Travel Preferences and Behaviour of Generation Z

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Abstract

This research examines the travel habits and preferences of Generation Z. Employing a quantitative methodology, a structured questionnaire was administered to individuals aged 18 to 28, resulting in 124 valid responses obtained through convenience sampling. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics in PSPP, focusing on key variables such as travel behaviour, the influence of social media, peer impact, and openness to new experiences. The findings reveal that social media has the most significant effect on the travel choices of Gen Z, with respondents heavily depending on digital content for selecting destinations and planning their trips. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of intrinsic factors, including curiosity and a desire for unique, adventurous experiences, in influencing travel behaviour. These results highlight the increasing significance of digital platforms in tourism-related decision-making and suggest that travel marketers should concentrate on social media engagement strategies to effectively reach Generation Z consumers.

Keywords

1. Generation Z travel behaviour

2. Social media influence

3. Peer influence

4. Openness to experience

5. Travel preferences

I Introduction

The widespread impact of social media has significantly transformed the way people make travel decisions today, with visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok becoming key players in shaping global tourism trends. Contemporary travellers are increasingly drawn to visually appealing locations that have gained popularity through influencer marketing and viral

content, often sidelining traditional travel resources. Although this digital shift has made travel inspiration and opportunities more accessible, it also intensifies pressing issues such as overtourism, environmental harm, and the standardization of cultural experiences. The conflict between curated online portrayals and genuine travel experiences poses considerable challenges for managing tourist destinations. This study critically analyses the dual effects of social media on tourism, investigating its ability to both ignite a desire for travel and promote unsustainable travel behaviours.

The travel and tourism industry has become a vital driver of economic growth in India, with Generation Z (individuals born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s) increasingly influencing industry dynamics. Industry reports indicate that India's travel market is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of approximately 12-15%, potentially contributing around $250 billion to the nation's GDP by 2030 (Enrich Money, 2025). Gen Z travellers, known for their digital proficiency, preference for experiential travel, and social media influence, are significantly impacting both domestic and international travel spending. Within India, this generation is boosting demand for budget airlines, alternative lodging options, and adventure tourism. On the international front, Indian Gen Z travellers are emerging as a significant demographic in outbound tourism, particularly to Southeast Asia and Europe, which not only affects the country's foreign exchange outflows but also introduces global markets to India's expanding consumer base.

This research paper investigates the travel habits and preferences of Gen Z in India, focusing on how their decisions influence national tourism revenue and international travel spending patterns. Additionally, the study examines the implications of these trends for travel-related businesses and policymakers aiming to leverage this demographic transition.

Generation Z (Gen Z) exhibits a strong inclination towards limitless and innovative experiences, influenced by their adeptness with digital technology, a globally interconnected perspective, and a quest for authenticity. This generation embodies a vibrant, bold, and unrestricted spirit, showcasing their flexibility and eagerness for unconventional opportunities. In contrast to previous generations, Gen Z's deep engagement with social media and exposure to a variety of cultural stories foster a greater propensity for experimentation, which is reflected in their travel preferences, career paths, and purchasing behaviours.

At the core of their perspective is the emphasis on experiential value rather than material possessions, which fuels their desire for immersive, socially shareable, and purpose-driven interactions. Additionally, their naturally disruptive nature is evident in their rejection of traditional structures, demonstrating a significant openness to innovation in technology, workplace settings, and lifestyle choices.

Generation Z is transforming the travel landscape by emphasizing flexibility, digital ease, and sustainability. This generation is moving away from rigid travel plans and traditional agencies, opting instead for self-organized, spontaneous journeys facilitated by travel applications and social media platforms. As a tech-savvy cohort, they favour cashless payments and rely on peer recommendations to discover genuine, unconventional experiences. They often combine leisure with remote work opportunities, known as "bleisure," while making environmentally conscious decisions, such as supporting local enterprises and choosing eco-friendly

accommodations. Although they are mindful of their budgets, Gen Z prioritizes meaningful experiences over luxury, utilizing cost-effective options like shared accommodations and last-minute offers, all while maintaining a spirit of adventure. This shift is leading to a more independent, immersive, and purpose-driven approach to travel.

Source: EnrichMoney 2025, Travel Gumbo 2025, Trade Wings 2025.

