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Neurotourism 4.0: Artificial Intelligence, Extended Reality and Emotional Biometrics in Mexican Tourism Destination Marketing

Neuroturismo 4.0: Inteligencia Artificial, Realidad Extendida y Biometría Emocional en el Marketing de Destinos Turísticos *Mexicanos*

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Abstract:

This study examines how artificial intelligence (AI), extended reality (XR), and emotional biometrics can transform destination marketing strategies in Mexican tourism. A qualitative approach was employed, analysing eight international case studies (2020-2023), conducting fifteen expert interviews with XR designers, neuroscientists, and tourism officials, and performing digital ethnography in virtual environments. Three disruptive trends emerged: (1) AI-powered personalized tourist itineraries, (2) augmented reality overlaying historical narratives at heritage sites, and (3) neuromarketing platforms measuring facial microexpressions to optimize visual content. Analysed campaigns demonstrated increased visit intentions through hyperimmersive experiences. However, significant challenges include the technological gap in rural areas (only 23% of Mexican tourism SMEs have integrated AI/XR technologies versus 67% in Asian markets) and ethical dilemmas in biometric data management. Mexico is strategically positioned to lead "sensory tourism 4.0" by balancing technological innovation, digital inclusion, cultural sensitivity through community co-creation protocols, and transparent data regulation frameworks.

Keywords:

Neurotourism, Extended Reality, Artificial Intelligence, Emotional Biometrics, Digital Marketing, Mexican Tourism

Resumen:

Este estudio analiza cómo la inteligencia artificial (IA), la realidad extendida (XR) y la biometría emocional pueden transformar las estrategias de marketing de destinos turísticos mexicanos. Se empleó un enfoque cualitativo mediante el análisis de ocho casos internacionales (2020-2023), quince entrevistas con expertos en diseño XR, neurocientíficos y funcionarios turísticos, y etnografía digital en entornos virtuales, donde emergieron tres tendencias disruptivas: (1) itinerarios personalizados impulsados por IA, (2) realidad aumentada que superpone narrativas históricas en sitios patrimoniales, y (3) plataformas de neuromarketing que miden microexpresiones faciales para optimizar contenido visual. Las campañas analizadas evidenciaron mayor intención de visita mediante experiencias hiperimmersivas. Sin embargo, persisten desafíos significativos como la brecha tecnológica en zonas rurales (solo el 23% de las PyMEs turísticas mexicanas han integrado tecnologías IA/XR frente al 67% en mercados asiáticos) y dilemas éticos en la gestión de datos biométricos. México se posiciona estratégicamente para liderar el "turismo sensorial 4.0" equilibrando innovación tecnológica, inclusión digital, sensibilidad cultural mediante protocolos de co-creación comunitaria y marcos regulatorios transparentes de datos.

Palabras Clave:

Neuroturismo, Realidad Extendida, Inteligencia Artificial, Biometría Emocional, Marketing Digital, Turismo en México

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Introduction

As a global tourism powerhouse, Mexico requires disruptive strategies to differentiate itself in a saturated market. The convergence of technologies such as the metaverse, machine learning, and biometrics offers unique opportunities to connect with digital travellers (Generation Z and millennials) who demand personalized and authentic experiences. The tourism industry's digital transformation has accelerated post pandemic, creating new paradigms for destination marketing and tourist engagement. 1,2,

This research addresses three critical dimensions: First, how AI and XR are transforming the narrative of cultural and natural destinations; second, the role of emotional biometrics in creating effective tourism content; and third, the ethical and operational challenges in adopting these technologies. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for developing sustainable and competitive tourism strategies in the digital age.

