AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY, TOURISM AND LEISURE
2026, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 985--996
https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.800

AJHTL
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Research article

Artificial intelligence in smart tourism: A systematic literature review of privacy, ethics, and governance

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the issues of artificial intelligence, privacy, and ethics in the context of smart tourism and determines the governance mechanisms needed for adopting AI in smart tourism applications. The methodology employed for this research study was a systematic literature review using the PRISMA framework. A total of 622 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2019 and 2026 were screened using predefined eligibility criteria, resulting in 57 included studies. The data were analysed using descriptive analysis and deductive-inductive thematic analysis to determine the major themes and issues regarding the topic of smart tourism. As a result, six themes were determined to be crucial to the governance of AI in smart tourism applications: privacy calculus, data autonomy, and personalisation; trust, transparency, explainability, and disclosure; bias, fairness, and representational integrity; human–AI collaboration and workforce ethics; destination and ecosystem governance; and cybersecurity, safety, resilience, and risk management. The findings of the study indicate that most smart tourism AI research currently focuses on the concerns of tourists, employees, organisations, technology providers, and smart tourism destinations and their management. For smart tourism applications to adopt AI in a responsible manner, concerns regarding privacy, consent, explainability, fairness, human oversight, participation, security, accountability, and redress must be addressed. The findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge of the ethics of artificial intelligence in smart tourism by proposing an integrated framework for governing artificial intelligence within smart tourism applications over their entire lifecycle. This framework can assist the researchers, tourism organisations, destination managers, and policymakers when deciding on the governance of AI within smart tourism applications.

KEYWORDS

artificial intelligence; smart tourism; privacy; ethics; governance

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industries are experiencing a transformation due to the use of AI applications such as recommendation engines, conversational agents, service robots, predictive tools, generative systems, and smart-destination platforms. These applications enhance the tourism and hospitality experience for customers by providing better personalisation, efficiency, accessibility, sustainability, and coordination between tourism industry destinations (Abdelmalak, 2024; Rahmadian et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2026). These technologies depend on location records, transactions, preferences, biometric data, and behavioural data of tourism and hospitality industry customers. As a result, customers' acceptance, satisfaction, and trust in the tourism and hospitality industry may be impacted by these technologies (Afolabi et al., 2021; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022; Gong & Schroeder, 2022). Other concerns regarding the use of AI in the tourism and hospitality industry include biased ranking of tourism spots, misleading AI-generated content, monitoring of hospitality industry employees, stereotyping of cultures, cyber failures, and lack of accountability for automated decisions by AI technologies (Huang et al., 2026; Ivanov & Umbrello, 2021; Martins et al., 2026). Due to

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HOW TO CITE: Kumar, P. & Fukushige, A. (2026). Artificial intelligence in smart tourism: A systematic literature review of privacy, ethics, and governance. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 15(3), 985--996 https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.800

ISSN: 2223-814X (Online) | © 2026 AJHTL

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the nature of tourism and hospitality industry activities, technologies, and participants, the use of AI alone is not sufficient to ensure the responsible use of these technologies. The responsible use of AI within tourism and hospitality industries requires the consideration of factors such as transparency, human oversight, accountability, stakeholders, security, and regulation of these industries (Abdelmalak, 2025; Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Lin & Dong, 2026). Recent tourism-focused review evidence similarly shows that artificial intelligence is reshaping tourism business processes and performance, while also underscoring the need to evaluate its wider organisational and governance implications (Idris et al., 2026). Despite the benefits of AI-enabled smart tourism, the development and expansion of such technologies have created a governance problem. The various smart tourism systems collect and infer sensitive data from tourists and automate critical processes within the tourism industry. Several institutions are also involved in the tourism and AI technology industry. However, the safeguards in place to protect the data of tourists and smart tourism systems' users are fragmented and do not ensure that the automated processes are fair, secure, transparent, accountable, sensitive to cultural differences, and provide for an effective redress mechanism for tourists. Therefore, the problem to be addressed in this paper is the lack of an integrated governance perspective that can regulate smart tourism innovations while protecting tourists' privacy and rights and ensuring that organisations responsible for AI-enabled decisions remain accountable for their actions and decisions.

While various literature reviews exist on the topics of smart tourism, technology acceptance, data privacy and security, AI ethics, and digital destination governance, the discussions of AI, data privacy, and governance are often separated among different types of literature. Most specifically, consumer research has investigated these concepts in the context of privacy as an antecedent to some consumer behaviour, organisational research has explored trust and ethics in the context of employees and leadership, technical research has investigated data security and data intrusion, and research on governance has reviewed the institutions and coordination of stakeholders. Yet all of these actors are often connected; the vendor may produce the AI or recommendation system that is implemented by the platform and destination, used by the hotel and traveller, and the traveller's data was contributed by several of these same actors. Thus, studies by Afolabi et al. (2021), Femenia-Serra et al. (2022), and Gong & Schroeder (2022) indicate the necessity of reviewing these topics in connection with one another. This paper reviews the literature on artificial intelligence, privacy, and ethics in smart tourism. The challenges relating to privacy, fairness, trust, security, transparency, and accountability in artificial intelligence within tourism are reviewed and a governance framework is proposed. The research questions derived from the PICO framework are presented in the Methodology section.