II Literature Review

Social media platforms, especially those focused on visual content such as Instagram and TikTok, significantly influence the travel preferences of Generation Z. Research by Rahman et al. (2022) indicates that young travelers heavily depend on social media for inspiration regarding travel destinations, often favouring places that are visually appealing and widely circulated online. In a similar vein, Ayeh et al. (2019) emphasized the significance of user-generated content (UGC) and recommendations from peers, pointing out that Generation Z tends to trust personal travel blogs and influencer reviews more than conventional advertising. The phenomenon known as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) further intensifies this behaviour, as Correia et al. (2020) found that exposure to popular destinations on social media instils a sense of urgency in Gen Z travelers to explore these sites. Yılmaz and Kaya (2022) corroborated this observation in their research on Turkish travelers, revealing that Instagram functions both as a tool for travel planning and a medium for self-expression, with young tourists pursuing destinations that enhance their online persona.

In addition to simple exposure, social validation plays a crucial role in influencing the travel choices of Generation Z. Research by Pilving et al. (2021) revealed that peer endorsement is a vital element, as young travelers are more inclined to explore locations recommended by friends or influencers within their online communities. This finding is consistent with Sauvignon's (2020) study, which indicated that Generation Z perceives travel as a form of social capital, carefully selecting experiences that can be shared on social media while also pursuing authentic cultural interactions. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2022) noted a similar trend among Vietnamese Generation Z travelers, who Favor destinations that provide both visually appealing opportunities for Instagram and genuine local experiences. This dual preference illustrates a wider trend where digital natives seek to harmonize aesthetic allure with substantial engagement, as highlighted by Petrov and Kim (2023) in their comparative analysis of travelers from Europe and Asia.

Although digital influence is widespread, cultural and economic disparities result in differing travel behaviours. Petrov and Kim (2023) observed that European Gen Z travelers emphasize sustainability and experiential tourism, in contrast to their Asian counterparts who are more inclined towards social media trends and group travel. Additionally, Rahman and Putra (2022) pointed out the distinct preferences of Muslim Gen Z travelers in Indonesia, who look for halal-compliant destinations that also provide visually appealing experiences. Economic limitations further impact decision-making processes. Martinez and Thompson (2023) discovered that budget-conscious Gen Z travelers in North America prefer economical lodging options such as

hostels and Airbnb, as well as traveling during off-peak times. Meanwhile, Nugraheni et al. (2021) highlighted that Indonesian students Favor cost-effective yet culturally enriching experiences. Suardana et al. (2023) further noted that perceived risks and sensitivity to prices significantly affect destination selections, with young travelers depending on online reviews to evaluate value and safety.

An increasing number of individuals from Generation Z are adopting the lifestyle of digital nomadism (Anderson & Lee, 2023) and engaging in solo travel (Kowalczyk & Derek, 2022), motivated by their quest for flexibility, personal development, and opportunities for remote work. These travelers Favor locations that provide dependable internet access, reasonable living expenses, and communities of expatriates, merging work and leisure in innovative ways that challenge conventional tourism

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework explores the elements that affect travel behaviour, concentrating on three primary variables: the impact of social media, peer influence, and openness to experience. Social media acts as a significant force in shaping travel choices by presenting individuals with aspirational content, destination visuals, and user-generated feedback, which can motivate or solidify travel intentions. Likewise, peer influence is crucial, as individuals frequently depend on the insights, experiences, and suggestions of friends, family, or colleagues when deciding on travel plans. These social interactions can mould preferences and encourage conformity in travel behaviours within social groups. On the other hand, openness to experience, a personality trait identified in the Big Five model, signifies an individual's inherent inclination to discover new places, welcome novelty, and engage in distinctive or unconventional experiences. Those who score high in this trait are more inclined to seek adventurous travel opportunities and explore culturally rich or less frequented destinations. Collectively, these three aspects—external social influences and internal personality characteristics—interact to shape individual travel behaviour, providing a thorough understanding of the psychological and social factors that influence travel decisions.
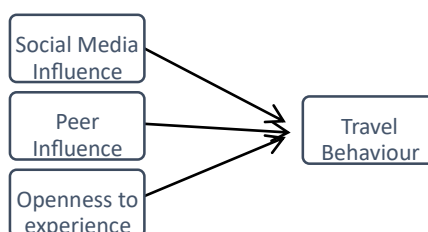
Theoretical Model

Table 2.1.1

Variable	Elements	Author
Travel Behaviour	Gen Z's preference for unique, budget-friendly, and culturally immersive travel experiences	Nugraheni et al. (2021), Martinez & Thompson (2023)
Social Media Influence	The role of visual platforms in inspiring travel choices	Yılmaz & Kaya (2022), Ayeh et al. (2019)
Peer Influence	Peer validation shaping destination choices and experiential tourism.	Pilving et al. (2021), Savignon (2020)
Openness to Experience	Willingness to explore unique destinations beyond mainstream options	Chen & Li (2023)

2.2 Research Question

What factors influence the travel preferences and behaviours of Generation Z?