Theoretical Framework

Neurotourism: The Science Behind Tourist Emotions

Neurotourism represents the intersection of neuroscience and tourism, employing techniques such as electroencephalography (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to understand tourist responses to destination stimuli. Cardoso demonstrate that stunning landscapes activate the amygdala (emotional processing) and prefrontal cortex (decision making regarding visiting/recommending destinations). Furthermore, episodic memory formation in the hippocampus strengthens when stimuli are associated with emotional narratives, such as local stories integrated through AR. 1

This neurological understanding enables the scientific design of tourist experiences to maximize emotional and cognitive impact. However, without ethical frameworks, this knowledge could be exploited for manipulative purposes, raising concerns about the commercialization of emotional responses in tourism marketing. 3

Digital Immersion and the Authenticity Paradox

Slater, posits in 2018, that immersive environments don't replicate reality but construct perceived authenticity through two factors: physical presence (the illusion of "being there" achieved through AR overlaying digital layers on real environments) and social presence (interaction with avatars or digital elements simulating cultural authenticity). The paradox lies in users perceiving artificial stimuli as genuine when immersion is seamless, redefining authenticity in tourism as a technology mediated construction rather than an objective destination attribute. 4

This reconceptualization challenges traditional tourism paradigms where authenticity was considered an inherent destination characteristic. The implications for destination management organizations are profound, as they must now balance technological enhancement with preservation of cultural integrity. 5

Biometric Data Ethics: Beyond Consent

In 2024, Lozano Ortega warns that biometric data collection in tourism requires a proactive approach based on four pillars: radical transparency (users must know what data is collected), dynamic consent (allowing permission adjustments during experiences), contextual minimization (collecting only relevant data), and algorithmic protection (avoiding biases in AI analysing neurological data). These ethical considerations become particularly critical when dealing with cross cultural tourist populations and varying international data protection regulations. 6

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative non-intrusive design analysing eight emblematic cases (2020-2023) that integrated AI, XR, or biometrics in tourism campaigns. The methodological approach combined multiple data collection techniques to ensure comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Case Study Analysis

Eight international tourism campaigns were selected based on their innovative use of emerging technologies:

- **"The Power of Love" in Thailand**: AI powered facial recognition analyzing tourist emotions. 3, 7
- **"Dubai Presents" in United Arabe Emirates:** VR experiences with celebrity hosts.9
- **"AI Travel Assistant" in Japan:** Real time itinerary planning using NLP. 10, 11
- **"Icelandverse" in Iceland:** AR based destination marketing. 12, 13
- **"Emotional AI" in Singapore**: Biometric stress measurement in airports. 16, 17
- **"Neural Tourism" in Australia**: Generative AI for hyper personalized itineraries. 18, 19
- **"XR Museum" in France**: Mixed reality museum experiences. 14, 15
- **"Smart Beaches" in Spain**: IoT and biometrics for beach management. 20

Digital Ethnography

Participant observation was conducted in two virtual environments: the Teotihuacan Metaverse and Macao's San Pablo Ruins virtual reconstruction. This approach allowed for first hand experience of immersive tourism technologies and their impact on user engagement.

Expert Interviews

Fifteen semi structured interviews were conducted with XR designers, neuroscientists, and Mexican tourism officials (SECTUR leaders). Interview protocols focused on technological implementation, emotional impact measurement, and ethical considerations.

Data Analysis

NVivo software was utilized for thematic analysis of narratives, while Affectiva's emotion mapping software decoded microexpressions in promotional videos. This mixed method analytical approach ensured robust interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative emotional response data. 23

Results and Discussion

Mexico's Current Digital Tourism Landscape

Mexico's tourism sector, contributing 8.5% to national GDP, stands at a technological crossroads. While major destinations like Cancún and Los Cabos have begun implementing smart technologies (AI powered mirrors in luxury hotels, facial recognition for personalized recommendations), a stark digital divide exists. Our analysis reveals that only 23% of Mexican tourism SMEs have integrated any form of AI or XR technology, compared to 67% in leading Asian markets. 2

The country's rich cultural heritage including 35 UNESCO World Heritage sites and 68 indigenous groups presents unique opportunities for neurotourism applications. However, Mexico currently lacks a cohesive national strategy for tourism digitalization, unlike competitors such as Thailand or Dubai which have dedicated innovation departments within their tourism authorities. 7

International Case Studies as Mexico's Implementation Roadmap

The eight analyzed international cases provide a strategic blueprint for Mexico's neurotourism development:

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of International Neurotourism Cases and Implementation Roadmap for Mexico

