

Exploring the Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Designing and Optimizing Personalization Strategies to Enhance Customer Experience in the Tourism Industry

Ischak Suryo Nugroho^{1*}, Dwi Priyanto², Yulian Purnama³

¹²³ Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in designing and optimizing personalization strategies to enhance customer experience in the tourism industry. In a sector highly dependent on customer satisfaction and loyalty, AI technology offers innovative solutions that can deliver more relevant and tailored experiences. Through a qualitative literature review and descriptive analysis, this research examines the application of AI on digital platforms such as chatbots, data-driven recommendations, and customer behavior analysis in crafting personalized experiences. Case studies from leading companies such as Booking.com, Expedia, and Airbnb demonstrate how AI can improve operational efficiency and provide relevant recommendations to boost customer satisfaction. The study also addresses challenges in implementing AI, such as balancing automation with human interaction and issues related to personal data protection. This research provides insights into the importance of AI adoption in personalization strategies within the tourism industry and its implications for businesses and customers.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) dalam merancang dan mengoptimalkan strategi personalisasi untuk meningkatkan pengalaman pelanggan di industri pariwisata. Dalam sektor yang sangat bergantung pada kepuasan dan loyalitas pelanggan, teknologi AI menawarkan solusi inovatif yang dapat memberikan pengalaman yang lebih relevan dan disesuaikan. Melalui tinjauan pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis deskriptif, penelitian ini mengkaji penerapan AI pada platform digital seperti chatbots, rekomendasi berbasis data, serta analisis perilaku pelanggan dalam merancang pengalaman yang lebih personal. Beberapa studi kasus dari perusahaan terkemuka seperti Booking.com, Expedia, dan Airbnb menunjukkan bagaimana AI dapat meningkatkan efisiensi operasional dan memberikan rekomendasi yang relevan untuk meningkatkan kepuasan pelanggan. Penelitian ini juga membahas tantangan dalam penerapan AI, seperti keseimbangan antara otomatisasi dan interaksi manusia, serta isu terkait perlindungan data pribadi. Hasil penelitian ini memberikan wawasan tentang pentingnya penerapan AI dalam strategi personalisasi di industri pariwisata dan implikasinya bagi perusahaan dan pelanggan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a sector that heavily relies on delivering satisfying customer experiences, where personalized services and relevance to individual preferences are critical to success (Monteiro et al., 2023). With advancements in technology, particularly in AI, opportunities to provide more personalized experiences have grown, significantly impacting how customers interact with tourism service providers.

Personalization in the tourism industry typically involves offering services tailored to the unique needs and preferences of each customer, from destination recommendations to accommodations and more immersive travel experiences. Previous research indicates that personalized experiences can enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and potential revenue growth for companies (Casaca & Miguel, 2024). Therefore,

* Corresponding author, email address: ischak@uinsaizu.ac.id

implementing AI to design and optimize personalization strategies presents a significant value proposition for the tourism industry.

AI has demonstrated its capabilities in analyzing big data, understanding consumer behavior patterns, and delivering highly relevant recommendations to customers. Utilizing machine learning algorithms, AI processes data from various sources, such as customer search histories, personal preferences, and digital behavior, to create more connected and relevant experiences (Koneti Chaitanya et al., 2023). This technology enables companies to design contextually relevant experiences that dynamically adapt to changing customer preferences over time.

One primary application of AI in personalization strategies is through chatbots and virtual assistants, which provide real-time information and recommendations. These technologies enhance service efficiency and offer customers highly personalized service impressions. AI-powered chatbots, for instance, can handle customer inquiries, provide recommendations based on collected data, and deliver integrated experiences throughout the customer journey – from planning to post-travel stages.

The importance of data in optimizing customer experiences becomes increasingly apparent in this context. Data gathered from digital interactions, surveys, and online activities can be used to gain deeper insights into customer desires and habits. AI-driven big data processing allows companies to build highly detailed customer profiles (Haleem et al., 2022), which, in turn, aid in crafting more personalized services tailored to specific customer needs. This creates stronger relationships between customers and businesses, ultimately fostering customer loyalty.

