

Gen Z and Social Media: Shaping Tourism and Hospitality Behavior: A Thematic and Bibliometric Review

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric and thematic analysis of Generation Z's role in reshaping tourism and hospitality through social media engagement. Utilizing longitudinal publication analysis, keyword frequency mapping, burst detection, and co-citation clustering, the research outlines both the evolution of academic interest and the thematic structure of this emerging research field. Drawing on 407 publications from 2011 to 2025, this research identifies six core themes: travel behavior, digital marketing, ethical tourism, festival experiences, immersive technologies, and satisfaction evaluation. The findings of this study reveal Gen Z's preference for authenticity, emotional resonance, digital interactivity, and ethical alignment. The study highlights strategic implications for tourism practitioners, including the need for immersive storytelling, tech-human integration, and value-based branding. The results offer an integrative framework for understanding Gen Z's transformative impact on tourism systems.

Keyword: Gen Z, Hospitality Behavior, Social Media, Tourism

Introduction

Success in tourism and hospitality increasingly hinges on adapting to evolving consumer values and technological disruptions. Among these, generational shifts notably influence market dynamics, making it essential to understand and respond to Generation Z's distinct preferences (et al., 2025). Generation Z—born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s—is the first fully digital-native generation. Their worldview is shaped by constant connectivity, ethical awareness, and preferences for personalized and meaningful experiences. In tourism and hospitality contexts, they emphasize authenticity, social impact, and digital engagement, significantly affecting their travel decisions, satisfaction evaluations, and brand loyalty (Correia et al., 2025; Susanto et al., 2024). Social media significantly influences Gen Z's destination perceptions and travel intentions. User-generated content and influencer

marketing are perceived as authentic and persuasive, reflecting their reliance on peer validation and immersive storytelling (Susanto et al., 2024; Khoa et al., 2021). Concurrently, digital technologies like artificial intelligence and service robots are embraced by Gen Z, not only for convenience but for their potential to deliver personalized, emotionally engaging interactions (Ayyildiz et al., 2022; Vernandes et al., 2024; Abed, 2024).

Emerging technologies, including virtual reality (VR) and the metaverse, further shape Gen Z's travel perceptions by influencing affective and cognitive aspects of destination imagery and promoting sustainable tourism, aligning closely with their digital fluency and environmental consciousness (Jorge et al., 2023; Go & Kang, 2023).

Despite growing research attention, key aspects remain fragmented, particularly the integration of psychological motivations, digital fluency, and ethical behavior in hospitality contexts. To bridge this gap, this study offers a structured thematic synthesis of Generation Z-focused tourism and hospitality literature, addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: *How has scholarly interest in Generation Z within tourism and hospitality evolved over time, and what emerging conceptual trends are evident from keyword analysis and citation bursts?*

RQ2: *What major thematic clusters emerge through co-citation analysis, and how can they form an integrated framework capturing Generation Z's multifaceted roles in tourism?*

RQ3: *How do these themes enhance theoretical understanding and inform strategic innovations for targeting Generation Z in tourism and hospitality?*

The contribution of this study is as follows: (1) This study adopts a mixed bibliometric–thematic methodology that integrates keyword analysis, burst detection, and clustering via CiteSpace. This approach offers a systematic and visualized mapping of the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of Generation Z research, addressing the fragmentation in existing literature; (2) By synthesizing scattered insights, the study develops a coherent analytical framework that enhances theoretical clarity across key psychological, technological, and ethical dimensions related to Generation Z in the tourism and hospitality context; (3) The study translates academic findings into strategic recommendations, enabling tourism and hospitality practitioners to align service strategies with Generation Z's expectations—particularly regarding digital fluency, experiential authenticity, and ethical alignment—thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Literature Review

Generation Z and Tourism and Hospitality

Generation Z, individuals born approximately between 1995 and 2010, is the first fully digital-native generation. Unlike Generation X or Millennials who adapted later in life, Gen Z's worldview is profoundly shaped by real-time connectivity, personalized digital interactions, and immersive online environments (Khoa et al., 2021). Their formative experiences, influenced by financial instability, ecological concerns, and rapid technological advancement, have fostered adaptability, individualism, and a preference for authentic, experience-rich interactions (Magano et al., 2020).

