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Research on the Adoption Willingness of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Tourism Decision-Making Among Young Tourists: Based on the Anthropomorphic Perspective and an Improved UTAUT2 Model

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Abstract: With the explosive growth of generative artificial intelligence (AIGC), it is profoundly transforming the travel decision-making paradigm of young tourists as a new decision-making support tool. Based on an improved Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2), this study introduces anthropomorphic traits and perceived risk to construct a model of the influencing mechanism of young tourists' willingness to adopt AIGC. Through structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis of 266 valid samples, it was found that: (1) Hedonic motivation is the primary driver of young tourists' willingness to adopt, followed by performance expectancy and effort expectancy; (2) Anthropomorphic traits significantly positively drive perceived benefits through a fully mediating pathway, thereby indirectly enhancing adoption willingness; (3) The young group exhibits significant risk "desensitization" characteristics, with perceived risk having no significant impact on willingness; (4) AI literacy has no significant moderating effect in the adoption pathway, validating the "egalitarian" nature of AIGC technology. The research findings provide a scientific reference for cultural and tourism enterprises to optimize the interactive design of AIGC products and promote the popularization of digital and intelligent tourism.

Keywords: Generative artificial intelligence; Young tourists; Travel decision-making

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

The Disruption of Travel Decision-Making Paradigms by Generative Artificial Intelligence Against the macro backdrop of the accelerated evolution of the global digital economy and the development of new quality productive forces, smart tourism has transitioned from mere "digitization" to a stage of deep integration of

"digital and intelligent" technologies. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AIGC) technologies, represented by ChatGPT, Ctrip's "Wendao," and Fliggy's "Wen Yi Wen," is profoundly disrupting traditional paradigms of travel information acquisition and decision-making. Traditional travel decision-making heavily relies on fragmented information from search engines and social media (such as Xiaohongshu and Mafengwo), requiring tourists to invest significant time in horizontal comparisons and screenings, facing severe "information overload" dilemmas [1,2].

In contrast, AIGC, with its powerful natural language processing capabilities and semantic understanding logic, can provide tourists with highly personalized, one-stop itinerary planning and consulting services. This shift from a "people seeking information" to an "information actively generated" model greatly reduces the time cost of information processing and enhances the performance expectancy of travel planning [3,4]. For the cultural and tourism industry, AIGC is not only an efficiency tool but also a core driver for reshaping user interfaces and improving service quality.

1.2. Problem identification

Balancing "Efficacy Perception" and "Algorithm Black Box" among Young Tourists Young tourists (aged 18–35), as "digital natives" of the mobile internet, have become the most dynamic core group in the cultural and tourism consumption market [5]. This group has a natural sensitivity and high acceptance of new technologies, but their decision-making psychology is also more complex. On one hand, young tourists pursue ultimate efficiency and hedonic experiences, hoping to achieve a unified interactive fun and scientific planning through AIGC; on the other hand, the inherent "algorithm black box" characteristics of AIGC and the potential for "hallucinatory information" (i.e., false or inaccurate recommendations) expose tourists to potential information bias risks while enjoying convenience [6,7].

Currently, research on AIGC in the tourism field mostly focuses on macro technological empowerment value or application scenario overview", while research on the psychological mechanisms of young tourists in vertical decision-making scenarios on the demand side remains lagging. How do young tourists balance anxiety about algorithmic uncertainty while perceiving technological utility? Can anthropomorphic interactive features effectively alleviate the coldness and distrust brought by technology? These questions constitute the core starting points of this study.

1.3. Research objective

Exploring the Mediating Driving Mechanism of Anthropomorphic Traits To reveal the internal logic of young tourists' AIGC adoption behavior, this study is grounded in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) and introduces "anthropomorphism" as a core antecedent variable in response to AIGC's human-like interactive traits, constructing a comprehensive explanatory model combined with perceived risk theory.

The main purposes of this study are as follows:

(1) To verify the applicability of classic technology adoption variables (performance expectancy, effort expectancy, hedonic motivation) in the context of AIGC travel services;

(2) To deeply analyze how anthropomorphic traits indirectly drive adoption willingness through the mediating pathway of perceived benefits (functional and emotional benefits) and explore the "emotional premium" role played by anthropomorphism in human-computer interaction [8,9];

(3) To empirically test the moderating effect of AI literacy in the decision-making pathway to clarify the similarities and differences in adoption logic under different literacy levels.

