Travelers may expect better scenery, amenities, services, and overall experiences than what is really offered when the location is highly romanticized. Therefore, it is anticipated that a more realistic perception of the destination will increase travelers' expectations prior to their visit. **H3: Tourist Expectation Formation has a positive effect on Expectation-Reality Gap.**

Expectation Confirmation Theory states that people assess their consuming experiences by contrasting past expectations with actual performance (Oliver, 1980). Expectations created by highly idealized depictions of destinations may serve as benchmarks for evaluating real experiences in the tourist industry. The gap between what visitors expect and what they actually experience is likely to widen when these expectations are too high. Consequently, it is anticipated that a larger Expectation-Reality Gap will result from higher visitor expectations. **H4: Expectation-Reality Gap has a negative effect on Destination Satisfaction.**

The degree to which real encounters fulfill or surpass earlier expectations has a significant impact on tourist satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). Travelers may find their vacation less fulfilling if the real location is much different from what they had anticipated. Additionally, Chen & Tsai (2007) stress the significance of destination evaluation in shaping visitor happiness and behavioral reactions. Consequently, it is anticipated that a greater Expectation-Reality Gap may lower destination satisfaction. **H5: Destination Satisfaction has a positive effect on Destination Loyalty.**

Travelers' future behavioral intentions are significantly influenced by their level of satisfaction. Satisfied travelers are more likely to return and refer others to the location (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Good encounters can reinforce positive perceptions of the place and promote ongoing connections with it. Therefore, it is anticipated that increased destination satisfaction

will boost destination loyalty. **H6:** Expectation-Reality Gap has a negative effect on Destination Loyalty.

Travelers' favorable assessment of a location may be undermined by a significant gap between their expectations and actual experiences. Travelers may be less inclined to return or promote a location if they believe it does not provide the experience that was promised or suggested by earlier representations. This is especially important when highly idealized digital or AI-generated representations shape expectations. Consequently, it is anticipated that a larger Expectation-Reality Gap may decrease Destination Loyalty. **H7:** Destination Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Expectation-Reality Gap and Destination Loyalty.

Overall, the suggested theories outline a step-by-step process by which Generative AI Destination Simulation creates a Hyperreal Destination Image, which in turn affects Tourist Expectation Formation, hence influencing tourists' pre-visit impressions. In line with destination image and expectation-confirmation viewpoints, these expectations are then contrasted with actual destination experiences, creating an Expectation-Reality Gap that may have an impact on destination satisfaction and, eventually, destination loyalty (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Oliver, 1980). However, these consequences can differ depending on tourists' AI literacy, since people's comprehension of AI's potential biases, limitations, and capabilities might affect how AI-generated information is perceived and assessed (Long & Magerko, 2020; Ng et al., 2021).

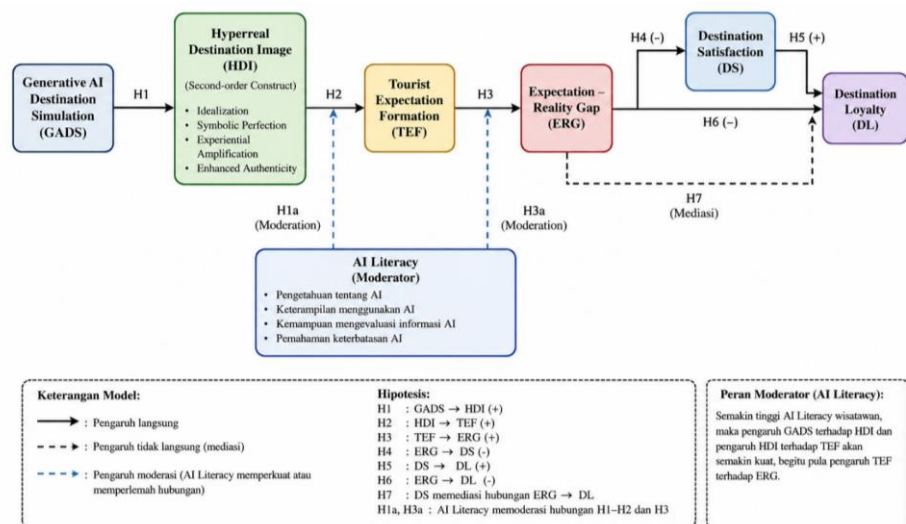


Figure 1. Research Model.