In tourism and hospitality contexts, Generation Z's behaviors significantly diverge from those of previous generations. Their travel decisions rely heavily on peer validation, emotional resonance, and digital shareability, rather than traditional marketing or institutional reputation (Guan, 2023; Zuo et al., 2022). Social media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and Xiaohongshu, play essential roles in their travel planning, where short-form videos, influencer content, and peer reviews substantially shape choices. Compared to Baby Boomers and Millennials, Gen Z emphasizes symbolic consumption, selecting destinations primarily for self-expression and enhancing their digital identity (Farzin et al., 2021). Symbolic consumption preferences notably influence their accommodation choices. Gen Z favors hotels offering flexibility, personalization, and advanced technologies, such as service robots and mobile check-ins, significantly boosting satisfaction and brand loyalty (Adiwijaya & Nurmala, 2023). Unlike older generations, Gen Z prioritizes emotionally engaging and socially validated hospitality experiences over traditional luxury (Adiwijaya & Nurmala, 2023).

Furthermore, Generation Z actively participates as co-creators in tourism by sharing content, reviews, and visual narratives online. This dynamic digital engagement positions them not merely as passive consumers but influential stakeholders who continuously shape brand perceptions and destination images (Guan, 2023; Zuo et al., 2022). Sustainability, social responsibility, and digital responsiveness are central to their hospitality expectations, reflecting broader shifts in contemporary definitions of meaningful experiences (Hoang et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025). Gen Z's hospitality preferences extend beyond functional needs into symbolic and aesthetic domains. Their dining and accommodation choices increasingly prioritize visual appeal, thematic storytelling, and authenticity. Establishments offering culturally rich and visually engaging experiences gain significant competitive advantages, even within budget-conscious contexts (Zuo et al., 2022; Ghosh et al., 2023).

Although existing research highlights Generation Z's distinct tourism preferences, critical gaps persist. Comparative analyses between Gen Z and older cohorts, detailed explorations of motivational drivers, attitudes toward emerging technologies, and their long-term industry impact remain underexplored. Addressing these themes offers significant opportunities for future academic inquiry.

Social Media Use Among Generation Z

Social media plays a central and unique role in Generation Z's everyday life, acting as a hybrid platform where personal identity formation and commercial activities seamlessly converge. Unlike earlier generations, Gen Z engages with digital content primarily through visually rich, interactive, and emotionally impactful formats, emphasizing real-time interaction and peer-generated narratives (Ngo et al., 2024; Sharma & Singh, 2024). Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are more than just communication tools; they serve as curated spaces where users actively shape their identities, find inspiration, and make lifestyle and purchasing decisions, including those related to travel and hospitality (Liu et al., 2023).

The effectiveness of social media marketing among Gen Z largely depends on trust, authenticity, and emotional relevance. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), especially user-generated content (UGC), short-form videos, and emotionally resonant storytelling, significantly influences their attitudes and behavioral intentions (Ngo et al., 2024). Furthermore, Gen Z demonstrates particular responsiveness to virtual social media

influencers (VSMIs), often preferring influencer-driven narratives that align closely with their personal values and identity expressions (Bouvier & Cho, 2022).

However, the deep integration of social media into Gen Z's daily routines introduces notable psychological complexities. Constant engagement on these platforms, often driven by needs for mood regulation or social validation, has been associated with increased anxiety, impulsivity, and digital fatigue, especially evident during crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Sharma & Singh, 2024; Liu et al., 2021). These psychological challenges highlight the critical need for balanced digital engagement strategies within marketing and communication frameworks targeting Generation Z.

In tourism contexts, Gen Z's distinctive social media behaviors profoundly shape travel experiences from initial planning to real-time sharing and post-trip reflections. Social media platforms are essential not only for discovering and evaluating destinations but also for constructing digital identities through aestheticized storytelling (Liu et al., 2023; Guan, 2023). This active engagement in content creation makes visual storytelling equally vital to consuming travel-related content, amplifying Gen Z's role as both consumers and influential co-creators within the tourism industry.

Understanding the nuanced interplay between Gen Z's social media usage and travel decisions is essential for tourism practitioners aiming to deliver emotionally resonant, digitally optimized, and highly engaging hospitality experiences. As Gen Z's economic and cultural influence continues to grow, deeper exploration of their complex social media dynamics remains critical for effective industry innovation and market responsiveness.

Research Methodology

This study employs a literature review methodology. The selected articles were sourced from the Scopus database, chosen for its reputation as one of the most widely recognized and reputable academic databases globally (Maulana, 2020). The data collection process included publications available up to May 28, 2025. A modified version of the PRISMA protocol was employed for the selection process, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Moher et al., 2009). To ensure the relevance of the collected literature to the research focus, the search strategy applied was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z") AND ("travel" OR "tourism" OR "tourist" OR "traveller" OR "hospitality" OR "hotel").