Conceptual background

Smart tourism is the use of digital and intelligent technologies to help improve tourism for both tourists and tourism organisations themselves. Technologies like artificial intelligence are used in areas such as recommendation systems, chatbots, service robots, predictive analytics, digital twins, generative applications, and smart tourism platforms. These technologies allow for improved personalisation of tourists' experiences, improved operational efficiencies for tourism organisations, accessibility for tourists of all abilities, sustainable tourism practices, and improved delivery of tourist services. All of these technologies rely on data regarding tourists' behaviour and movements (Abdelmalak, 2024; Rahmadian et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2026). In an African smart-destination context, Nengovhela et al. (2020) validated smart-tourism technology attributes in the City of Tshwane, reinforcing the importance of destination-specific evaluation of smart tourism technologies within tourism ecosystems. Responsible AI involves ensuring that AI is developed and used in a manner that is transparent, fair, secure, accountable, inclusive, and overseen by humans. Therefore, governance in smart tourism must go beyond the algorithms themselves to the datasets, interfaces, the people who develop the technology, the purchasing arrangements for technology providers, the tourism industry itself, and the regulatory bodies that oversee these sectors (Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Ivanov & Umbrello, 2021; Lin & Dong, 2026). Many scholars view privacy through the lens of the privacy-calculus perspective, which evaluates the benefits and risks of data sharing. Despite the ability of tourists to calculate the risks and benefits of data sharing, some argue that tourists do not provide their informed consent to sharing their data, as there are no alternatives to sharing their data. Privacy should include the ability for tourists to share their data, access and correct their data, and even delete their data (Afolabi et al., 2021; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022; Gong & Schroeder, 2022). Trust and fairness are similarly multidimensional. Trust depends on a range of factors relating to reliability, transparency, explainability, security, human support, and contestability, while fairness relates to accessibility, cultural representation, workforce dignity, and equitable participation. Furthermore, each of these concerns requires some form of governance to ensure that AI systems are developed and retired in a manner that is responsible and ethical (Huang et al., 2026; Martins et al., 2026).

Methodology

Review design. The process of conducting this review followed the PRISMA model, with adaptations according to the characteristics of the available publication dataset. The dataset comprises 622 publication records from Scopus-indexed journals, and 19 bibliographic and publication-related fields for each record, including authors, article title, publication year, source journal, citation count, digital object identifier (DOI), publication stage, and Scopus EID. The publications included in the dataset were published between the years 2019 and 2026. Search strategy and information source. Given the nature of the research topic involving various disciplines such as AI, tourism, privacy, ethics, management, and information systems, Scopus was selected as the database that would be utilised for this research. Studies have shown that Scopus includes a wider variety of journals and citation-based fields than Web of Science databases (Falagas et al., 2008; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The fields within Scopus also allowed for the research study to use a specific search syntax that would help to ensure that the database was searched in a consistent manner. However, as with any scientific database, utilising only one database means that research could potentially exclude studies that may have been published in other databases available internationally. Thus, the findings of this literature review are limited to the studies indexed in Scopus, not to all of the potential publications on the topic that may have existed within the rest of the world. Eligibility criteria and study selection, the eligibility of the studies was determined through the criteria established prior to screening the database records. The criteria for inclusion were that the publication must have been published within the stated period, must be indexed in Scopus, must relate to the tourism or hospitality industry, and must include the use of some AI-enabled or "smart" technology and contain at least one of the listed dimensions related to ethics and governance. Publications that did not meet these criteria were eliminated from review. The process of screening the database proceeded through four main stages. First, all of the 622 records were imported and checked for duplicates; while some records have identical titles, there were no exact duplicates. Furthermore, while many databases have DOIs, some do not have a DOI for various reasons that could not be accounted for in this paper; thus, no records were removed due to missing DOIs. Second, all of the titles were screened for concepts related to the domain and issues with AI in tourism. Third, each of the records was reviewed manually to ensure that the terms used in the titles related to the topic of AI in tourism. Finally, the articles were coded according to the main themes and concepts within the articles and authors. After screening, 57 studies were eligible and 565 records were excluded. The majority of exclusions were due to a lack of connection between all three concept groups. Some records explored tourism governance but lacked the AI component, others explored the role of AI but not in relation to privacy or ethics, and others explored privacy in smart cities but not in relation to tourism. No further exclusions were made from the title-and-metadata based eligibility assessment. Figure 1 shows the full details of the identification, title-and-metadata based screening, eligibility and final inclusion process.