3. METHOD

The causal links between Generative AI Destination Simulation, Hyperreal Destination Image, Tourist Expectation Formation, Expectation-Reality Gap, Destination Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty are investigated in this work using a quantitative explanatory research design. Major tourist locations in Lampung, Indonesia, such as Pulau Pahawang, Teluk Kiluan, Pantai Gigi Hiu, Way Kambas National Park, and coffee tourism destinations in West Lampung, are the focus of this study. These locations were chosen due to their high online presence and active promotion via social media and material produced by artificial intelligence. The population is made up of domestic travelers who have researched destinations using ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, or Copilot, among other generative AI platforms. Purposive sampling is used because the population size is uncertain; at least 400 respondents are needed to guaranty sufficient statistical power for the very sophisticated structural model (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020; Hair et al., 2022).

A structured questionnaire is used in both online and offline surveys to gather data. While the Hyperreal Destination Image construct is particularly built based on Baudrillard's (1994) hyperreality theory, Urry and Larsen's (2011) tourist gaze perspective, and destination image literature, measurement items are borrowed from prior studies. The instrument is subjected to a pilot research with about 50 respondents to evaluate item clarity and preliminary reliability, as well as expert evaluation to confirm content validity. A seven-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree, is used to measure each construct (Hair et al., 2022). Idealization, Symbolic Perfection, Experiential Amplifica-

tion, and Enhanced Authenticity make up Hyperreal Destination Image, which is operationalized as a second-order construct. The indicators for the other constructs are taken from well-known travel and consumer behavior research.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS is used to examine data. This method works well for developing theories, validating new constructs, and creating rather sophisticated models with latent variables (Hair et al., 2022). The measurement model is evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Fornell-Larcker criteria, and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Next, path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and bootstrapping are used to assess the structural model. Additionally, the relationship between Expectation-Reality Gap and Destination Loyalty is examined in relation to Destination Satisfaction as a mediating variable. Using this method, the study aims to contribute to the evolution of the Hyperreal Destination Image idea in the era of generative simulation while offering empirical evidence on how Generative AI influences traveler behavior and destination impressions.

Table 1. Operational Definition.

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Code	Indicator	Ref
Generative AI Destination Simulation (GADS)	Tourists' perceptions of the ability of Generative AI to provide destination information, visualizations, recommendations, and travel simulations that support information search and trip planning.	Information Generation	GADS1	AI helps me obtain destination information quickly.	Dwivedi et al. (2024); Kim et al. (2023)
			GADS2	AI provides relevant destination recommendations.	Dwivedi et al. (2024)
			GADS3	AI generates engaging descriptions of destinations.	Kim et al. (2023)
			GADS4	AI helps me imagine the travel experience.	Kim et al. (2023)
		Personalization	GADS5	AI tailors its recommendations to my preferences.	Dwivedi et al. (2024)
			GADS6	AI understands my travel needs.	Dwivedi et al. (2024)
			GADS7	AI provides suggestions	Kim et al. (2023)

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Code	Indicator	Ref
				that feel personalized to me.	
			GADS8	AI helps me plan my travel itinerary.	Kim et al. (2023)
Hyperreal Destination Image (HDI)	Tourists' perceptions of a destination formed through generative simulations that portray the destination as more idealized, attractive, persuasive, and convincing than its actual condition.	Idealization	HDI1	AI makes the destination appear more beautiful than it actually is.	Developed from Baudrillard (1994); Urry & Larsen (2011)
			HDI2	AI portrays the destination as almost perfect.	Baudrillard (1994)
			HDI3	AI emphasizes the positive aspects of the destination.	Baudrillard (1994)
			HDI4	AI makes the destination appear free from shortcomings.	Urry & Larsen (2011)
		Symbolic Perfection	HDI5	The destination appears highly exclusive.	Baudrillard (1994)
			HDI6	The destination appears to have extraordinary quality.	Baudrillard (1994)
			HDI7	The destination appears superior to other destinations.	Beerli & Martín (2004); developed by the researcher

