
Artificial Intelligence, Social Unrest, and Economic Development as Antecedents of Foreign Tourist Destination Choice

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of artificial intelligence (AI), social unrest, and economic development as key antecedents in the selection of foreign tourist destinations. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which tourists utilize AI tools during the decision-making process and the role AI algorithms play in facilitating destination choice. Additionally, the research explores how social unrest, by disrupting stability and legal order, impacts tourists' preferences, alongside the effect of economic development on destination attractiveness. The empirical research was conducted in the Republic of Serbia in 2025 using the survey method, and the respondents' answers were analyzed using the statistical software SmartPLS 4. The total sample consisted of 310 respondents, and the findings indicate that all variables exert a positive influence on the selection of foreign tourist destinations. By integrating technological, socio-political, legal and economic dimensions, this study offers valuable insights for tourism and hospitality service providers aiming to optimize their strategies and better cater to evolving tourist behaviors. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on how advanced technologies and contextual factors shape contemporary travel decisions, ultimately supporting more informed marketing and management practices in the global tourism industry.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, social unrest, economic development, tourism, foreign destinations.

Introduction

In recent years, the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed various sectors, including tourism. AI technologies are increasingly integrated into tourists' decision-making processes, influencing how destinations are researched, evaluated, and ultimately selected (Eddyono et al., 2025). This integration not only brings convenience and personalization to the user experience, but also introduces new challenges regarding privacy protection, data manipulation, and the reliability of recommendations — making it clear that understanding and applying artificial intelligence is an essential part of modern internet security culture (Bjelajac & Jovanović, 2013; Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020). Besides technological innovations, socio-political factors such as social unrest have become critical in tourists' decision-making as they affect perceptions of safety and stability in potential destinations (Ali et al., 2018). Economic development remains a fundamental factor shaping destination attractiveness, impacting infrastructure quality, service availability, and the overall visitor experience. Legal stability and the effectiveness of the host country's legal system play a significant role in shaping the tourist image, as they influence the level of security, protection of tourists' rights, and reliability of tourism services (Awaritefe, 2004; Carvache-Franco et al., 2019; Perez Galvez et al., 2017).

This study aims to explore the combined influence of artificial intelligence, social unrest, and the economic development, as antecedents of foreign tourist destination choice. By examining how tourists utilize AI tools during their decision-making process, as well as the extent to which social, economic, and legal contexts affect their destination preferences, this research provides a comprehensive understanding

of the multiple factors shaping contemporary tourist behavior. The empirical research was conducted in the Republic of Serbia in 2025 using the survey method, and the data were analyzed using advanced statistical software. The findings of this research offer valuable insights for stakeholders in the tourism industry seeking to optimize their marketing strategies and improve service delivery in a rapidly changing global environment. By integrating technological, socio-political, economic, and legal perspectives, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on how contemporary factors shape international tourism flows and decision-making processes.

Literature review

The choice of foreign tourist destinations represents a complex and multidimensional process influenced by numerous factors stemming from technological, socio-political, and economic environments. In contemporary conditions of globalization and digitalization, three variables stand out as significant determinants shaping tourist behavior: *artificial intelligence*, *social unrest* and *economic development*.

Artificial intelligence (AI) encompasses a set of technologies and systems that simulate human intelligence through learning, data analysis, decision-making, and problem-solving capabilities (Samala et al., 2022). In the tourism industry, AI is employed to personalize user experiences, enhance customer support, and optimize marketing strategies. Tourists increasingly utilize applications and platforms powered by AI algorithms to receive destination recommendations, book accommodations, plan routes, and tailor travel experiences to their individual preferences (Dong et al., 2025). This technological advancement facilitates more efficient information gathering and reduces uncertainty in decision-making, thereby increasing the likelihood of selecting destinations better suited to personal needs. Accordingly, artificial intelligence acts as a powerful catalyst in tourists' decision-making processes while simultaneously enhancing the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the global market (Barcellos-Paula et al., 2024; Chi & Phuong, 2022; Stalidis et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2024). The first research hypothesis is:

H1: Artificial intelligence has an impact on tourists' decision-making regarding the choice of foreign destinations.