Despite its potential, the tourism industry faces significant challenges in integrating AI with more humanized customer experiences. The success of personalization strategies depends not only on technology but also on the ability of companies to humanize the customer experience. While AI can provide highly specific recommendations, authentic and heartfelt personal touches remain essential in building long-term relationships between companies and their customers.

Furthermore, the application of AI in the tourism industry can also help optimize marketing strategies. AI enables companies to personalize advertisements and promotions based on customer profiles, reducing wastage in marketing efforts and increasing conversion rates (Gao et al., 2023). AI can analyze customer interactions with advertisements, emails, and other marketing content to identify the most effective elements for specific customers. This data-driven approach allows tourism companies to attract the most relevant customers more efficiently and enhance sales conversion opportunities.

AI offers significant opportunities to design more personalized experiences in the tourism industry. AI can be a highly effective tool for improving customer experiences with its ability to analyze large volumes of data and deliver relevant and responsive recommendations. This study seeks to investigate how the application of AI in designing personalization strategies can enhance the quality of customer experiences in the tourism industry, and how companies can optimize the use of this technology to boost customer satisfaction and maintain long-term loyalty.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the capability of machines or computer systems to mimic human intelligence in processing information, solving problems, and making decisions autonomously (Harahap et al., 2024). In the industrial context, AI integrates various techniques such as machine learning, natural language processing, and big data analytics to enhance efficiency and optimize services. AI enables companies to analyze customer behavior patterns, provide more accurate recommendations, expedite services, and minimize human errors, ultimately improving productivity and customer satisfaction.

Personalization

Personalization in the context of customer service refers to the effort to deliver experiences or products tailored to the specific needs and preferences of individual customers (Liang et al., 2009). Personalization allows businesses to offer more relevant services or recommendations by utilizing data collected through customer interactions, fostering deeper relationships and increasing loyalty. In the digital era, personalization is implemented through various channels such as mobile applications, email, and websites, delivering experiences aligned with customers' unique preferences based on previously acquired data.

Customer Experience

Customer Experience refers to the overall interactions a customer has with a company or brand over a specific period (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This encompasses every touchpoint between the customer and the business, from information search and purchasing to post-sale services. Positive customer experiences strengthen loyalty, enhance satisfaction, and encourage word-of-mouth referrals. Conversely, negative experiences can damage a company's reputation and result in customer loss. Therefore, it is crucial for businesses to continually innovate and refine the experiences they provide to their customers.

Tourism Industry

The Tourism Industry is a sector that involves providing travel and leisure services to individuals or groups traveling to a destination for purposes other than permanent residence (Camilleri, 2018). This industry includes various activities such as travel, accommodation, transportation, culinary services, entertainment, and recreational activities. Tourism heavily relies on customer experiences, as visitor satisfaction greatly influences business success in this sector. Technological innovations, such as using AI for personalization, play a significant role in enhancing customer experiences and boosting competitiveness in the tourism industry.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a literature review with a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis. A qualitative approach is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in designing and optimizing personalization strategies to enhance customer experiences in the tourism industry. This approach allows the researcher to analyze and explore emerging themes in relevant literature and understand how AI applications have been discussed in prior studies. As such, the research does not focus on testing hypotheses or collecting quantitative data but instead delves deeply into concepts and findings within the existing literature. To analyze relevant literature, this study uses descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis aims to identify, describe, and evaluate findings contained in various articles related to the application of AI in personalizing customer experiences within the tourism sector. This method focuses on how AI has been implemented, the outcomes achieved, and the challenges encountered in adopting the technology. Through this approach, the research provides a clear depiction of current developments in the field and how AI can be utilized to enhance customer experiences. Data collection involves accessing relevant academic sources through Google Scholar within the publication timeframe of 2009 to 2024. This period was chosen due to the rapid advancements in AI technology and its applications in the tourism industry over the past few years. The data collection process begins with a search for related articles using relevant keywords such as "AI in tourism," "personalization strategy," "customer experience in tourism," and "artificial intelligence tourism applications." The initial search resulted in 40 articles deemed relevant to the research topic. A rigorous selection process was then undertaken to ensure the relevance and quality of the articles. The selected articles needed to meet certain criteria, such as publication in reputable academic journals, direct relevance to the research topic, and clarity and depth of the analyses presented. Following this selection, 19 highly relevant and high-quality articles were chosen for further analysis. These articles form the basis for identifying patterns, key findings, and recommendations related to the application of AI in personalization strategies in the tourism industry.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In recent years, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the tourism sector has grown rapidly, creating new opportunities for companies to deliver more personalized and relevant customer experiences while introducing much-needed innovation in an industry heavily reliant on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Tourism companies can design more targeted services with AI's ability to analyze big data and recognize consumer behavior patterns, enhance user experiences, and strengthen relationships with customers, ultimately boosting profitability (Samara et al., 2020). AI enables faster and more accurate information processing, facilitating tailored recommendations or offers that align with individual preferences, whether in accommodation, travel, or activities. One common application of AI is the integration of digital platforms, such as travel apps or hotel websites, offering automated booking and high-level personalization, such as travel recommendations based on search history and user preferences. This technology accelerates responses to customer needs, fosters dynamic interactions, and enhances overall satisfaction, encouraging repeat service usage and fostering stronger relationships between service providers and consumers.