The initial search yielded 498 documents. Inclusion criteria were applied to restrict results to English-language publications categorized as journal articles, book chapters, or conference papers, reducing the dataset to 465 publications. A further screening process was conducted by carefully reviewing the titles and abstracts to eliminate studies not directly relevant to the research topic. This refinement stage resulted in a final dataset of 407 relevant articles.

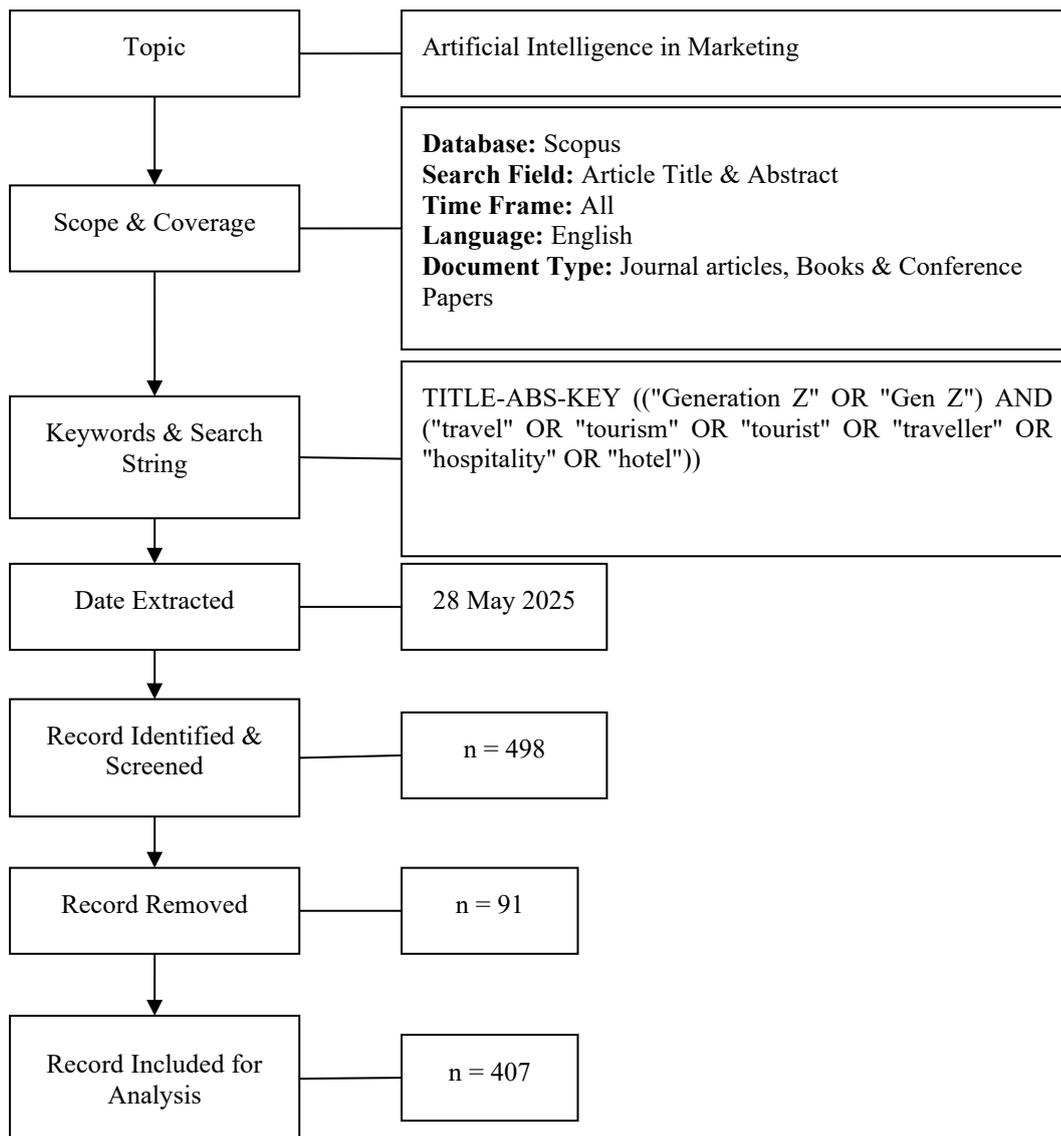
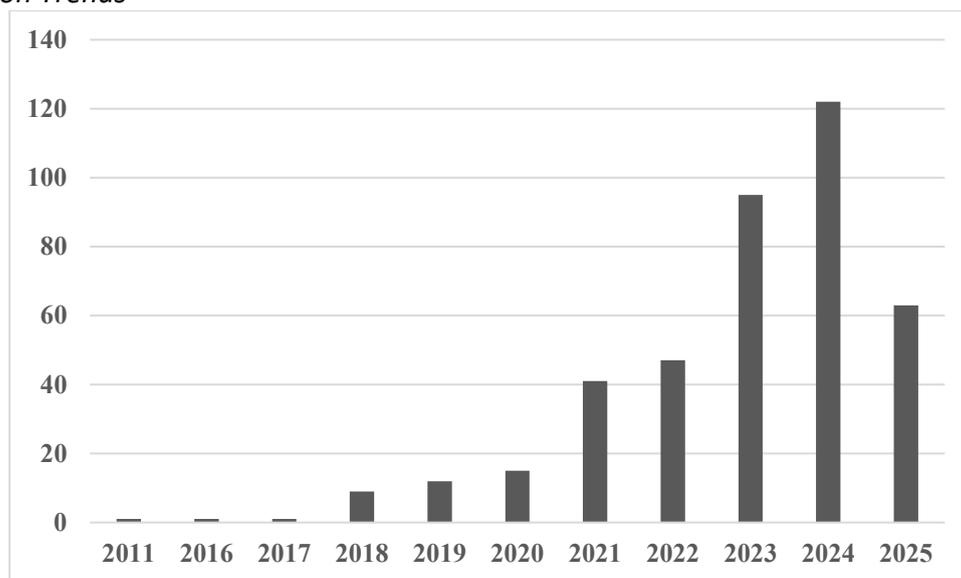