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Code	Indicator	Ref
Experiential Amplification			HDI8	AI creates an idealized image of the destination.	Baudrillard (1994)
			HDI9	AI makes the travel experience appear highly enjoyable.	Urry & Larsen (2011)
			HDI10	AI enhances the emotional appeal of the destination.	Urry & Larsen (2011)
			HDI11	AI makes the travel experience appear more memorable.	Urry & Larsen (2011)
			HDI12	AI strengthens my expectations of the travel experience.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
Enhanced Authenticity			HDI13	AI-generated information feels highly convincing.	Wang (1999); Dwivedi et al. (2024)
			HDI14	AI-generated representations appear highly realistic.	Baudrillard (1994)
			HDI15	I trust the destination image generated by AI.	Dwivedi et al. (2024)
			HDI16	AI simulation makes me feel as if I have already visited the destination.	Urry & Larsen (2011)

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Code	Indicator	Ref
Tourist Expectation Formation (TEF)	The level of tourists' expectations regarding the quality of the experience they will receive before visiting a destination.	Cognitive Expectation	TEF1	I expect the destination to provide high-quality experiences.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
			TEF2	I expect the destination to have good facilities.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
			TEF3	I expect the actual experience to match the information I received.	Oliver (1980)
			TEF4	I have positive expectations about the destination.	Oliver (1980)
		Affective Expectation	TEF5	I anticipate having an enjoyable experience.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
			TEF6	I expect to have a memorable experience.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
Expectation-Reality Gap (ERG)	The extent of the discrepancy between tourists' pre-visit expectations and their actual experiences after visiting the destination.	Performance Gap	ERG1	My actual experience differed from what I expected.	Oliver (1980)
			ERG2	The destination did not fully match the image I had formed beforehand.	Oliver (1980)
			ERG3	There was a difference be-	Oliver (1980)

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Code	Indicator	Ref
Destination Satisfaction (DS)	Tourists' overall evaluation of their experience during their visit to the destination.	Overall Satisfaction	ERG4	tween my expectations and reality. My actual experience was lower than I had expected.	Oliver (1980)
			DS1	I am satisfied with my travel experience.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
			DS2	This visit met my expectations.	Oliver (1980)
			DS3	I feel that my decision to visit this destination was the right one.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
			DS4	Overall, I am satisfied with this destination.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
Destination Loyalty (DL)	Tourists' commitment to revisit the destination and recommend it to others.	Revisit Intention	DL1	I intend to revisit this destination.	Chen & Tsai (2007)
		Recommendation Intention	DL2	I will choose this destination in the future.	Yoon & Uysal (2005)
			DL3	I will recommend this destination to others.	Yoon & Uysal (2005)
			DL4	I will provide positive reviews about this destination.	Yoon & Uysal (2005)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

There is 420 domestic travelers who had previously used Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) to gather destination information were included in the study. This sample was larger than the required minimum of 400 responders. Because the study focuses on how AI-generated trip simulations affect travelers' pre-visit destination perceptions, choosing GenAI users was crucial. Users of ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Copilot, and related GenAI apps were among the target demographics.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics.

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	191	45.5
	Female	229	54.5
Age	18-24 years	133	31.7
	25-34 years	151	36
	35-44 years	82	19.5
	>45 years	54	12.9
Education	Senior High School/Equivalent	116	27.6
	Diploma	34	8.1
	Bachelor's Degree	221	52.6
	Master's/Doctoral Degree	49	11.7
GenAI Usage Frequency	1-2 times/month	71	16.9
	3-5 times/month	113	26.9
	6-10 times/month	128	30.5
	>10 times/month	108	25.7
Used GenAI for Travel Purposes	Yes	420	100
Visited a Destination in Lampung	Yes	420	100

With the greatest age groups being 25-34 years old (36.0%) and 18-24 years old (31.7%), the respondent profile is comparatively in line with the phenomenon being studied. This means that 67.7% of respondents are in the 18-34 age range. Although formal schooling does not always imply AI literacy, the majority of respondents (52.6%) had a bachelor's degree, and 11.7% have postgraduate degrees, showing sufficient exposure to digital information. According to usage intensity, 25.7% of respondents use GenAI more than ten times a month, and 56.2% of respondents use it at least six times, indicating that GenAI has become a regular element of information-seeking behavior. This widespread application in tourism supports the idea that GenAI is a type of generative simulation since it goes beyond simply getting destination information to include making recommendations, planning itineraries, summarizing experiences, and envisioning destinations before trip. All things considered, the respondent profile offers a pertinent foundation for investigating whether engagement with AI-generated simulations influences the creation of hyperreal destination visions.