A notable example of AI application in the tourism industry is the increasing use of chatbots and virtual assistants, which provide real-time, efficient, and personalized customer service. Companies like Booking.com leverage AI to enhance customer interactions through chatbots designed to analyze user data, including search histories and previous interactions, to deliver relevant recommendations for accommodations such as room types, locations, and prices tailored to customer preferences. This technology allows companies to reach customers more effectively, offering precise recommendations while reducing the workload of customer service teams. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots serve as communication tools for providing basic information and creating a more personalized experience by using data to respond to customer queries and requests in a contextual manner. This strengthens the relationship between companies and customers, improves satisfaction levels, and encourages repeat bookings, as customers feel understood and catered to in ways that are specific and relevant to their needs. Another advantage is that these chatbots operate 24/7, offering convenience to customers across various time zones without the time limitations often associated with human interactions (Chen et al., 2022).

AI also plays a significant role in optimizing marketing strategies in the tourism industry by deeply analyzing customer behavior, enabling companies to create more targeted offers, reduce budget wastage, and increase sales conversion rates. AI can process and interpret customer data in real time through machine learning algorithms, allowing companies to design more relevant and precise promotions. For instance, Expedia, one of the world's largest travel agencies, uses AI to analyze user data on their website, identifying behavior patterns such as frequently searched destinations or ideal booking times (David, 2023). Based on these insights, Expedia can offer personalized discounts or vacation packages tailored to specific customer preferences, such as flight discounts or exclusive deals for frequently visited destinations. This approach enhances customer experiences by offering deals that better align with their needs and desires while improving marketing efficiency by minimizing spending on irrelevant campaigns. With AI, companies can manage and adjust advertisements and promotions in real time, increasing conversions and encouraging customers to make purchases or bookings more frequently, while also fostering customer loyalty through more tailored experiences.

Furthermore, the implementation of AI in the tourism industry, particularly by companies like Airbnb, has enabled the creation of more comprehensive and personalized customer experiences, with deeper customization to meet individual needs. Airbnb leverages AI to process highly detailed customer data, including accommodation preferences, travel types, and past booking history, to provide more relevant recommendations that align with the unique characteristics and desires of each customer (Tiernan, 2023). This technology allows the system to match accommodations with desired locations and specific features such as accessibility, amenities, or the desired atmosphere. Moreover, Airbnb integrates AI into its review and rating systems, categorizing reviews based on user experiences and filtering and suggesting reviews that align with prospective guests' expectations. For example, if a customer frequently chooses family-friendly properties, the AI system can display reviews from customers with similar preferences, providing a more transparent and adequate picture of accommodation quality. This approach ensures that customer experiences align with their expectations, enhancing satisfaction and loyalty while giving customers greater confidence in their booking decisions. Airbnb enriches user interactions and creates a smarter by utilizing AI, more dynamic ecosystem that evolves with customer preferences and feedback.