Figure 1. Searching strategy flow chart
Source from: Moher et al. (2009)

Results and Analysis

Publication Trends



#as on May 28, 2025

Figure 2. Publication by year (2011-2025)

As illustrated in Figure 2, research on Generation Z within travel, tourism, and hospitality contexts has steadily increased over the past decade. The earliest identified study combining Generation Z, social media, and tourism or hospitality appeared in 2011, when the oldest Gen Z members were approximately 16 years old, setting the stage for subsequent scholarly interest. A noticeable acceleration in research output began around 2018, with a significant surge observed from 2020 onward. The number of publications reached its peak in 2024, totaling 122 studies, reflecting intense academic focus. Between 2018 and 2024, scholarly output grew at an average annual rate of about 60%, underscoring sustained attention to this digitally native generation's engagement with tourism and hospitality. Although data for 2025 (as of May) indicates a slight decrease, the overall trajectory remains indicative of an expanding research domain addressing this influential consumer segment.

Keyword Analysis

As shown in Table 1, keyword analysis identifies core thematic areas in the literature on Generation Z in tourism and hospitality. The most frequent keyword is "generation z" (n = 177), highlighting its central relevance, followed by "tourism" (n = 56) and its abbreviation "gen z" (n = 41), underscoring the intersection of this demographic with tourism. Other significant keywords, such as "social media" (n = 33), "sustainability" (n = 32), and "tourist destination" (n = 26), reflect research interests in Gen Z's digital engagement and sustainable travel practices. Additionally, keywords like "covid 19" (n = 21) and "sustainable tourism" (n = 21) demonstrate the impact of recent global disruptions on travel behavior.

Table 1

Top 20 Keywords

Ranking	Count	Centrality	Year	Keywords
1	177	0.2	2017	generation z
2	56	0.22	2018	tourism
3	41	0.3	2016	gen z
4	33	0	2018	social media
5	32	0.01	2022	sustainability
6	26	0.05	2022	tourist destination
7	21	0.06	2021	covid 19
8	21	0.14	2018	sustainable tourism
9	21	0.06	2020	tourist behavior
10	20	0.08	2021	perception
11	19	0.05	2020	marketing
12	19	0.06	2019	ecotourism
13	15	0.33	2017	hospitality industry
14	15	0.29	2018	millennials
15	13	0.15	2019	generation y
16	13	0.07	2022	virtual reality
17	12	0	2023	travel behavior
18	11	0.08	2023	tourism development
19	11	0.18	2021	sustainable development
20	11	0.01	2023	china

Regarding keyword centrality—indicating thematic importance within research—"hospitality industry" (centrality = 0.33), "gen z" (0.30), and "millennials" (0.29) stand out, highlighting ongoing comparative analyses of generational behaviors in hospitality contexts. Emerging terms, including "virtual reality," "travel behavior," and "China," have gained prominence since 2022–2023, suggesting growing scholarly attention toward technological and regional dimensions of Generation Z's tourism behaviors. Overall, the keyword landscape reveals an evolving, multidimensional exploration of Generation Z as travelers influenced by sustainability, digital technology, and global events.