Structural Model Evaluation

The analysis on the structural model proceeded once the measurement model was judged sufficient. The model's capacity to explain each endogenous construct varied, according on the simulation findings.

Table 3. R² and Effect Size.

Endogenous Construct	R ²	Main f ²	Interpretation
HDI	0.452	GADS → HDI = 0.825	Moderate; large effect
TEF	0.374	HDI → TEF = 0.597	Moderate; large effect
ERG	0.363	TEF → ERG = 0.570	Moderate; large effect
DS	0.236	ERG → DS = 0.309	Weak-moderate; medium effect
DL	0.485	DS → DL = 0.480	Moderate; large effect

The R2 results show that GADS accounts for 45.2% of the variance in Hyperreal Destination Image (HDI), indicating that generative simulation perceptions have a significant role in the creation of hyperreal destination images. While TEF accounts for 36.3% of the Expectation-Reality Gap (ERG), HDI accounts for 37.4% of the variance in Travel Expectation Formation (TEF). The final model explains 48.5% of Destination Loyalty (DL) at the post-visit stage, whereas ERG explains 23.6% of Destination Satisfaction (DS). This suggests that loyalty is impacted by both expectation-reality discrepancies and how these discrepancies are translated into tourists' satisfaction assessments.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Result.

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	GADS $\rightarrow$ HDI	0.672	18.57	<0.001	Supported
H2	HDI $\rightarrow$ TEF	0.612	15.81	<0.001	Supported
H3	TEF $\rightarrow$ ERG	0.602	15.42	<0.001	Supported
H4	ERG $\rightarrow$ DS	-0.485	11.35	<0.001	Supported
H5	DS $\rightarrow$ DL	0.569	14.15	<0.001	Supported
H6	ERG $\rightarrow$ DL	-0.212	5.27	<0.001	Supported
H7	ERG $\rightarrow$ DS $\rightarrow$ DL	-0.276	6.03	<0.001	Supported

The suggested theoretical linkages are strongly and consistently supported by the structural data. Hyperreal Destination Image (HDI) is favorably and significantly influenced by Generative AI Destination Simulation (GADS) ($\beta = 0.672$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that better AI-generated representations, recommendations, visualizations, and narratives contribute to greater hyperreal destination impressions. Additionally, Tourist Expectation Formation (TEF) is significantly impacted by HDI ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that idealized and persuasive AI representations become mental standards for tourists' expected experiences. These results provide credence to the transition from algorithmic curation to generative simulation, when AI actively contributes to the creation of destinations' symbolic realities.

Additionally, the Expectation-Reality Gap (ERG) is positively impacted by TEF ($\beta = 0.602$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that greater expectations can widen the gap between expected and real experiences. This research emphasizes a crucial effect of generative AI: while it could improve pre-trip information and visualization, it might also raise expectations that travel destinations would find difficult to meet. ERG consistently has a negative impact on Destination Satisfaction (DS) ($\beta = -0.485$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that lower tourist satisfaction is linked to larger differences between expectations and actual experiences.

The last interactions demonstrate how crucial contentment is in determining loyalty. Destination Loyalty (DL) is negatively impacted by ERG ($\beta = -0.212$, $p < 0.001$), while DS has a greater beneficial impact on DL ($\beta = 0.569$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that visitors' general contentment with the real experience continues to be a crucial factor in determining loyalty, rather than the fact that their expectations are not entirely fulfilled. Therefore, contentment serves as a crucial evaluative process that translates expectations and reality differences into decisions about tourists' loyalty.

The Role of Mediation in Destination Satisfaction

Table 5. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effect.