PICO framework. PICO—Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcome was used to establish the boundaries of the literature review, link the research questions to the eligibility criteria for the studies to be included in the review, and to ensure consistency in the selection of studies to be included in the review. While the framework was developed for health science research, it can be adapted to other types of research investigations if the relevant stakeholders in that area of study are made explicit (Schardt et al., 2007). In this research, the PICO framework was adapted to reflect AI-enabled smart tourism and the issues associated with such smart tourism projects. The population consisted of tourists, residents, employees, tourism organisations, destination bodies, museums, heritage institutions, and other ecosystem stakeholders. The intervention included recommendation systems, chatbots, service robots, generative AI, predictive analytics, big-data tools, smart platforms, and digital twins. The comparisons that have been covered in this paper include those of conventional services with alternative technologies and governance arrangements, as well as the differences between various applications, groups, destinations, and conditions under which these technologies and services are implemented. The possible outcomes of the technologies and methods that have been discussed include impacts upon concepts like privacy, data autonomy, fairness, transparency, explainability, trust, accountability, human oversight, cybersecurity, resilience, and governance.

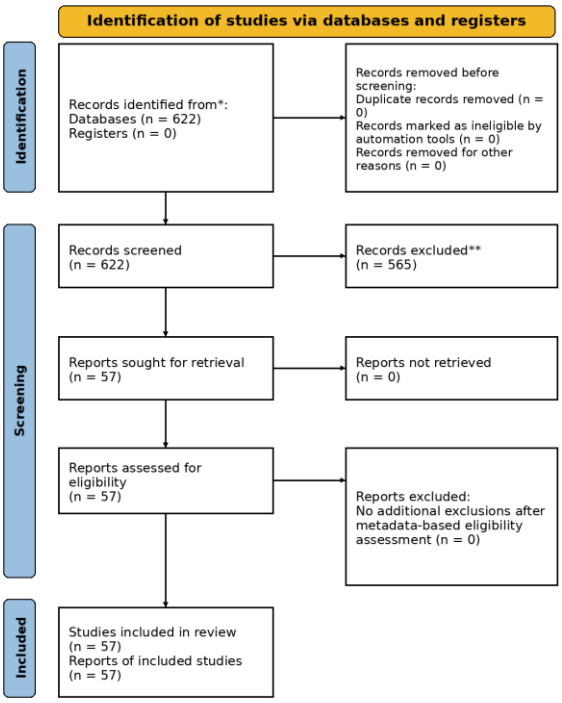

Figure 1. PRISMA-informed study-selection flow diagram.

Research questions. Based on the PICO elements, four research questions were formulated to guide study selection, thematic coding, analysis, and reporting. The questions connect the relevant smart tourism populations and contexts with AI-enabled interventions and the privacy, ethical, trust, security, and governance outcomes examined in the review.

RQ1: What privacy and data-governance concerns are emphasised in AI-enabled smart tourism?

RQ2: What ethical risks and trust mechanisms are associated with AI applications in tourism and hospitality?

RQ3: How are governance responsibilities distributed across technological, organisational, destination, and societal levels?

RQ4: What integrated framework can support responsible AI adoption in smart tourism?

Relevance and traceability assessment. The relevance-and-traceability appraisal procedure was adapted from those demonstrated by Chang et al. (2025) and Kitchenham & Charters (2007). Five criteria assessed tourism context, AI-technology focus, ethical-governance relevance, bibliographic traceability, and contribution to at least one research question. Each criterion was scored 1 when fully satisfied, 0.5 when partly satisfied, and 0 when not satisfied. Scores above 4 were classified as high relevance and traceability, scores from 3 to 4 as medium relevance and traceability, and scores below 3 as low relevance and traceability. Forty-eight studies were classified as having high relevance and traceability and nine as having medium relevance and traceability; none were classified as having low relevance and traceability. However, all of the studies that were classified as having medium relevance and traceability were relevant to the topic of AI in tourism and the governance of such tourism activities. Furthermore, all 57 studies had adequate publication details for identification. Data extraction and analysis. The analysis was performed in two phases. During the first phase, information from the 57 included records was entered into a table to allow for descriptive analysis. Variables included in the table were publication year, journal source, number of citations, publication status, open access status, authors, DOI number, and Scopus identification. Frequencies, percentages, cumulative frequencies, and citation-based descriptive statistics were performed to summarise the evidence base. Thematic analysis combined deductive responsible-AI codes—privacy, security, fairness, transparency, explainability, accountability, human oversight, trust, governance, and resilience—with inductive tourism-specific codes, including travel planning, personalisation, service robots, destination governance, cultural representation, workforce ethics, generative content, acceptance, and platform risk. Related codes were consolidated into six themes. Each article received one principal theme for descriptive counting, while secondary links were retained for interpretation.