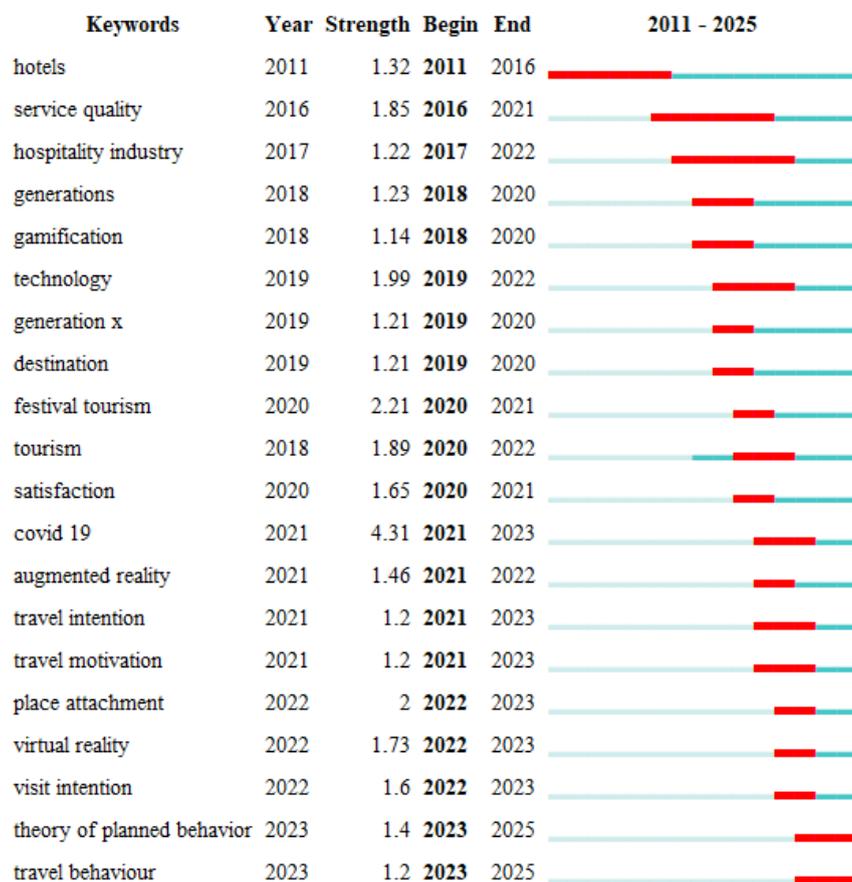
*Keyword Burst Analysis***Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts**

Figure 3. Top 20 keywords with strong bursts

Figure 3 illustrates the top twenty keywords with the strongest citation bursts, highlighting periods of increased academic attention and signaling evolving research interests in Generation Z within tourism and hospitality. The earliest burst keyword, "hotels" (2011–2016), indicates an initial research focus on traditional hospitality settings and infrastructure. The strongest citation burst keyword, "covid 19" (4.31, 2021–2023), emphasizes the significant impact of the pandemic on global travel behaviors. Additional notable terms, such as "festival tourism" (2020–2021), "place attachment" (2022–2023), and "technology" (2019–2022), reflect emerging scholarly interests in cultural, emotional, and technological dimensions post-2020.

A notable group of technology-oriented keywords—including "augmented reality" (2021–2022), "virtual reality" (2022–2023), and "gamification" (2018–2020)—suggests an increasing emphasis on immersive and digitally enhanced tourism experiences relevant to Gen Z's digital native status. Further, terms like "travel intention," "travel motivation," and "visit intention," appearing prominently from 2021 onward, indicate a shift toward behavioral and psychological aspects of Gen Z's tourism decision-making processes. The recent appearance of "theory of planned behavior" (2023–2025) and "travel behaviour" (2023–2025)

highlights the growing application of psychological frameworks in understanding Gen Z's consumption patterns.

Overall, the keyword burst analysis indicates a transition from traditional hospitality themes toward a broader exploration of technological innovation, generational comparisons, and behavioral insights, reflecting Generation Z's pivotal role in the digital and sustainable transformation of tourism.