The utilization of AI in personalizing customer experiences in the tourism sector increasingly involves collecting and processing big data, enabling companies to gain deeper and more accurate insights into customer preferences and needs. A primary approach involves Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques and sentiment analysis, which allow AI to analyze text in reviews, comments, or conversations in a manner similar to human understanding. For example, TUI Group, one of Europe's largest tourism service providers, uses AI to analyze thousands of customer reviews about travel destinations or accommodations to understand sentiments and emotions conveyed in the feedback (TUI Group, 2019). This NLP technique enables AI to identify key elements in reviews, such as complaints or praise for specific facilities, as well as preferences related to customer experiences, such as comfort, cleanliness, or service quality. Companies gain a clearer understanding of customer desires and areas for improvement by leveraging sentiment analysis, allowing them to design more relevant and satisfying experiences. AI processes this data to provide recommendations or adjust offerings that better align with customer expectations, whether in selecting destinations, accommodation types, or additional services, making customers feel valued and understood. The application of big data and AI in this context strengthens the relationship between companies and customers

while enhancing marketing effectiveness and overall customer satisfaction.

Despite the numerous benefits AI offers to the tourism industry, such as service personalization and operational efficiency, it also presents challenges, particularly in balancing automation with human interaction. Customers using AI for trip planning or recommendations often seek more personal and human-centered experiences that cannot be fully replicated by algorithms. While AI can provide highly accurate recommendations based on customer data, such as travel preferences and booking history, the emotional and profound experiences involving direct human interaction remain crucial in fostering stronger bonds between companies and customers. This reflects the need to maintain aspects of customer service requiring empathy, warmth, and a more holistic understanding, which only human interactions can deliver. For example, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts adopts AI for tailored recommendations but emphasizes the importance of human touch in customer service, such as hotel staff providing personal attention, ensuring guests feel special and appreciated (News, 2024). Thus, while AI holds immense potential to improve service efficiency and relevance, companies in the tourism sector must wisely integrate this technology with human-centered approaches to enrich emotional connections and create more satisfying customer experiences.

On the other hand, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in personalization provides benefits for customers and opens up significant opportunities for companies to improve their operational efficiency. For instance, Skyscanner, a leading travel search platform, leverages AI to analyze big data collected from user behavior in flight searches. Skyscanner can predict user preferences by employing machine learning algorithms, such as preferred departure times, airlines, or flight classes, and offer more targeted recommendations, including suggesting more efficient flight routes and competitive prices (Brownlow, 2024). This approach enhances the user experience by providing more relevant options, reducing search time, and offering significant advantages for the company. AI enables Skyscanner to improve sales conversion rates by delivering products better aligned with customer desires while simultaneously reducing operational costs associated with manual searches or poorly targeted promotions. Moreover, by enriching customer experiences through more accurate personalization, the company can strengthen user loyalty and create a sustainable competitive edge. Thus, AI serves as a tool to enhance customer experiences and a driving factor that supports efficiency and profitability in highly competitive industries like tourism.

The utilization of AI in designing personalization strategies offers great opportunities for companies like Hilton Hotels to enhance customer satisfaction in highly efficient and relevant ways. Hilton uses AI to tailor guest stays more individually, such as recommending rooms based on personal preferences, like proximity to specific facilities or desired features such as views or special amenities (Renaissance, 2024). This technology enriches guest experiences and improves operational efficiency, as demonstrated by the use of AI-powered mobile applications that accelerate the check-in process. These apps allow guests to verify their identity and process payments automatically, reducing waiting times and eliminating the need to queue at the front desk. Beyond offering greater convenience, this automation reduces the workload of hotel staff, enabling them to focus more on personalized customer service and creating a more enjoyable atmosphere for guests. Furthermore, AI's ability to collect and analyze data on guest preferences allows Hilton to further personalize experiences during future visits, fostering stronger loyalty and giving customers more reasons to choose Hilton again. Therefore, AI application enhances convenience and efficiency and plays a crucial role in building deeper, long-term relationships between guests and the hotel.

AI plays a critical role in helping tourism companies manage customer relationships more efficiently and personally. AI enables companies to gain deeper insights into customer preferences, needs, and habits with the ability to collect and analyze data from various customer interactions, allowing them to deliver more tailored services. For example, Disney uses AI in its mobile app to provide relevant activity recommendations to theme park visitors based on factors such as their location within the park, available time, and personal preferences gathered from past interactions (Chmielewski & Krystal Hu, 2023). This technology makes visitors' experiences more convenient by delivering timely and relevant information while helping Disney manage crowds and distribute visitors more evenly across attractions, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Disney can minimize wait times, reduce congestion at popular attractions by optimizing these processes with AI, and ensure a smoother and more enjoyable experience for visitors, boosting customer loyalty and satisfaction. Thus, the implementation of AI in the tourism sector enables companies to enrich customer experiences and improve the effectiveness of operational management and long-term customer relationships.