Results

Of the 57 studies that were included in this review, it becomes evident that there has been an expansion of the research in the area of AI, privacy, and ethics in the context of smart tourism, particularly after the year of 2024. The majority of the early studies published on the topic investigated aspects like governance, privacy, data security, and the ethical implications of smart tourism. More recent studies, however, have expanded to investigate topics like generative AI, algorithmic bias, identity, the impact on tourism workers, cultural impacts, cybersecurity, and governance in smart tourism ecosystems (Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022; Lin & Dong, 2026). The studies were published in journals dedicated to tourism, hospitality, information systems, sustainability, management, ethics, and heritage tourism. While each of these journals published research on the topic of AI, privacy, and ethics in the context of smart tourism, their understanding of some of these concepts differed from one another. Accordingly, the results of these studies will be presented in both a general review of each of the studies, as well as in the six themes that relate to AI, privacy, and ethics in the smart tourism ecosystems. Recent studies also address intelligent automation, ESG-oriented tourism systems, rural and ice-and-snow tourism governance, responsible supply chains, and museum applications, illustrating the widening operational and institutional scope of the field (Eduarda & Wendhausen, 2025; Han et al., 2024; Hong & Kim, 2025; Kim et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2024; Tong et al., 2022).

Publication distribution by time frame

Table 1 presents the temporal distribution of the reviewed literature. No eligible studies were identified for 2019 or 2020. Three studies were published in each of 2021 and 2022, two in 2023, five in 2024, 16 in 2025, and 28 in 2026. Overall, 44 of the 57 studies (77.2%) were published between 2025 and 2026. The distribution indicates that the field is rapidly shifting from privacy and destination governance towards generative AI, algorithmic fairness, workforce issues, cybersecurity, and ecosystem governance.

Table 1. Distribution of publications over time (n = 57)

Publication year	Studies (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative n	Cumulative (%)
2021	3	5.3	3	5.3
2022	3	5.3	6	10.5
2023	2	3.5	8	14.0
2024	5	8.8	13	22.8
2025	16	28.1	29	50.9
2026	28	49.1	57	100.0

Journal distribution and disciplinary coverage

The 57 studies were published across 41 different journals, reflecting the multidisciplinary field of AI governance in tourism. Current Issues in Tourism had the highest number of studies (n = 5) followed by Tourism Management (n = 4). Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology, and Journal of Smart Tourism each contributed three studies. The rest were spread across tourism, hospitality, sustainability, information systems, ethics, cultural heritage, management, and technology journals. Table 2 shows the top journals and groups lower-frequency journals into an “Other journals” category for readability.

Table 2. Distribution of studies across leading source journals

Source journal/category	Studies (n)	Percentage (%)
Current Issues in Tourism	5	8.8
Tourism Management	4	7.0
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	3	5.3
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	3	5.3
Journal of Smart Tourism	3	5.3
Other journals (36 outlets)	39	68.4

Citation and publication profile

Of the 57 studies that were included in this analysis, the studies have garnered a total of 598 citations across all publications. The citation counts for each study ranged from 0 to 70 citations, with a mean citation count of 10.5 citations per study and a median of 2 citations per study. Thus, twenty studies (35.1% of the total) have not yet been cited by other studies in the field - a reflection of the relatively recent composition of the field. Table 3 presents the distribution of citations for each of the 57 studies, demonstrating the right-skewed distribution of citations; few studies receive high citation counts, yet there are a small number of studies with very high citation counts. The most highly cited studies relate to topics such as destination governance,

smart tourism and privacy, data privacy and security, digital twins and big-data governance, and the ethics of AI and robotization. Thus, these topics represent the foundation upon which the field is based during its initial formation.

Table 3. Citation distribution of the included studies

Scopus citations per study	Studies (n)	Percentage (%)
0	20	35.1
1–2	12	21.1
3–5	8	14.0
6–10	3	5.3
11–20	5	8.8
More than 20	9	15.8

Relevance and traceability distribution of included records

Of the 57 records included in the analysis, 48 (84.2%) achieved a high relevance-and-traceability score and 9 (15.8%) achieved a medium score; none received a low score. Every record met the eligibility requirements for tourism or hospitality context, AI-enabled technology, and ethical-governance relevance. Medium-scoring records were retained because they remained relevant to governance-related concepts and contained sufficient bibliographic information for identification and analysis.