Through the above explorations, this study aims to provide empirical evidence for the differentiated

development of AIGC travel tools and the inclusive growth of smart tourism.

2. Theoretical foundations and research hypotheses

2.1. Adaptability of the UTAUT2 model to AIGC travel scenarios

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) is one of the most authoritative theoretical frameworks for explaining individual technology adoption behavior [10]. This study argues that AIGC travel tools, as a highly interactive smart service medium, highly conform to the core logic of UTAUT2 in terms of adoption behavior. Among them, performance expectancy reflects the extent to which young tourists believe that using AIGC can enhance itinerary planning efficiency; effort expectancy embodies the ease of use perception brought by AIGC's natural language interaction; hedonic motivation corresponds to the fun and novelty obtained by the young group in human-computer dialogue [11–13]. Considering the non-mandatory nature of travel decision-making, this study retains the above three core variables as the basic dimensions driving young tourists' willingness.

2.2. Antecedent driving role of anthropomorphic traits (H1–H5)

Anthropomorphism refers to the tendency of individuals to attribute human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human objects [14]. In the context of AIGC, this "human-like" characteristic is no longer limited to appearance but is also reflected in understanding depth and language warmth.

2.2.1. Driving functional perception (H1–H2)

When AIGC exhibits a high degree of anthropomorphism, tourists tend to believe it possesses higher intelligence levels, thereby enhancing trust in its ability to solve complex travel problems and increasing performance expectancy [15]. Simultaneously, human-like interactive logic conforms to daily human communication habits, effectively reducing users' cognitive load and enhancing effort expectancy [16].

2.2.2. Driving emotional perception (H3)

Anthropomorphism can endow technology with "social presence," transforming originally cold algorithmic interactions into emotional communications with social attributes, greatly stimulating young tourists' hedonic motivation.

2.2.3. Direct and indirect driving of willingness (H4–H5)

Based on social exchange theory, anthropomorphism may directly enhance users' adoption willingness or play a role by strengthening the above perceived mediating pathways.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1–H3: Anthropomorphism significantly positively influences performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and hedonic motivation.

H4–H5: Anthropomorphism significantly positively influences adoption willingness, with performance expectancy playing a mediating role. ‘

2.3. Impediment mechanism of perceived risk: Exploration based on "machine hallucinations" (H9)

Despite AIGC's strong empowerment potential, the randomness of its underlying algorithms leading to

"machine hallucinations" remains a non-negligible negative factor. In travel decision-making, this manifests as false attraction information, invalid ticket links, or unreasonable route suggestions [17]. Perceived risk refers to the potential losses users feel when facing the uncertainty of AIGC-generated results. Traditional research suggests that risk perception generates strong defensive psychology, thereby inhibiting adoption willingness [18]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Perceived risk significantly negatively influences young tourists' adoption willingness.

2.4. Moderating logic of AI literacy: The boundary role of individual differences (H10–H11)

AI literacy is a collection of abilities exhibited by individuals in evaluating, using, and effectively interacting with AI systems. In the technology adoption pathway, literacy levels may play the role of a "moderator." High-literacy tourists typically possess stronger discernment and operational skills, enabling them to more efficiently mine the value of AIGC, thereby strengthening the conversion of performance perception to willingness (H10); simultaneously, high-literacy users often view algorithmic biases more rationally and can avoid risks through effective prompt engineering, thereby weakening the negative impact of perceived risk on adoption willingness (H11).

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H10: AI literacy plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between performance expectancy and adoption willingness.

H11: AI literacy plays a negative moderating role in the relationship between perceived risk and adoption willingness.

2.5. Construction of the research theoretical model

Based on the above analysis, this study constructs a comprehensive model with anthropomorphism as the antecedent variable, UTAUT2 core dimensions as mediators, perceived risk introduced as a negative pathway, and considering the moderating effect of AI literacy, as shown in **Figure 1**.