Social unrest refers to occurrences of social instability, including protests, political conflicts, riots, and other forms of public tension that disrupt social order (Isaac & Velden, 2018). Such conditions significantly affect risk perception and destination safety—one of the most critical factors influencing tourist destination choice (Nazir, 2023). Tourists tend to avoid destinations experiencing social unrest due to the paramount importance of safety for an enjoyable and worry-free vacation (Fazli et al., 2023). Beyond the direct impact on tourism, social unrest can cause disruptions in infrastructure and services, further diminishing a destination's appeal (Isaac & Van den Bedem, 2021). Given that global tourism depends on stability and trust, political and social stability have become imperatives for the sustainable development of the tourism industry (Dong & Qu, 2023; Phau et al., 2014; Poulaki & Nikas, 2021; Khalid et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024). The second research hypothesis is:

H2: Social unrest influences tourists' decision-making in selecting foreign destinations.

Economic development is a key macroeconomic indicator encompassing factors such as gross domestic product per capita, quality of infrastructure, service levels, technological advancement, and

overall living standards (Nanjappa et al., 2024). Economically developed destinations often offer superior conditions for tourists in terms of accommodation, transportation, safety, and a variety of supplementary activities, which directly influence their attractiveness (Das & Maitra, 2025). Tourists are more inclined to choose destinations that guarantee high levels of comfort, security, and diverse experiences (Kusumawati et al., 2020). Furthermore, developed economies enable destinations to invest in marketing campaigns, develop new tourism products, and maintain service quality, thereby further enhancing their competitiveness in the global market (Liu & Nguyen Hoang Thanh, 2025; Liu et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2024). The third research hypothesis is:

H3: Economic development exerts a significant impact on tourists' decisions when choosing destinations.

These variables intertwine and collectively contribute to a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors affecting the choice of foreign tourist destinations. Artificial intelligence facilitates access to relevant information and offers personalized services, while socio-political stability, through the absence of social unrest, ensures tourist safety. Simultaneously, economic development provides the necessary infrastructure and service quality, collectively making a destination desirable to contemporary tourists (Harrington, 2021; Lakhoua et al., 2021; Mehra, 2023; Uzar & Samet Yilmaz, 2025). Understanding these factors is crucial for decision-makers in the tourism sector, enabling them to tailor their strategies according to market demands and expectations, which is essential for achieving sustainable growth and development within the industry.

Methodology

The empirical research was conducted in the Republic of Serbia in 2025 using a quantitative approach based on the survey method. The aim was to examine the influence of artificial intelligence, social unrest, and economic development on the selection of foreign tourist destinations. A structured questionnaire was designed to measure respondents' perceptions of each variable, and data were collected from a diverse sample of participants. The total sample consisted of 310 respondents. The responses were analyzed using the statistical software SmartPLS 4, which enabled the evaluation of the proposed model and hypotheses through structural equation modeling (SEM). This methodological approach was chosen for its ability to assess complex relationships between multiple constructs and provide robust insights into the factors influencing tourist decision-making behavior. The demographic structure of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

The sample structure shows that a total of 310 respondents participated in the study, with females comprising the majority at 59.6%, and males representing 40.4% of the sample.

Regarding age distribution, the largest group of respondents (44.5%) were between 21 and 40 years old, while those aged 41 to 60 accounted for 36.1%. The youngest group (up to 20 years) made up 12.6%, and the oldest group (61 years and over) represented 6.8%.

In terms of education, most respondents held a university degree (56.8%), 38.4% had completed high school, and only a small portion (4.8%) had primary education.