2.3 Objectives of the study

1. To assess the relationship between social media influence, peer influence, openness to experience, and travel behaviour.

2. To investigate how social media influence, peer influence, and openness to experience collectively shape travel behaviour.

III Research Methodology

This research utilizes a quantitative methodology to investigate the travel habits of Generation Z by conducting an online survey with participants (ages 18-28) chosen through convenience sampling. The study focuses on essential factors such as preferred destinations, budgeting behaviours, the impact of digital media, and considerations of sustainability. The data was examined through descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to uncover notable trends and relationships. Although the results yield important insights, they are constrained by the limitations associated with convenience sampling. The research complies with ethical standards, guaranteeing the anonymity of participants and their voluntary involvement. The findings present practical implications for tourism marketers aiming to engage this demographic.

IV Analysis and Discussion

Reliability

A reliability analysis was performed to evaluate the internal consistency of the constructs measured, with Cronbach's alpha values reflecting acceptable to high reliability across all scales. The constructs of travel behaviour ($\alpha = .78$), social media influence ($\alpha = .75$), and peer influence ($\alpha = .77$) exhibited strong internal consistency. In contrast, openness to experience ($\alpha = .69$) fell slightly short of the conventional threshold of 0.70, yet it remains close enough to suggest reasonable reliability for exploratory research. Given that all values are at or above 0.70, the scales can be deemed sufficiently reliable for assessing their respective constructs, ensuring that the items within each dimension effectively capture the intended underlying factors.

Table 1. Demographic profile

Attributes	Categories	Percentage (%)
Age	18-21 yrs	39.8
	22-25 yrs	47.2
	26-28 yrs	13
Gender	Male	40.7
	Female	59.3
Employment Status	Student	57.7
	Government employee	9.8
	Private employee	22.8
	Self-employed	9.8
Marital Status	Married	13.8
	Unmarried	77.2
	Divorced	4.1
	Others	4.9
Area Of Residence	Urban	49.6
	Rural	37.4

	Semi-Urban	13
Income per Month	Up to ₹25,000	41.5
	₹26,000- ₹40,000	23.6
	₹41,000- ₹90,000	26
	₹91,000 & above	8.9
Family Structure	Nuclear Family	67.5
	Joint Family	32.5
Who do you live with	Parents	67.5
	Friends	22.8
	Spouse	3.3
	Alone	6.5

Interpretation

From table 1 the demographic analysis indicates a predominantly youthful sample, with 87% of participants aged between 18 and 25 years, reflecting a population primarily in early adulthood. Females represent a larger segment at 59.3%, compared to males at 40.7%, suggesting a slight gender imbalance. Regarding employment status, more than half of the respondents are students (57.7%), followed by private sector employees (22.8%), while both government employees and the self-employed account for 9.8% each, illustrating a demographic largely composed of students and individuals at the beginning of their careers. A considerable majority are unmarried (77.2%), with smaller percentages being married (13.8%), divorced (4.1%), or identifying as other (4.9%), indicating that most respondents are likely single and self-sufficient. Nearly half of the participants live in urban areas (49.6%), while 37.4% reside in rural settings and 13% in semi-urban locales, offering a well-rounded geographic distribution. Income data reveals that 65.1% earn ₹40,000 or less monthly, with only 8.9% earning above ₹91,000, suggesting a generally moderate-income level. The majority of respondents come from nuclear families (67.5%) and live with their parents (67.5%), followed by those living with friends (22.8%), alone (6.5%), or with a spouse (3.3%), emphasizing a living arrangement focused on family and shared spaces. Overall, the findings depict a young, student-centric group with moderate earnings and a blend of urban and rural backgrounds, providing valuable insights into their behaviours and preferences within the study.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis

	Mean	Sd	Variance
Travel Behaviour	3.58	.65	.43
Social Media Influence	3.38	.71	.50
Peer influence	3.26	.69	.47
Openness to Experience	3.52	.58	.33