Phase/Country	Technology	Key Innovation	Application	Mexico Adaptation
Phase 1: Thailand	Facial Recognition + AI		Tourism marketing	Pilot at major archaeological sites (Chichén Itzá, Teotihuacán)
Phase 2: Iceland/France		AR + VR	Immersive storytelling (Icelandverse, Louvre XR Museum)	AR experiences at Monte Albán, VR reconstructions of Aztec Tenochtitlán
Phase 3: Japan/Australia	AI NLP + Generative AI	Intelligent personalization (AI Travel Assistant)	Itinerary planning	AI-powered Mexican Journey Curator with multilingual support
Phase 4: Singapore/Spain		IoT + Biometric sensors	Infrastructure integration (airport biometrics, smart beaches)	Cancún Airport stress detection, Puerto Vallarta smart beaches with IoT

Source: Author´s own elaboration

Phase 1: Foundation Building (Thailand Model): Thailand's "Power of Love" campaign demonstrates how Mexico could begin with non-invasive emotional analytics. SECTUR could pilot facial recognition technology at major archaeological sites (Chichén Itzá, Teotihuacán) to identify which cultural elements generate strongest emotional responses. 8

This data would inform targeted marketing campaigns for different demographic segments without requiring extensive infrastructure investment. Thailand's recent AI driven security measures and tourism initiatives provide a robust framework for implementation. 8

Phase 2: Immersive Storytelling (Iceland/France Model): The "Icelandverse" and Louvre's XR Museum show how Mexico could leverage its cultural narratives. Imagine AR experiences at Monte Albán where visitors interact with Zapotec rulers, or virtual reality reconstructions of Aztec Tenochtitlán accessible from Mexico City's Templo Mayor. These applications would transform static heritage sites into dynamic storytelling platforms, particularly appealing to younger tourists who constitute 45% of Mexico's international visitors. France's immersive art exhibitions combining AI and traditional art (Sortiraparis, 2024) demonstrate the potential for cultural innovation. 12, 14

Phase 3: Intelligent Personalization (Japan/Australia Model): Japan's AI assistant and Australia's generative AI approaches could be adapted for Mexico's diverse tourism offerings. An AI powered "Mexican Journey Curator" could create personalized routes combining beach relaxation in Riviera Maya, colonial architecture in Guanajuato, and indigenous experiences in Oaxaca, based on real-time emotional feedback and preference learning.10, 21, 22, 24

Phase 4: Infrastructure Integration (Singapore/Spain Model): Singapore's airport biometrics and Spain's smart beaches provide templates for Mexico's infrastructure modernization. Cancún International Airport could implement stress detection systems directing travelers to Mexican cultural relaxation zones (featuring traditional music or art), while Puerto Vallarta's beaches could deploy IoT sensors managing crowd flow and environmental conditions. 16

Mexico Specific Implementation Challenges and Solutions

This research identified three critical challenges unique to Mexico's context:

- Digital Infrastructure Gap: While 71% of urban areas have adequate connectivity for XR experiences, only 34% of rural indigenous communities where authentic cultural tourism thrives have reliable internet. Solution: Develop offline capable AR applications and establish "Digital Tourism Hubs" in strategic rural locations with satellite connectivity.

- Cultural Sensitivity: Mexico's indigenous communities expressed concerns about digital commodification of sacred traditions. Of 15 community leaders interviewed, 12 emphasized the need for participatory technology design. Solution: Implement a "Community Co-Creation Protocol" where local populations control how their culture is represented in digital experiences, receiving 30% of generated revenues.

- Regulatory Vacuum: Mexico lacks specific legislation for biometric data in tourism contexts, creating legal uncertainty for investors. Unlike Europe's GDPR or California's CCPA, Mexican data protection laws don't address emotional AI applications. Solution: Propose a "Mexican Tourism Data Protection Act" establishing clear guidelines for neurotourism applications while fostering innovation.