The statements used in the survey questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Sample structure

Sample structure	Number	Percentage	
Gender	Female	185	59.6%
	Male	125	40.4%
	Total	310	100%
Age	Up to 20 years	39	12.6%
	21-40 years	138	44.5%
	41-60 years	112	36.1%
	61 years and over	21	6.8%
	Total	310	100%
Education	Primary school	15	4.8%
	High school	119	38.4%
	Faculty	176	56.8%
	Total	310	100%

*Source: Authors***Table 2: Statements from questionnaire**

Variables	Statements	Source
Artificial intelligence	1. When planning a trip, I use artificial intelligence tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Google Bard) to research destinations. 2. AI algorithms help me find the best tourist destination according to my preferences. 3. I believe that artificial intelligence improves the quality and efficiency of decision-making regarding international travel.	De Carlo et al. (2021)
Social unrest	1. When choosing a foreign tourist destination, I pay attention to the political stability and safety of the country. 2. I avoid traveling to countries where protests, unrest, or armed conflicts are frequent. 3. Media reports about social unrest negatively influence my decision to visit a particular destination.	Shahrabani et al. (2021)
Economic development	1. I prefer to travel to economically developed countries due to better infrastructure and service quality. 2. The economic development of a country greatly influences my choice of tourist destination. 3. I believe that economically developed countries offer safer and higher-quality conditions for tourists.	Zientara et al. (2024)
Foreign destinations	1. I enjoy traveling abroad and exploring new cultures and countries. 2. I plan to continue choosing foreign destinations for my future trips. 3. I generally choose foreign destinations that I consider more attractive than domestic ones.	Lee et al. (2023) <i>Source: Authors</i>

Source: Authors

The following section presents the research findings.

Research results

Table 3 presents the model fit indices for the structural equation model examining the impact of artificial intelligence, social unrest, and economic development on the choice of foreign tourist destinations.

Table 3. Model Validity

Indicators of model validity	Research model- Foreign tourist destinations	Recommended value
χ^2/df	1.745	<3
GFI	0.935	>0.9
IFI	0.924	>0.9
TLI	0.933	>0.9
CFI	0.941	>0.9
RMSEA	0.051	<0.08

Source: Authors

The model validity indicators suggest that the research model demonstrates a very good statistical fit with the empirical data. Specifically, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) is 1.745, which is below the recommended threshold of 3, indicating an adequate alignment between the model and the observed data. The fit indices—GFI (0.935), IFI (0.924), TLI (0.933), and CFI (0.941)—all exceed the recommended value of 0.9, further confirming a high level of structural consistency. Additionally, the RMSEA value of 0.051 is well below the acceptable limit of 0.08, indicating a satisfactory level of approximation error and reinforcing the overall model fit. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the research model meets all key criteria of statistical validity and provides a robust foundation for testing the proposed hypotheses (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Table 4 presents the reliability and convergent validity indicators for the constructs used in the research model.

Table 4. Reliability analysis

Research variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Artificial intelligence	0.841	0.825	0.698
Social unrest	0.812	0.814	0.674
Economic development	0.823	0.854	0.692
Foreign destinations	0.889	0.878	0.724

Source: Authors

The results show that all constructs meet the recommended thresholds, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.812 to 0.889, exceeding the minimum acceptable level of 0.7 and confirming internal reliability for each variable. Similarly, composite reliability (CR) values, ranging from 0.814 to 0.878, are all above the recommended threshold of 0.7, further supporting the consistency of the measurement scales. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceed 0.65, with the lowest being 0.674, which indicates that a substantial amount of variance is explained by the observed indicators. These results collectively confirm that the measurement model demonstrates strong psychometric properties and that the constructs are both reliable and valid for further structural analysis (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Table 5 presents the results of the structural model, estimating the effects of the independent variables on the choice of foreign tourist destinations.

Table 5. Sem model (dependent variable: foreign tourist destinations)

Independent variables	Original Sample	T test	P values
Artificial intelligence	0.359	5.897	0.000** sig
Social unrest	-0.315	5.125	0.000** sig
Economic development	0.335	5.574	0.000** sig

Source: Authors

Based on the path coefficients, t-values, and p-values, all three predictors show a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. Artificial intelligence exerts a positive and significant influence ($\beta = 0.359$; $t = 5.897$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that increased use of AI tools contributes positively to tourists' decision-making processes. Economic development also shows a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.335$; $t = 5.574$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that economically developed and stable destinations are more attractive to tourists. In contrast, social unrest has a negative but statistically significant impact ($\beta = -0.315$; $t = 5.125$; $p < 0.001$), implying that higher levels of instability and perceived risk discourage tourists from selecting such destinations. All p-values fall below the 0.001 threshold, confirming the high statistical reliability of the findings and all three proposed research hypotheses have been confirmed.