Thematic synthesis

The 57 studies were grouped into six overlapping themes: privacy calculus, data autonomy, and personalisation; trust, transparency, explainability, and disclosure; bias, fairness, and representational integrity; human–AI collaboration and workforce ethics; destination and ecosystem governance; and cybersecurity, safety, resilience, and risk management. Collectively, they show a shift from technology acceptance and individual privacy towards socio-technical governance, institutional responsibility, stakeholder coordination, cultural representation, employee wellbeing, and operational risk. Table 4 presents the distribution of the 57 studies across the six primary themes, together with their central concerns, representative applications, and corresponding governance responses.

Table 4. Quantified thematic synthesis of the included literature (primary-theme coding)

Theme	Studies (n)	Share (%)	Core concern	Representative applications	Governance response
Privacy calculus, data autonomy, and personalisation	16	28.1	Tracking, profiling, control, secondary use, and personalisation	Smart destinations, IoT, travel planning, platforms, and AI personalisation	Data minimisation, meaningful choice, privacy-enhancing design, and collective safeguards
Trust, transparency, explainability, and disclosure	6	10.5	Disclosure, confidence, contestability, and responsibility	Robots, recommendations, reviews, and AI-supported decisions	Layered disclosure, understandable explanations, human escalation, and clear accountability
Bias, fairness, and representational integrity	6	10.5	Discrimination, stereotyping, visibility, and cultural distortion	Travel planners, review summaries, heritage interpretation, and recommendation systems	Bias audits, community validation, provenance, correction, and appeal
Human–AI collaboration and workforce ethics	9	15.8	Autonomy, surveillance, job quality, competence, and identity disclosure	Frontline service, robots, supply chains, leadership, and managerial decision support	Training, worker participation, human oversight, accountability, and decent-work safeguards
Destination and ecosystem governance	15	26.3	Coordination, public-private power, data sharing, participation, and institutional responsibility	Smart destinations, digital twins, cultural heritage, biodiversity, and algorithmic ecosystems	Common standards, multi-stakeholder bodies, public reporting, and fair value distribution
Cybersecurity, safety, resilience, and risk management	5	8.8	Breaches, system failure, harmful advice, vendor dependence, and operational risk	Platforms, IoT, generative AI, cloud systems, museums, and destination management	Secure lifecycle, incident coordination, fallback procedures, and continuous monitoring

Figure 2 integrates the six themes into an ethical AI governance framework in which privacy, transparency, fairness, human-AI collaboration, ecosystem governance, and cybersecurity jointly support tourist trust, ethical personalisation, inclusive service delivery, organisational accountability, destination resilience, and sustainable smart tourism development.

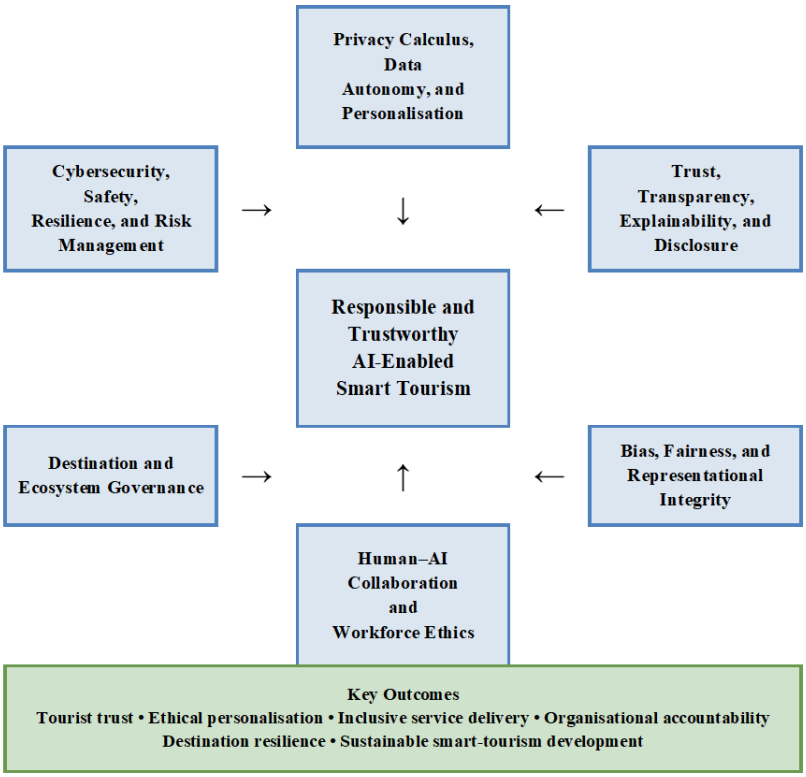

Figure 2. Integrated ethical AI governance framework for smart tourism

Privacy calculus, data autonomy, and personalisation

Privacy is central to smart tourism because personalised services depend on tourists' data. Acceptance of such services does not necessarily constitute informed consent, particularly when data are collected continuously or combined across platforms and devices (Afolabi et al., 2021; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022; Gong & Schroeder, 2022). Responsible personalisation requires data minimisation, clear purposes, meaningful choice, a non-personalised alternative, and effective rights to access, correct, delete, or restrict personal data. Related research on AI-powered travel planning, hospitality personalisation, smart-technology risk, personalisation paradoxes, and platform value further shows that travellers accept data use only when they perceive meaningful control and proportionate benefits (Abduljabbar et al., 2025; Chauhan & Jishtu, 2026; Choe & Si Tou, 2025; Duan et al., 2026; Yu et al., 2026).