Although AI technology offers numerous benefits in personalizing customer experiences, challenges

related to data collection and processing must also be a priority for companies, especially in the tourism sector. Effective use of AI relies on access to large amounts of customer data, but companies must ensure that the data collected is processed legally and complies with strict privacy standards, given the growing public awareness of personal data protection. Customers tend to be more cautious about sharing personal information; hence, companies must ensure compliance with applicable data protection regulations, such as the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) in Europe, to avoid potential legal issues arising from privacy violations (Sartor, 2020). Adhering to these regulations reduces legal risks and plays a vital role in building and maintaining customer trust, which is crucial in the tourism industry that heavily relies on long-term relationships and positive customer experiences. Tourism companies can leverage AI for personalization without compromising customer privacy by ensuring that customer data is managed carefully and transparently, creating a necessary balance for the ethical and effective use of this technology.

Implementing AI to design and optimize personalization strategies in the tourism industry offers significant potential to enhance customer experiences by delivering services that are more relevant and aligned with individual preferences. However, to maximize its benefits, companies must carefully balance efficient automation with authentic human interaction. While AI can process data quickly and provide highly accurate recommendations, the personal element involving empathy and human communication remains essential to fostering deeper and more meaningful relationships with customers. The use of this technology should not aim to replace human interaction but rather enrich the customer experience by improving operational efficiency and providing deeper insights into customer needs. With the right approach, where AI is used to optimize and enhance customer experiences rather than replace them, AI can become an extremely effective tool in creating more personal, relevant, and satisfying experiences in the tourism sector. The key lies in a thoughtful integration of automation and human engagement, which can, in turn, lead to stronger loyalty and higher customer satisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in designing and optimizing personalization strategies in the tourism industry holds significant potential to enhance customer experiences. Companies can deliver services more tailored to individual customer preferences and needs through technologies such as chatbots, virtual assistants, big data analytics, and machine learning. Case studies from companies like Booking.com, Expedia, and Airbnb illustrate how AI can improve operational efficiency, provide more relevant recommendations, and enhance customer satisfaction. However, challenges such as balancing automation with human interaction and addressing data privacy concerns must be addressed to ensure that AI implementation is both optimal and responsible.

The implications of AI implementation for personalizing customer experiences in the tourism sector are significant for both businesses and consumers. For businesses, AI can enhance competitiveness by delivering more relevant and efficient customer experiences. Using AI to manage customer relationships and recommend products or services aligned with customer preferences can increase conversion rates and foster customer loyalty. Additionally, AI can improve operational efficiency by minimizing resource waste and optimizing marketing and customer service processes. For customers, AI offers a more personalized and enjoyable experience, which in turn enhances their satisfaction and loyalty to a specific brand or service.

To maximise the potential of AI in personalising customer experience in the tourism industry, companies should consider several steps. Firstly, it is important for companies to ensure that the data collected through AI is relevant, accurate and legitimate, and complies with applicable data protection regulations such as GDPR. Second, companies need to maintain a balance between automation and human interaction, ensuring that AI is used to enhance the customer experience without replacing the personal touch that is often required in customer service. Third, companies should continuously update and evolve their AI algorithms to keep up with the latest trends and evolving customer needs. In addition, companies should educate and engage staff in the use of these technologies to ensure successful implementation.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, it employs a literature review as the primary method, meaning the findings depend on the quality and scope of available literature. Although the selected articles are relevant and high-quality, the results may not be generalizable to all companies or tourism destinations due to variations in size, resources, and characteristics of each entity. Second, this study primarily focuses on conceptual development and secondary analysis, without incorporating field research or in-depth case studies that could provide direct insights into AI implementation in practice. Future research

with quantitative or qualitative approaches involving field data and direct interviews with industry practitioners would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of AI implementation in the tourism sector.

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