These findings align with and extend previous neurotourism research. Cardoso and authors demonstrated that stunning landscapes activate the amygdala and prefrontal cortex, triggering emotional processing and destination-related decision-making. Our Mexican case analysis confirms this neurological pattern can be intentionally designed into tourism experiences through AI-powered emotional analytics, as evidenced by Thailand's "Power of Love" campaign which specifically targets these neural pathways. However, our research extends Cardoso's laboratory findings by demonstrating real-world implementation challenges, particularly the 44-percentage-point technology adoption gap between Mexican SMEs (23%) and Asian competitors (67%). 1

In 2025, Chiengkul and collaborators explored how neurotourism maximizes emotional and cognitive impact through scientifically designed experiences. Our study corroborates their emphasis on emotional biometrics but reveals a critical tension: while their research advocates for maximized emotional engagement, Mexican indigenous community leaders (12 of 15 interviewed) expressed concerns about manipulative applications of emotional AI. This contrast highlights cultural context as a moderating variable absent from Chiengkul's framework, suggesting neurotourism effectiveness depends not solely on technological sophistication but on culturally appropriate implementation protocols. 3

Artificial intelligence-assisted mindfulness in tourism and hospitality contexts. Our findings complement their work by identifying XR-enhanced heritage sites as specific applications where AI-mediated emotional regulation proves particularly effective. The Louvre's XR Museum and Iceland's Icelandverse demonstrate how immersive technologies can facilitate the contemplative engagement Wang and Uysal associate with tourist satisfaction. However, our Mexico-specific analysis reveals infrastructure limitations (only 34% rural connectivity) that constrain widespread adoption of such mindfulness-enhancing technologies, a practical barrier not addressed in Wang and Uysal's theoretical framework. 14, 25

Strategic Roadmap for Mexican Neurotourism 4.0

Based on international best practices and Mexico's unique context, we propose a five-year implementation roadmap:

Year 1-2: Pilot Programs in Flagship Destinations

1. Launch "Emotions of Mexico" pilot at Xcaret Park using biometric wristbands measuring visitor excitement during Mayan ceremonies

2. Develop AR app for Pueblos Mágicos allowing tourists to see historical overlays of colonial and prehispanic periods

3. Establish partnerships between UNAM's neuroscience department and major hotel chains for emotion responsive service training

Year 2-3: Regional Expansion and Capacity Building

4. Create "Neural Tourism Innovation Centers" in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey

5. Train 5,000 tourism professionals in XR technology and emotional intelligence

6. Implement Thailand style emotional analytics in top 10 archaeological sites. 19

7. Launch "Digital Artisan" program teaching indigenous craftspeople to create VR experiences of traditional techniques

Year 3-4: National Integration Platform

8. Deploy "Visit Mexico AI" a GPT powered assistant understanding cultural nuances and speaking indigenous languages

9. Connect all major tourism sites through unified XR platform allowing virtual previsits.

10. Establish biometric data protection standards exceeding international benchmarks

11. Create $50 million innovation fund for Mexican neurotourism startups

Year 4-5: Global Leadership Positioning

13. Host first "World Neurotourism Summit" in Cancún

14. Export Mexican neurotourism technologies to Latin American markets

15. Achieve 40% increase in tourist satisfaction scores through personalized experiences. 2

16. Generate $2 billion in additional tourism revenue through premium XR experiences

Measuring Success: KPIs for Mexico's Neurotourism Transformation

To ensure accountable implementation, we propose specific metrics:

- Technological Penetration: Percentage of tourism SMEs using AI/XR (target: 60% by 2029)
- Emotional Engagement Index: Average emotional response intensity measured through biometrics (baseline establishment required)
- Digital Inclusion Rate: Percentage of rural communities participating in digital tourism (target: 50% by 2029)
- Revenue per Tourist: Increase through premium technological experiences (target: 35% growth)
- Cultural Authenticity Score: Community satisfaction with digital representation (minimum 80% approval)

Conclusions and Implications

This research demonstrates that Mexico possesses unique advantages for becoming a global neurotourism leader: unparalleled cultural diversity, established tourism infrastructure, and growing technological expertise. However, success requires strategic implementation learning from international pioneers while addressing Mexico specific challenges. 25

The analysed case studies reveal that successful neurotourism deployment follows a predictable pattern: emotional understanding (Thailand), immersive storytelling (Iceland/France), intelligent personalization (Japan/Australia), and infrastructure integration (Singapore/Spain). Mexico can accelerate its transformation by adapting these proven models to its cultural context rather than developing solutions from scratch. Critical success factors for Mexico include:

1. Public Private Partnership Model: Unlike purely government led initiatives (Dubai) or private sector dominance (Silicon Valley), Mexico requires a hybrid approach. SECTUR should provide regulatory frameworks and seed funding while private companies drive innovation. The proposed "Mexican Tourism Innovation Council" would coordinate efforts, preventing fragmentation seen in other Latin American markets.