Trust, transparency, explainability, and disclosure

Trust should be justified rather than automatic. Tourism systems must disclose automated interaction and AI-generated content, explain data practices and recommendation logic, identify accountable organisations, and provide human escalation and redress (Ma et al., 2026; Ngan et al., 2025; Su et al., 2026). Explanations should meet stakeholder needs: tourists require understandable reasons and correction options, while managers and regulators need documentation, performance information, and risk records. Trust is also shaped by cultural fit, perceived benefits and concerns, emotional responses, and the ethical character of AI-personalised tourism marketing (Araújo-Vila & Toubes, 2026; Guo & Au, 2026; Mohd Amin et al., 2026; Zheng et al., 2026).

Bias, fairness, and representational integrity

Algorithms can exhibit inequalities by favouring some destinations over others, specific cultures, languages, or businesses. The reasons for such biases are numerous and include, for example, the difference in investments made into certain groups versus others, the representation of specific languages in the algorithms training data, and the participation of certain groups in the platforms that utilise these algorithms (Huang et al., 2026; Ivanov & Umbrello, 2021; Martins et al., 2026). Generative AI can intensify these risks by fabricating or distorting cultural and heritage information. Platforms should therefore ensure traceable provenance, clear disclosure of sponsored or AI-generated material, verifiability, correction mechanisms, and accessible appeal procedures. Fairness also requires services that accommodate visual, hearing, mobility, cognitive, and language needs and involve affected stakeholders in system design and evaluation. Studies of medical-travel algorithms, generative travel planners, AI-generated review summaries, and public

dialogue about AI bias reinforce the need for continuous fairness assessment and accessible correction mechanisms (Alam, 2025; Heeg & Avraamidou, 2026; Jia et al., 2026; Shi et al., 2026).

Human–AI collaboration and workforce ethics

Robots, chatbots, scheduling tools, and generative assistants may reduce repetitive work but can intensify surveillance, restrict discretion, restructure roles, and create displacement concerns (Choubey et al., 2025; Hu & Min, 2025; Sharma & Mattila, 2026). Responsible adoption should preserve customer choice and human assistance while protecting employee privacy, dignity, autonomy, participation, job quality, and access to reskilling. Contracts should assign responsibility for monitoring, incidents, updates, escalation, documentation, redress, and training. Workforce-focused studies further emphasise ethical values, employee wellbeing, leadership networks, competency development, and organisational responsibility as conditions for responsible adoption (Arif et al., 2026; Fang et al., 2026; Khan & Soomro, 2025; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2025; Soomro & Khan, 2025).

Destination and ecosystem governance

Smart-tourism governance goes beyond the firms themselves but includes all aspects of tourism such as transportation, lodging, attractions, payments, sensors, cultural institutions, platforms, and services. While the use of algorithms can enhance tourism, it can also create challenges in terms of accountability (Abdelmalak, 2025; Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Lin & Dong, 2026). Governance for destination should include requirements for sharing data, procuring goods and services, ensuring interoperability among systems, evaluating impact, auditing systems, and reporting on incidents. Governance should include members from the business, tech, worker, resident, heritage, and civil society sectors. It is crucial for these sectors to engage with and have a voice in the governance given the way in which AI can impact these areas. Sustainability objectives should inform the design of the system and governance, its monitoring, feedback, and improvements. These insights can inform the establishment of a lifecycle approach to data governance, from the initial collection of that data to its retirement. In each of these stages, data can be governed in a manner that is lawful, ethical, and responsible. Such an approach will necessarily be continuous, given the way in which technologies, regulations, and the requirements of the stakeholders will evolve over time. Such an approach can be informed by studies of cultural heritages, synthetic tourism experiences, biodiversity, sustainable tourism destinations, community acceptance of tourism developments, and environmental governance in the tourism industry (Ali Mari & Ahmad, 2026; Bravo-Jaico et al., 2026; Bugarčić et al., 2026; Christou et al., 2025; Shaikhon, 2025; Su & Zakaria, 2026).