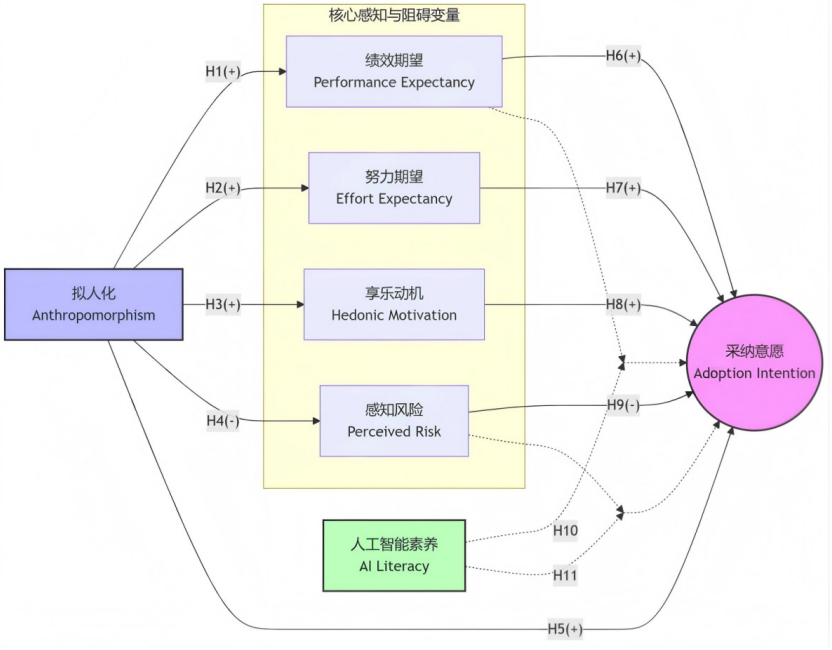

Figure 1. Depiction of the theoretical conceptual model.

3. Research design and methodology

3.1. Variable measurement

To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments, the measurement items for all core variables in this study were adapted from established scales in relevant fields both domestically and internationally, with localized modifications made based on the specific context of generative artificial intelligence (AIGC) in tourism decision-making assistance. The scale employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with scores from 1 to 5 assigned accordingly.

3.1.1. Anthropomorphism (ANT)

Drawing on the established scale by Waytz *et al.*, three items were used to measure users' perceptions of AIGC's human-like qualities, empathy, and understanding capabilities [9].

3.1.2. Performance expectancy (PE), effort expectancy (EE), hedonic motivation (HM), and adoption intention (AI)

These four dimensions were strictly designed based on the classic UTAUT2 model scale proposed by Venkatesh *et al.*, encompassing a total of 12 items that assess the role of AIGC in enhancing planning efficiency, the ease of interaction, and the enjoyment experienced during use [17].

3.1.3. Perceived risk (PR)

Building on the scale by Featherman & Pavlou, four items were established to primarily evaluate tourists' concerns about information bias, privacy breaches, and decision-making losses caused by "machine hallucinations [17]."

3.1.4. Artificial intelligence literacy (AIL)

Referencing the study by Long & Magerko, three items were used to examine users' ability to craft prompts, discern AI-generated content, and recognize technological limitations [18].

3.2. Data collection

This study collected data through the professional online survey platform "Questionnaire Star," targeting young tourists with experience using AIGC tools (such as ChatGPT, ERNIE Bot, Doubao, etc.).

Initially, screening questions were employed to identify respondents with prior AIGC usage to ensure the data reflected genuine interaction experiences. A total of 325 questionnaires were collected during the formal survey. After excluding invalid responses due to excessively short completion times, patterned responses, and age discrepancies, 266 valid samples were obtained, yielding an effective response rate of 81.85%.

3.3. Sample statistical characteristics

The sample in this study focused on young tourists aged 18–35, demonstrating significant representativeness and relevance to the research: Among the sample, 55.64% were aged 18–25, and 44.36% were aged 26–35. All respondents were "digital natives" of the mobile internet era, highly sensitive to AIGC technology and possessing independent decision-making capabilities. The overall educational level was relatively high, with 62.03% holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. This high educational attainment ensured a strong homogeneity among the sample in understanding generative technology and evaluating algorithmic logic. Additionally,

83.46% of respondents had traveled at least once in the past year, with the highest proportion (63.53%) traveling 1–2 times. This indicates that the sample group had genuine tourism decision-making needs and frequent survey trigger scenarios, ensuring the empirical results' guiding value for the tourism vertical industry.