Interpretation

It is inferred from Table 2 that travel Behaviour (M = 3.58, SD = 0.65) exhibits a slight right skew (0.15) and a platykurtic distribution (-0.34), indicating a moderate level of variability. Social Media Influence (M = 3.38, SD = 0.71) shows a minor positive skew (0.24) and light tails (-0.18), which suggests a relatively flat distribution. Peer Influence (M = 3.26, SD = 0.69) reveals nearly symmetrical skewness (-0.04) and slight leptokurtosis (0.53), indicating that responses are clustered around the mean. Lastly, Openness to Experience (M = 3.52, SD = 0.58) demonstrates minimal skew (0.15) and near-normal kurtosis (-0.04). Collectively, these variables exhibit acceptable levels of normality (with skewness and kurtosis values within ±1) and moderate dispersion, thereby justifying the application of parametric analyses for subsequent research.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis

		MSMI	MPI	MOE
Travel Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.581$_a$	.374$_a$	.392$_a$
'a' significant at 0.05				

Interpretation

From table 3 the outcomes of the Pearson correlation analysis, which investigates the relationships between travel behaviour and three independent variables: social media influence, peer influence, and openness to experience. The results reveal that all correlations are positive and statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating meaningful connections among the variables. Social media influence exhibits a strong positive correlation with travel behaviour (r = 0.581), suggesting that greater exposure to social media content correlates with heightened travel activity or interest. Additionally, peer influence (r = 0.374) and openness to experience (r = 0.392) show moderate positive correlations with travel behaviour, indicating that individuals who are swayed by their peers or possess a greater openness to new experiences are more inclined to travel. These findings underscore the important impact of both external factors

(social media and peers) and internal characteristics (openness to experience) in influencing the travel behaviour of the respondents.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Variables	Unstandardised Coefficient	Sig
	B	
Constant	1.02	
Social media influence	.43	.000*
Peer influence	.15	.051
Openness to experience	.18	.048*
R square = 0.39; Adjusted R square = 0.37		

* - highly significant

Travel Behaviour = 1.02+[{0.43(SMI)} + {0.15(PI)} + {0.18(OE)}]

Interpretation

It is inferred from table 4 that the regression analysis indicates that social media influence, peer influence, and openness to experience together account for 37% of the variance in travel behaviour (R^2 = 0.39; Adjusted R^2 = 0.37). Among the variables examined, social media influence demonstrates the most substantial and statistically significant effect (B = 0.43, $p <$ 0.001), suggesting that increased exposure to social media correlates with heightened travel behaviour. Additionally, openness to experience exhibits a significant positive relationship (B = 0.18, p = 0.048), indicating that individuals who are more receptive to new experiences tend to travel more frequently. Although peer influence is positively associated with travel behaviour (B = 0.15), it does not reach statistical significance at the 0.05 threshold (p = 0.051), indicating a comparatively weaker effect. The regression equation derived from this analysis is: Travel Behaviour = 1.02 + 0.43(Social Media Influence) + 0.15(Peer Influence) + 0.18(Openness to Experience). In summary, the results highlight the stronger predictive capacity of social media and personality traits in influencing travel behaviour compared to peer influence within the studied sample.

Conclusion

The travel preferences of Generation Z in India are transforming the tourism sector, influenced by social media, a desire for authentic experiences, and a tendency to organize trips online. In contrast to previous generations, Gen Z primarily gathers inspiration from platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, values recommendations from friends over advertisements, and seeks distinctive, cost-effective, and environmentally conscious travel options.

Nevertheless, the Indian tourism industry is lagging as it has not fully embraced digital marketing, tailored travel solutions, or developed appropriate infrastructure for emerging trends like workcations and remote work. The insufficient focus on sustainable practices and personalized travel experiences further exacerbates the disconnect between Gen

Z's expectations and the current offerings of the industry. To enhance its competitiveness, India must revamp its tourism strategy by collaborating with social media influencers, providing improved online resources for seamless trip planning, and creating appealing, eco-friendly travel options. Policy enhancements, such as implementing visas for remote workers, better managing overcrowded tourist destinations, and establishing online platforms for travelers to exchange advice, can position India as a premier destination for younger travelers. By aligning with Gen Z's values—authentic experiences, sustainability, and technology-driven travel—India can revitalize its tourism industry, ensuring sustainable growth while preserving its cultural and natural heritage.

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