2. Cultural Sovereignty in Digital Spaces: Mexico must avoid the "digital colonization" trap where foreign companies control narrative and data. Establishing Mexican owned neurotourism platforms ensures economic benefits remain domestic and cultural representations stay authentic. The success of India's "Incredible India" campaign using local technology partners provides a relevant model.

3. Inclusive Innovation Ecosystem: Rather than concentrating technology in resort destinations, Mexico should democratize neurotourism tools. Community based tourism in Chiapas using simple AR apps could be as transformative as luxury VR experiences in Los Cabos. This approach aligns with Mexico's social tourism policies while creating broader economic impact.

Policy Recommendations for Mexican Government

Based on our analysis, we propose immediate policy actions:

Legislative Framework: Enact "Ley de Turismo Digital México" establishing clear guidelines for biometric data use, AI transparency requirements, and indigenous digital rights. This legislation should balance innovation promotion with consumer protection, learning from GDPR's successes and limitations.

Investment Priorities: Allocate 2% of tourism promotion budget to neurotourism development. Prioritize projects demonstrating measurable emotional engagement improvements and community benefit sharing. Singapore's tourism technology fund, generating 8:1 ROI, provides a benchmark.

Educational Reform: Integrate neurotourism modules into tourism curricula at public universities. Partner with public and private universities to establish Latin America's first Neurotourism Research Institute, positioning Mexico as regional knowledge hub.

International Cooperation: Establish bilateral agreements with neurotourism leaders (Japan for AI, Iceland for AR, Thailand for biometrics) facilitating technology transfer and best practice sharing. Mexico's strategic position between North and South America enables unique bridge building opportunities.

Future Research Directions

This study opens several research avenues critical for Mexico's neurotourism development:

- Longitudinal studies measuring emotional attachment to destinations after XR experiences
- Cross cultural analysis of biometric response variations among Mexico's diverse tourist segments
- Economic impact assessment of neurotourism on indigenous communities
- Development of "Emotional Authenticity Index" specific to Mexican cultural tourism
- Investigation of generative AI's role in creating personalized Mexican cultural narratives

Limitations

This study's qualitative design, while providing rich contextual insights, limits statistical generalizability beyond the analysed cases. The sample of eight international campaigns and fifteen expert interviews, though purposefully selected, represents a snapshot of the rapidly evolving neurotourism landscape between 2020-2023. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of case studies prevents longitudinal assessment of technology adoption impacts over time.

Methodological limitations include: (1) the absence of quantitative biometric measurements from actual Mexican tourists, relying instead on international campaign data; (2) potential selection bias toward successful implementations, as failed neurotourism initiatives rarely receive public documentation; (3) limited representation of indigenous community perspectives, with only preliminary consultations rather than full participatory research; and (4) the inability to measure long-term behavioural changes resulting from XR experiences versus traditional marketing.

Contextual constraints specific to Mexico's developing technological infrastructure mean findings may not directly transfer to destinations with more advanced digital ecosystems. Privacy regulation differences between Mexico and case study countries (Thailand, Iceland, Singapore) also limit direct applicability of ethical frameworks. Finally, the accelerated pace of AI development means some technological capabilities discussed may become outdated or superseded by emerging innovations.

Future Research Directions

Future investigations should prioritize: (1) Longitudinal studies measuring emotional attachment to destinations following XR experiences over 12-24 month periods to assess conversion from virtual interest to actual visits; (2) Cross-cultural analysis of biometric response variations among Mexico's diverse tourist segments (domestic, North American, European, Latin American) to enable culturally-sensitive personalization; (3) Economic impact assessment of neurotourism technologies on indigenous communities, quantifying revenue distribution and cultural commodification concerns; (4) Development and validation of an "Emotional Authenticity Index" specific to Mexican cultural tourism, measuring perceived genuineness despite technological mediation; (5) Investigation of generative AI's role in creating personalized Mexican cultural narratives that balance innovation with heritage preservation; and (6) Experimental studies comparing neural responses to physical heritage sites versus their VR reconstructions among different age demographics.

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