Effect	β	t-statistic	p-value
ERG $\rightarrow$ DL (direct effect)	-0,212	5,27	<0,001
ERG $\rightarrow$ DS $\rightarrow$ DL (indirect effect)	-0,276	6,03	<0,001
ERG $\rightarrow$ DL (total effect)	-0,488	10,17	<0,001
VAF	56,6%	—	—

The mediation results demonstrate that the connection between Expectation-Reality Gap (ERG) and Destination Loyalty (DL) is significantly mediated by destination satisfaction. With a VAF of 56.6%, the direct effect is still significant ($\beta = -0.212$), suggesting some mediation, but the indirect effect through satisfaction is substantial ($\beta = -0.276$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that the primary effect of hyperreality is not just high expectations but also the application of those expectations as benchmarks for assessing real experiences; when reality fails to live up to expectations, tourists' loyalty and propensity to return or recommend the location are weakened.

Discussion

The results show that Hyperreal Destination Image (HDI) is positively impacted by Generative AI Destination Simulation (GADS), suggesting that GenAI has developed from an information-search tool to an active agent in creating symbolic destination representations. Destinations may appear more idealized and appealing than they actually are due to persuasive AI-generated tales, recommendations, and visualizations. This result is in line with Zhu et al. (2025), who discovered that destination stereotypes may be reinforced by GenAI-generated visuals that are homogenized. Additionally, HDI has a favorable impact on Tourist Expectation Formation (TEF), indicating that tourists use idealized AI representations as anticipatory references to create standards for their expected experiences. This validates the findings of Chen et al. (2025), who discovered that destination visuals produced by GenAI can inspire travelers more than actual photographs.

A potential paradox of generative AI is shown by the positive correlation between TEF and Expectation-Reality Gap (ERG): increased informational and visual persuasiveness may create expectations that are harder for real destinations to meet. This result is in line with Wang et al. (2026), who found that pre-trip expectations might be raised by AI-generated review summaries, widening the gap between expectations and experiences and lowering visitor happiness. As a result, the detrimental impact of ERG on destination satisfaction (DS) suggests that travelers assess real experiences based on both their conformity to preconceived notions and the objective quality of the destination. Even when a destination's objective quality doesn't change, it may be seen as less pleasant when generative representations are too idealized.

Lastly, satisfaction is a crucial mechanism connecting pre-trip expectations to post-trip behavioral results, as demonstrated by the fact that DS favorably influences Destination Loyalty (DL) whereas ERG negatively affects loyalty. The effect of ERG on loyalty operates both directly and indirectly decreased satisfaction, according to the partial mediation of DS. Overall, the results demonstrate a generative hyperrealization mechanism whereby GenAI creates hyperreal destination images, which raise visitor expectations, widen the expectation-reality gap, lower satisfaction, and ultimately affect loyalty. By emphasizing how generative systems can reshape the reference standards through which tourists interpret destination reality, this expands on previous research on GenAI tourism beyond adoption, usefulness, and inspiration. It also highlights the significance of AI authenticity, trust, and representational accuracy in tourists' responses to generative content (Bui et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that in order to minimize homogenized AI-generated content, destination managers should refocus their use of GenAI from maximizing visual appeal to managing expectation accuracy by striking a balance between appealing representations and the real attributes of destinations, backed by human oversight. Since properly labeling AI-generated graphics might increase authenticity and visitor trust, destination management and digital platforms should additionally guaranty AI-content transparency. Because biased AI-generated expectations may lower satisfaction, marketing effectiveness should be assessed not only by engagement or visit intention but also by expectation accuracy, destination satisfaction, and post-visit loyalty. In order to ensure that the destination reality can match the more compelling expectations established by GenAI, destinations must ultimately improve actual service quality, amenities, cleanliness, accessibility, cultural authenticity, and overall visitor experience.

Future studies should look at AI literacy as a moderator to see if visitors who are more aware of the limitations of GenAI are better able to differentiate between simulations and reality, and whether AI literacy reduces the correlation between GADS, HDI, and TEF. In order to better analyze changes in expectations and expectation-reality gaps, longitudinal and experimental designs are also advised to measure visitors prior to exposure to GenAI content, after viewing simulations, and after visiting places. Future research should examine AI disclosure and transparency as potential moderators of hyperrealization, credibility, and information processing while comparing AI-generated and human-generated content across various modalities, such as text, images, videos, and chatbots. Lastly, as sensitivity to authenticity may differ depending on context and GenAI may result in homogenized or stereotypical destination representations, research should cover a variety of destination categories, including natural, cultural, heritage, urban, and mass-tourism destinations.

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