

Interviewer:

Hi, thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. We are conducting a study as part of our course at Linnaeus University. The purpose is to explore how generative AI, such as ChatGPT, influences customer experiences within digital services, particularly in the travel and hospitality services. The interview will be recorded so that we can transcribe it accurately afterward. All information will be anonymized, meaning that no personal details such as name or workplace will be included in the report. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes and there are no right or wrong answers. I am only interested in your own experiences. Do you consent to participate in the interview and for it to be recorded?

Participant:

Yes, that's completely fine.

Interviewer:

Thank you, then we'll begin.

Interviewer:

Can you describe a specific situation in your service experience where you interacted with or utilized a GenAI-driven tool?

Participant:

Yes I can think of a very clear situation actually. It was last summer when I was planning a solo trip to Japan. I had been wanting to go there for years, but I always postponed it because it felt complicated language barriers, cultural differences and transportation systems, so everything just felt overwhelming.

Normally when I plan trips within Europe, it's quite straightforward. But Japan felt like something entirely different and I didn't really know where to start. So I decided to try using generative AI, specifically ChatGPT as a planning assistant. I remember starting quite broadly. I wrote something like I'm traveling alone to Japan for two weeks. I want a mix of culture, nature and food experiences and I'm a bit nervous about navigating the country. The response I got was surprisingly structured and reassuring. It didn't just list destinations it actually explained why certain places would suit a solo traveler.

For example, it suggested starting in Tokyo for a few days to get comfortable, then moving on to Kyoto for cultural experiences and possibly adding a quieter destination like Takayama or Hakone for a more relaxed atmosphere. What I appreciated was that it explained the flow of the trip not just individual locations. Then I went deeper and asked about transportation, how the train system works, whether I should get a JR Pass or book tickets and how to book it. It explained it step by step in a way that felt easy to understand, even though I had previously found it confusing when reading online guides.

I also used it for smaller things like understanding cultural etiquette. For example I asked about behavior in public transport, tipping culture and how to behave in restaurants. Those details made me feel much more confident about traveling there. So overall, I would say I used GenAI throughout the entire planning process from deciding where to go, to how to structure the trip, to understanding practical and cultural aspects. It became like a continuous conversation rather than a one time search.

Interviewer:

In this situation, what specific problem or task was the GenAI intended to solve?

Participant:

The main problem it solved was uncertainty and complexity. Japan, for me, represented a destination where I didn't feel confident relying only on my own knowledge. There were too many unknown transportation systems, language differences and even small social norms.

When you search online, you get a lot of information but it's often fragmented and sometimes contradictory. One blog says one thing, another says something else and it's difficult to know what actually applies to your situation.

The AI helped by simplifying that complexity. It took all those scattered pieces of information and presented them in a way that felt coherent and tailored to me. It wasn't just giving facts it was helping me understand how everything connects.

Another problem it solved was decision fatigue. Planning a trip like that involves hundreds of small decisions where to stay, how long to stay and how to move between places. Normally, that can become exhausting. But with AI, I could ask for recommendations based on my preferences, which made the process much more manageable.

It also helped with confidence. Traveling alone can feel intimidating especially in a country that feels unfamiliar. Having something that could answer my questions instantly made me feel more prepared.

Interviewer:

How has the introduction of this GenAI tool changed the way you interact with service providers?

Participant:

It has changed my behavior quite significantly, especially in terms of independence. Before I would rely more on service providers for guidance. For example, I might contact a hotel to ask about transportation or rely heavily on booking platforms to suggest options.

Now, I feel like I come into those interactions much more informed. By the time I use a booking platform, I already know what I'm looking for specific areas, types of accommodation even approximate prices. So instead of exploring broadly, I'm more focused and efficient.

It has also reduced the need for direct interaction with customer service. For example, instead of asking a hotel questions via email, I would first ask the AI. It's faster and often gives me enough information to make a decision without needing to contact anyone.

I would say that it hasn't completely removed interaction with service providers. It has just shifted when and why I interact with them. Now, I mostly interact with them when it's something very specific or personal that AI cannot answer.