4. Empirical analysis and results

4.1. Reliability and validity testing

This study initially conducted reliability and validity tests on the 266 valid sample data to ensure the measurement instruments' reliability and validity.

Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's α coefficient. The results showed that the Cronbach's α coefficient for the overall scale was 0.966, with α coefficients for each latent variable dimension ranging from 0.966 to 0.989, significantly exceeding the recommended standard of 0.7, indicating high stability of the scale. Convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Experimental data revealed that all observed variables had standardized factor loadings greater than 0.7; composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.878 to 0.926, surpassing the threshold of 0.7; and average variance extracted (AVE) values were all greater than 0.7 (except for artificial intelligence literacy, which was 0.706), far exceeding the determination criterion of 0.5, proving the scale's excellent convergent validity. The square root values of AVE for each latent variable were all greater than their correlation coefficients with other dimensions, meeting the Fornell-Larcker criterion and indicating good independence among dimensions. Specific reliability and convergent validity test results are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity test results

Path	Aspect	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*P*	Std. Estimate	AVE	CR
Anthropomorphism1	Anthropomorphism	1.000				0.869	0.784	0.916
Anthropomorphism2		0.977	0.051	19.174	***	0.874		
Anthropomorphism3		1.036	0.050	20.761	***	0.913		
Performance Expectancy1	Performance Expectancy	1.000				0.878	0.803	0.924
Performance Expectancy2		1.052	0.049	21.588	***	0.905		
Performance Expectancy3		1.031	0.048	21.564	***	0.905		
Effort Expectancy1	Effort Expectancy	1.000				0.889	0.786	0.917
Effort Expectancy2		1.044	0.049	21.114	***	0.887		
Effort Expectancy3		1.024	0.049	20.957	***	0.884		
Hedonic Motivation1	Hedonic Motivation	1.000				0.883	0.778	0.913
Hedonic Motivation2		1.026	0.048	21.477	***	0.896		
Hedonic Motivation3		1.025	0.051	19.977	***	0.867		
Perceived Risk1	Perceived Risk	1.000				0.841	0.712	0.908
Perceived Risk2		0.977	0.056	17.542	***	0.859		
Perceived Risk3		0.941	0.069	13.658	***	0.729		
Perceived Risk4		1.107	0.056	19.747	***	0.934		
AI Literacy1	AI Literacy	1.000				0.859	0.706	0.878
AI Literacy2		1.001	0.058	17.276	***	0.842		
AI Literacy3		0.912	0.055	16.528	***	0.819		

Adoption Intention1		1.000				0.942	0.807	0.926
Adoption Intention2	Adoption Intention	1.018	0.041	24.956	***	0.892		
Adoption Intention3		0.980	0.044	22.335	***	0.858		

4.2. Path analysis of structural equation modeling

In this study, AMOS 25.0 was employed to construct a structural equation model (SEM) for conducting path calculations on the research hypotheses.

The results of the goodness-of-fit test revealed that the Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) was 2.321 (< 3), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.071 (< 0.08). Additionally, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.958, the incremental fit index (IFI) was 0.959, and the normed fit index (NFI) was 0.930, all exceeding the ideal threshold of 0.9. All the fit indices fell within the excellent range, indicating that the theoretical model constructed in this study demonstrated a high degree of fit with the actual survey data and could effectively explain the causal relationships among variables. The results of the model path analysis and hypothesis testing are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Summary of model path analysis results and hypothesis testing

Path	Aspect	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*P*	Std. Estimate
Performance Expectancy	Anthropomorphism	0.877	0.054	16.194	***	0.931
Effort Expectancy	Anthropomorphism	0.861	0.054	15.983	***	0.914
Hedonic Motivation	Anthropomorphism	0.894	0.054	16.694	***	0.947
Perceived Risk	Anthropomorphism	0.544	0.066	8.269	***	0.531
Adoption Intention	Anthropomorphism	-0.458	0.337	-1.358	0.174	-0.498
Adoption Intention	Performance Expectancy	0.437	0.152	2.875	0.004	0.447
Adoption Intention	Effort Expectancy	0.257	0.127	2.023	0.043	0.263
Adoption Intention	Hedonic Motivation	0.664	0.204	3.256	0.001	0.681
Adoption Intention	Perceived Risk	0.065	0.039	1.662	0.097	0.073