Conclusion

The results of the conducted research clearly highlight the importance of three key variables in the context of foreign tourist destination choice. Artificial intelligence (AI) has a positive influence on the intention to travel abroad, as it facilitates trip planning, organization, and the overall tourist experience by providing personalized information and reducing uncertainty in the decision-making process. Additionally, the economic development of the destination positively affects tourists' perception of quality and safety, further motivating them to visit such countries. On the other hand, a high level of social unrest generates fear and insecurity among tourists, particularly when the legal order and institutional stability are compromised, which negatively affects their intention to visit such destinations.

Theoretical implications of this study relate to the integration of technological, economic, political, and legal dimensions in understanding consumer behavior in tourism. The study contributes to the expansion of existing tourism behavior models by emphasizing the importance of contextual factors, such as social stability and legal security, alongside the growing influence of advanced technologies. *Practical implications* are relevant for policymakers and stakeholders in the tourism industry, who should recognize the importance of incorporating artificial intelligence into their services and digital platforms, as well as undertaking efforts to improve infrastructure and strengthen economic indicators. Furthermore, ensuring political stability, the rule of law, and social order represents a key prerequisite for the development of international tourism and the establishment of trust among potential tourists. *Limitations of the research* stem from the territorial focus of the sample, as the study was conducted solely in the Republic of Serbia. Moreover, the research is based on respondents' perceptions within the current context, which may change in response to future global or local developments. *Future studies* could focus on comparative analyses of these variables across different geographical and cultural settings, as well as longitudinal studies that track changes in tourist perceptions over time. Further research is also recommended on specific aspects of legal security and the role of regulatory policies in shaping destination image, along with analyses of interactions between technological tools (e.g., AI chatbots, algorithmic recommendations) and tourists' emotional responses during crisis situations.

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Veštačka inteligencija, socijalni nemiri i ekonomska razvijenost kao determinante izbora stranih turističkih destinacija

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Sažetak

Ova studija ispituje uticaj veštačke inteligencije (AI), socijalnih nemira i ekonomske razvijenosti kao ključnih determinanti u odabiru stranih turističkih destinacija. Posebno se analizira u kojoj meri turisti koriste alate veštačke inteligencije tokom procesa donošenja odluka, kao i uloga AI algoritama u olakšavanju izbora destinacije. Takođe, istraživanje razmatra na koji način socijalni nemiri, narušavanjem stabilnosti i pravnog poretka, utiču na preferencije turista, kao i efekat ekonomske razvijenosti na atraktivnost destinacije. Empirijsko istraživanje sprovedeno je u Republici Srbiji 2025. godine primenom anketne metode, dok su odgovori ispitanika analizirani pomoću statističkog softvera SmartPLS 4. Ukupan uzorak obuhvatio je 310 ispitanika, a rezultati ukazuju na to da sve analizirane varijable pozitivno utiču na izbor stranih turističkih destinacija. Integracijom tehnoloških, socio-političkih, pravnih i ekonomskih aspekata, ova studija pruža dragocene uvide za pružaoce turističkih i ugostiteljskih usluga u cilju optimizacije strategija i boljeg prilagođavanja promenljivom ponašanju turista. Istraživanje doprinosi rastućem korpusu znanja o tome kako savremene tehnologije i kontekstualni faktori oblikuju odluke o putovanjima, podržavajući time informisanije marketinške i menadžerske prakse u globalnoj turističkoj industriji.

Ključne reči: veštačka inteligencija, socijalni nemiri, ekonomska razvijenost, turizam, strane destinacije.