Another change is that I feel more in control. I don't feel as dependent on the information provided by service platforms. Instead, I use them more as tools to execute decisions rather than to guide them.

Interviewer:

Can you describe a moment where the GenAI did not perform as expected? How did you handle it?

Participant:

Yes, there was one situation during my trip where I realized the limitations quite clearly. I asked the AI about a specific train route between Kyoto and a smaller town I wanted to visit. It gave me a route that seemed straightforward, including train names and approximate travel time. But when I actually tried to follow that route, I realized that some of the details were not accurate. The train schedule was different and one of the transfers didn't exist in the way it was described. It wasn't completely wrong, but it was not precise enough to rely on.

Another example was restaurant recommendations. It suggested some places that sounded very authentic, but when I looked them up, a few of them were either very touristy or had inconsistent reviews. So what I learned from that is that AI is very good at giving general guidance, but not always reliable for realtime or highly specific details.

To handle it, I started using a combination of tools. I would use AI for planning and understanding, but then verify details using official websites, Google Maps or local apps. So instead of replacing other tools, AI became part of a broader system. It also made me more cautious. I don't take AI responses at face value anymore I see them as suggestions rather than facts.

Interviewer:

To what extent do you feel GenAI technology has changed the human element of your service experience?

Participant:

I think it has reduced the need for human interaction in the planning phase quite a lot. Before, I might have contacted travel agencies or relied more on recommendations from people I know. Now, I often go directly to AI. So during the actual trip, I don't think the human element has decreased in some ways.

For example, interactions with hotel staff, restaurant employees or locals are still very meaningful and cannot be replaced by AI. In fact I would say that because I rely less on humans for planning, the human interactions I do have during the trip feel more valuable. They are less about information and more about experience.

There is also something about trust. Even though AI is helpful, I still feel a stronger emotional connection when interacting with a real person. Especially in situations where something goes wrong, I prefer human support. So overall I would say that AI has reduced functional interactions but not emotional ones.

Interviewer:

Looking ahead two to three years, what is the most significant change you anticipate GenAI will bring to your travel planning or service experience?

Participant:

I think the biggest change will be integration and personalization. Right now, AI feels like a separate tool that you use alongside booking platforms. But in the future, I think everything will be more connected.

For example, I can imagine a platform where AI already knows my travel history, preferences and even my schedule. It could automatically suggest trips that fit my availability and interests, without me having to start from scratch. I also think real time support will improve. For example, if something changes during a trip like a delayed train or bad weather the system could automatically suggest alternatives and help me adjust my plans.

Another change could be more natural interaction. Instead of typing questions, you might just speak or even have ongoing conversations with an AI assistant that follows you throughout the entire journey. Overall, I think the experience will become more seamless and less fragmented.

Interviewer:

In what way does generative AI influence your decisions when choosing travel destinations or accommodation?

Participant:

It influences my decisions quite strongly, especially in the early stages. For example when I was considering Japan, I wasn't sure which cities to visit. The AI helped me narrow down my options by explaining the differences between them.

It also helps me think in a more structured way. Instead of randomly browsing options, I can ask targeted questions like which area is best for a solo traveler? or what are the advantages of staying in this neighborhood? That makes my decisions more informed.

For accommodation it helps me understand trade offs. For example, whether it's better to stay centrally or in a quieter area or whether certain types of accommodation are more suitable for

my travel style. So while I still make the final decision, AI definitely shapes how I think about my options.

Interviewer:

Do you feel that AI replaces human service or does it function more as a complement? Why?

Participant:

I definitely see it as a complement rather than a replacement. AI is very efficient and helpful for handling information, but it lacks human qualities like empathy, flexibility and personal connection. For example, if I have a problem during a trip, I would still prefer to talk to a human. There's something about human interaction that feels more reassuring. At the same time, AI makes the overall experience more efficient. It reduces waiting times and makes information more accessible. So it improves the service experience but it doesn't replace the human aspect. I think the ideal situation is a combination of both AI for efficiency and humans for meaningful interaction.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much for your detailed answers. That concludes the interview.

Participant:

Thank you, it was interesting to reflect on this.