Note: * $p < 0.05$ **, $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

4.3. Core path verification

Through an analysis of the model's path coefficients, this study verifies the core driving forces behind the willingness to adopt AIGC in tourism: among all influencing factors, hedonic motivation exerts the most significant positive driving effect on adoption willingness ($\alpha = 0.681$, $p = 0.001$). This indicates that young tourists place greater importance on the interactive fun and immersive experiences provided by AIGC. Performance expectancy ($\alpha = 0.447$) and effort expectancy ($\alpha = 0.263$) both significantly promote the generation of willingness, reflecting the value of AIGC in enhancing planning efficiency and lowering operational barriers. The direct impact of anthropomorphism on adoption willingness is not significant ($p = 0.174$), but it exerts an indirect influence by significantly driving performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and hedonic motivation (all $\alpha > 0.9$), demonstrating a complete mediating effect. The empirical results show that the negative impact of perceived risk on adoption willingness does not reach statistical significance ($\alpha = 0.073$, $p = 0.097$). This suggests that the youth group exhibits a "desensitization" to risk in AIGC tourism scenarios, with potential concerns about information bias not yet translating into decision-making resistance.

4.4. Moderating effect test

An empirical analysis of the moderating effect of AI literacy was conducted using the SPSS Process plugin (Model 1). The results of the moderating effect analysis of AI literacy on performance expectancy and adoption willingness are presented in **Table 3** and **Table 4**.

Table 3. Moderating effect test of AI literacy on performance expectancy and adoption willingness

Variable	B	Standard Error	t	*P*
Constant	3.915**	0.028	138.617	0.000
Performance Expectation	0.376**	0.042	8.888	0.000
AI Literacy	0.512**	0.043	11.937	0.000
Performance Expectation × AI Literacy	-0.034	0.026	-1.291	0.198
R^2		0.753		
Adjusted R^2		F(3,262) = 265.658, p = 0.000		
F value	3.915**	0.028	138.617	0.000

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Dependent variable: Adoption intention

Table 4. Test of the moderating effect of AI literacy on perceived risk and adoption intention

Variable	B	Std. Error	t	*P*
Constant	3.882**	0.029	135.872	0.000
Perceived Risk	3.897**	0.030	128.857	0.000
AI Literacy	0.108**	0.037	2.951	0.003
Perceived Risk * AI Literacy	0.735**	0.039	18.825	0.000
R^2	0.004	0.031	0.140	0.889
Adjusted R^2		0.688		
F value		F (3,262) = 192.496, p = 0.000		

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Dependent variable: Adoption intention.

The regression coefficient for the interaction term between performance expectancy and AI literacy is -0.034, with $p = 0.198$, not reaching a significant level. The regression coefficient for the interaction term between perceived risk and AI literacy is 0.004, with $p = 0.889$, also not significant. Empirical data objectively demonstrate that AI literacy does not play a significant moderating role in the adoption path of AIGC tourism. This finding reveals the "technological egalitarianism" characteristic of AIGC, meaning its minimalist interaction logic enables young tourists with different technological backgrounds to equally perceive its value, with adoption logic demonstrating stability across groups with varying levels of literacy.

5. Discussion

5.1. Analysis of the "mediating effect" of hedonic motivation and anthropomorphism

Empirical results show that hedonic motivation has the most significant impact on young tourists' adoption intention ($\beta = 0.681$, $p = 0.001$). This indicates that in the non-rigid scenario of tourism decision-making, young tourists' perception of AIGC has transcended mere instrumental attributes, tending more towards viewing it as an interactive experience with entertainment value. Meanwhile, the direct impact of anthropomorphism on adoption intention is not significant ($p = 0.174$), but it indirectly enhances intention by significantly

driving hedonic motivation (β = 0.947) as well as performance and effort expectancy. This reveals that anthropomorphism plays the role of a "pre-catalyst" in AIGC interactions. By endowing algorithms with human-like emotional warmth and communication logic, it transforms cold data into vivid situational simulations, thereby inducing tourists' sense of immersion and pleasure, achieving a complete mediating transformation from technological attributes to emotional benefits.