Cybersecurity, safety, resilience, and risk management

Cybersecurity cannot be separated from privacy and ethics in the smart tourism industry due to the interconnected nature of its components. A lack of cybersecurity in any of these components puts the tourist experience and data at risk. Therefore, steps must be taken to ensure the protection of all these components as part of the tourist experience (Ngan et al., 2026; Omar et al., 2025; Tiwari et al., 2024). Any AI-generated advice regarding the routes, health, weather, or accessibility of these destinations is also likely to require verification. The concept of resilience in this context also guarantees the preservation of users' privacy, fairness, accessibility, continuity, accountability, and redress in the face of disruption. Other studies have investigated aspects of this concept, such as intrusion detection systems, supervision of generative-AI systems, data security, machine unlearning, corporate risk resilience, and technology-risk management (Dziurakh et al., 2024; Gao & Wang, 2025; Katits & Fejes, 2026; Khan & Singh, 2026; Montañés Del Río & Rodríguez Cornejo, 2026; Nieves-Pavón et al., 2026).

Discussion by research question

RQ1 shows that privacy in smart tourism extends beyond individual concern to tracking, profiling, secondary use, cross-platform exchange, and destination surveillance. Governance should combine data minimisation, purpose limitation, user control, accountable sharing, and collective safeguards, moving from a narrow privacy-calculus perspective towards data autonomy and lifecycle responsibility (Afolabi et al., 2021; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022; Tiwari et al., 2024). RQ2 identifies opaque recommendations, undisclosed automation, misleading generative content, discrimination, stereotyping, and unclear responsibility as major ethical risks. Calibrated trust depends on reliable performance, disclosure, understandable explanations, security, accessible design, human support, provenance, correction, and complaint procedures (Huang et al., 2026; Ivanov & Umbrello, 2021; Martins et al., 2026). RQ3 demonstrates that responsibility is distributed across developers, tourism firms, destination authorities, vendors, regulators, and independent bodies. Each lifecycle stage should specify the responsible actor, decision authority, documentation, reporting duty, and

escalation pathway so that distributed governance does not become diluted accountability (Abdelmalak, 2025; Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Lin & Dong, 2026). RQ4 synthesises the six themes into two complementary governance outputs. Figure 2 defines the substantive dimensions of responsible AI in smart tourism: privacy calculus, data autonomy, and personalisation; trust, transparency, explainability, and disclosure; bias, fairness, and representational integrity; human–AI collaboration and workforce ethics; destination and ecosystem governance; and cybersecurity, safety, resilience, and risk management. Figure 3 operationalises these dimensions through six stages of the AI lifecycle. The AI lifecycle begins with the collection of data and obtaining consent from the relevant parties to ensure that the AI system is responsibly developed. The collected data can then be used to develop the AI system in a way that is fair, accessible, and secure. Following its development, the AI system can be validated and assessed for potential risks before its deployment. At the deployment stage, the AI system is deployed into live environments, but with full disclosure of its existence, the ability of individuals to exercise choice in its use, and with human oversight. Following its deployment, the AI system can be continually monitored and audited. Finally, feedback from the system and its deployment can be used to make corrections and improve the AI system. At each stage, organisations should identify the responsible actor, required documentation, oversight mechanism, and escalation pathway. The framework therefore supports innovation by making governance continuous, participatory, and accountable rather than a one-time compliance exercise (Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Ivanov & Umbrello, 2021; Lin & Dong, 2026). Taken together, Figures 2 and 3 integrate the substantive principles of responsible AI governance with their implementation across the AI lifecycle, emphasising continuous accountability, stakeholder participation, oversight, correction, and redress.