5.2. The "desensitization" phenomenon of risk perception: Why young people show tolerance for algorithmic hallucinations

The study found that the impact of perceived risk on adoption intention did not reach statistical significance (p = 0.097), exhibiting a clear characteristic of "risk desensitization." The reason lies in the fact that young tourists, as "digital natives," have developed a learned cognition of algorithmic uncertainty through long-term human-machine interactions. Since tourism decision-making is a high-tolerance hedonic consumption, even if AIGC generates "machine hallucinations" leading to information bias, the actual losses incurred are usually within a controllable range, and this "low sense of harm" weakens the inhibitory effect of risk. Additionally, the trust brought by anthropomorphism and the novel experience brought by hedonic motivation effectively hedge against potential anxiety, enabling young people to show a strong tolerance for emerging technologies when weighing benefits and costs.

5.3. The failure of moderating effect under "technological egalitarianism": Analyzing the relationship between AIGC's low-threshold characteristics and literacy variables

The moderating role of AI literacy is not significant in any of the core paths, a finding that reveals the "technological egalitarianism" characteristic of AIGC. Traditional smart tourism systems often implicitly require users to possess certain keyword search skills or complex logical filtering capabilities, whereas AIGC, based on natural language processing technology, reduces the interaction threshold to the level of daily conversation. This minimalist entry point enables individuals, regardless of their AI literacy level, to intuitively perceive the efficiency improvements and fun value brought by the technology. Therefore, in the low-threshold scenario of tourism decision-making, AI literacy is no longer a key variable determining intention conversion, with adoption logic demonstrating stability across groups with varying levels of literacy.

5.4. Practical implications of research findings for smart tourism product design

The research conclusions deeply align with the current evolutionary logic of the smart tourism market. The success of vertical large models such as "Ctrip's Inquiry" essentially represents an empirical application of the dual driving paths of hedonic motivation and performance expectancy identified in this study. By incorporating anthropomorphic traits to mitigate the coldness of interactions, the product externalizes the logical mechanism through which anthropomorphism influences intention via perceived benefits. Additionally, the universal characteristics of AIGC imply its potential to penetrate from a core audience of highly educated individuals to a broader long-tail market, laying an empirical foundation for the industry to achieve a transition from "niche exploration" to "universal adoption."

6. Conclusions and implications

6.1. Main conclusions of the study

Through empirical analysis of 266 valid samples, this study draws the following conclusions:

(1) Hedonic motivation, performance expectancy, and effort expectancy are the core driving forces behind young tourists' adoption of AIGC-assisted decision-making, with hedonic motivation being the strongest driver;

(2) Anthropomorphism indirectly affects adoption intention through a complete mediating path and does not exhibit a direct driving effect;

(3) There is a significant "desensitization" phenomenon regarding perceived risk among young tourists, which does not pose a substantial obstacle to adoption decisions;

(4) AI literacy does not have a moderating effect in the adoption model, validating the "egalitarian" nature of AIGC technology.

6.2. Practical implications: Countermeasures for developers and enterprise adopters

Product developers should emphasize hedonic motivation-oriented design, meeting tourists' emotional needs through immersive interactions, fun dialogues, and personalized itinerary simulations. At the same time, they should continuously optimize anthropomorphic experiences, positioning AI as a "considerate guide" rather than a mere search engine to reduce users' psychological distance. Enterprise adopters should seize the window of opportunity for "risk desensitization" and conduct scenario-based marketing targeting the core audience aged 18–35, highlighting the customization capabilities of AIGC. Leveraging its low-threshold characteristics, they should promote services to people with varying levels of literacy, cultivating users' digital and intelligent usage habits.

6.3. Limitations and future prospects

Due to the high concentration of samples among highly educated young people aged 18–35, AI literacy exhibits "high-level homogeneity," which may limit the capture of variations in the moderating effect. Future research should further expand sample heterogeneity to include middle-aged and elderly as well as low-educated tourist groups, and combine longitudinal tracking data to analyze the dynamic evolution of user decision-making logic and risk perception characteristics as AIGC technology transitions from a "novel experience" to a "routine tool."

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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