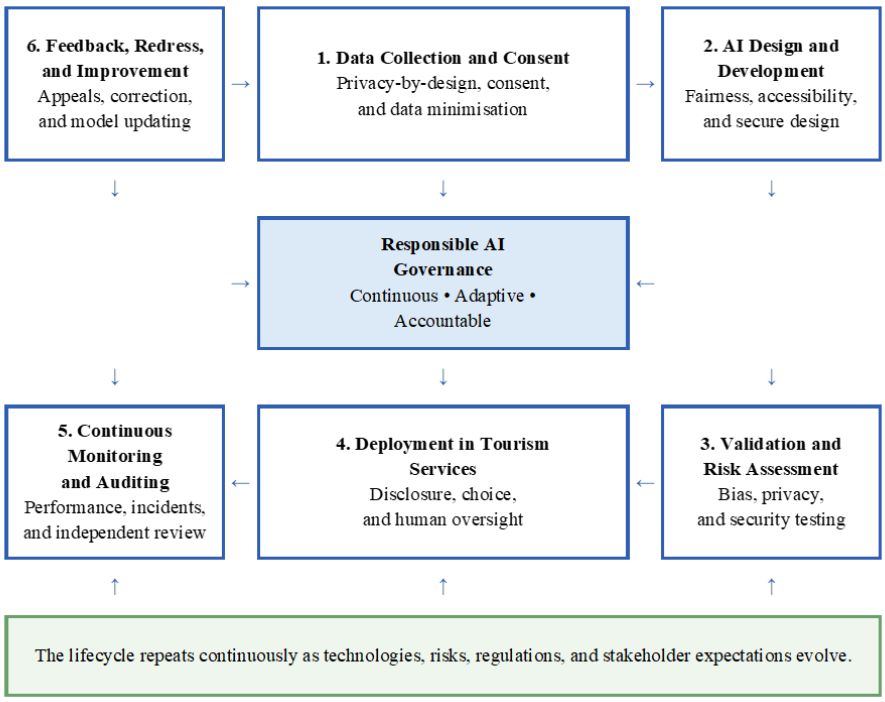

Figure 3. Responsible AI governance lifecycle for smart tourism

Implications and further research

The article presents a theoretical shift from explaining the acceptance of technological innovations to discussing responsible AI governance in smart tourism. It argues that the concepts of privacy, transparency, trust, fairness, cybersecurity, and human oversight should not be analysed separately in AI governance but as interconnected aspects of the smart tourism system. These findings extend the perspective on privacy by examining tourists' data sharing through the lens of technological interface, organisational power, data alternatives, and the use of their data for secondary uses. The study extends the perspective on trust by demonstrating that trust in smart tourism applications depends on the transparency, explainability, security, support from tour operators, the ability to contest smart tourism applications' decisions, and who is responsible for their operation. Fairness and justice in smart tourism applications are expanded to include accessibility, cultural representation of operators, the dignity of the workforce, justice in the destinations tourists visit, and ensuring that all tourists have an equal opportunity to enjoy smart tourism applications. Figures 2 and 3 display the findings of the study in the form of a framework and lifecycle model of

responsible AI governance in smart tourism applications that extend from data collection and design through validation, deployment, continuous monitoring, feedback, redress, and improvement.

The review suggests that responsible AI in smart tourism requires coordinated action at organisational, destination, and policy levels. Tourism organisations should establish committees or appoint officers responsible for AI systems to ensure that their deployment meets certain requirements. All AI systems should have records that detail who created, supplied, approved, operated, and reviewed those systems. Travellers should be able to provide consent for the use of these systems, understand the reasons for their use, opt out of those systems, if possible, via non-digital means, and challenge the outcomes of those systems. Employees should be protected from the effects of automation through training, consultation, and transition plans. The authorities responsible for the destination should also work to create common standards for all entities involved in the tourism industry. Policymakers should develop regulations that connect AI with issues such as data protection, consumer law, labour, competition, disability and heritage protection. Audits and public participation can ensure that these regulations accompany smart tourism innovations. However, this review has several limitations. First, it was limited to Scopus-indexed journal articles, so relevant studies in other databases, regional journals, conference proceedings, books, and policy reports may have been missed. Second, the inclusion of newly published and in-press studies means that citation patterns remain unstable. Future research should use multiple databases and full-text analysis, compare regulatory and cultural contexts, and examine tourists, residents, employees, firms, and destination authorities. Longitudinal and experimental studies should test whether privacy-by-design, explainability, bias auditing, human oversight, and redress improve trust and reduce harm. Further attention is also required for generative AI, deepfakes, inter-platform data sharing, accessibility, workforce surveillance, and community participation in destination governance.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is transforming the concept of smart tourism. The literature reviewed demonstrates that the topic of responsible AI adoption cannot be addressed through addressing any of the concerns regarding privacy, trust, fairness, transparency, cybersecurity, and human oversight alone. Each of these concerns is related to others and impacts multiple levels of the smart tourism phenomenon. Literature indicates that the concept of privacy should relate to data autonomy. Trust should be developed through transparency, explainability, security, human oversight, contestability, and accountability. Concepts of fairness relate to accessibility, diversity, non-discrimination, dignity in the workplace, justice in tourism destinations, and fair access to tourism experiences and services. The review also contributes a framework and model for responsible AI in smart tourism. Figure 2 presents the different dimensions of responsible AI governance, while Figure 3 presents how these dimensions should be applied to AI-enabled smart tourism systems throughout its lifecycle. Responsible development of smart tourism necessitates the consideration and action of multiple groups, including tourism organisations, technology companies, tourism destinations, policymakers, employees, tourists, and residents and communities within those destinations. Furthermore, the success of smart tourism should not be determined by the amount of technology that is implemented into tourism destinations and experiences, but instead by the considerations of whether the artificial intelligence is applied in a way that is proportional, transparent, secure, fair, and respectful of the dignity and value of the individuals involved in the tourism experience.

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