Cluster Analysis and Thematic Consolidation

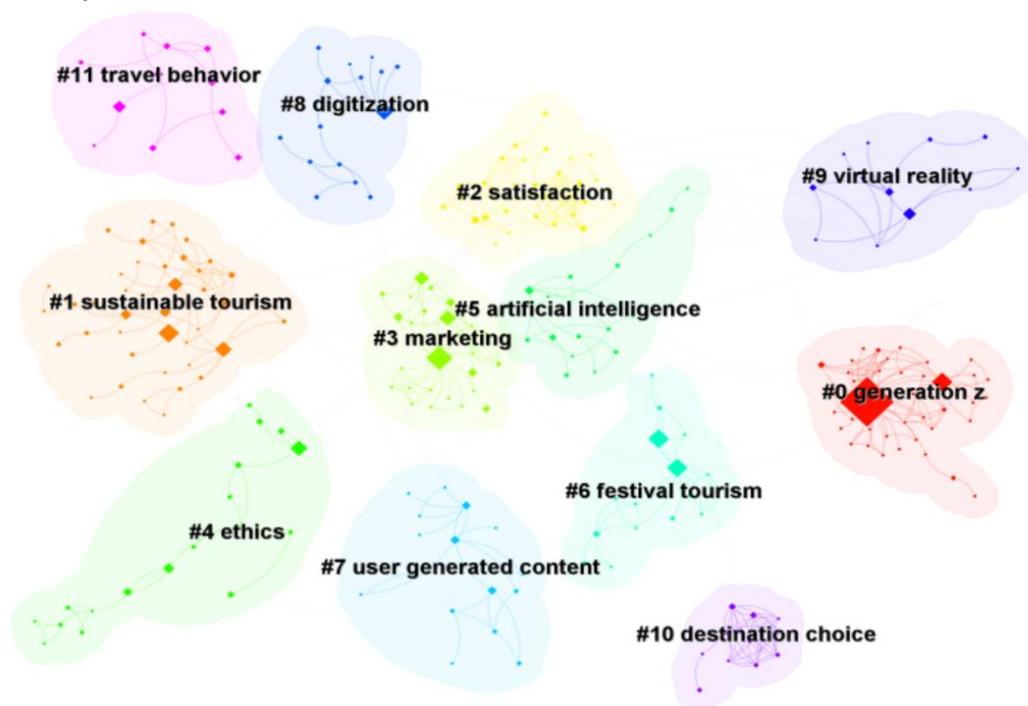


Figure 4. Thematic Clustering of Scholarly Literature

A co-citation clustering analysis using CiteSpace identified twelve thematic clusters in Generation Z tourism research (Figure 4). These clusters encompass diverse topics, including general travel behavior (Cluster 0), sustainability actions (Cluster 1), satisfaction and experiences (Cluster 2), digital marketing (Cluster 3), ethical consumption (Cluster 4), AI and robotics (Cluster 5), festival tourism (Cluster 6), user-generated content (Cluster 7), digitization and heritage (Cluster 8), virtual reality and the metaverse (Cluster 9), destination choices (Cluster 10), and generational comparisons (Cluster 11). Due to thematic overlaps, these clusters were reorganized into nine broader categories to enhance analytical clarity. Specifically, Clusters 0 and 11 merged under "Generation Z Travel Behavior" based on shared psychological and behavioral insights. Clusters 3 and 7 combined as "Digital Marketing and User-generated Content," reflecting mutual interests in digital influence. Additionally, Clusters 8 and 9 merged into "Digitization and Virtual Reality," highlighting their common focus on immersive technologies. The final thematic structure includes the following six categories:

Table 2

Thematic Categories Identified from Co-Citation Cluster Analysis

N	Thematic Category	Original Clusters Merged	Thematic Focus
1	Generation Z Travel Behavior	0, 10, 11	Explores the psychological, behavioral, and identity-driven patterns of Gen Z tourists, including their motivations, values, and travel decisions.
2	Digital Marketing and User-generated Content	3, 7	Examines how Gen Z uses social media, influencer content, and peer-generated narratives to inform and shape travel choices and destination images.
3	Ethical and Sustainable Tourism	1, 4	Focuses on Gen Z's value-oriented tourism behaviors, emphasizing environmental consciousness, ethical consumption, and digital activism.
4	Festival Tourism	6	Highlights Gen Z's preference for immersive, socially connective festival experiences, emphasizing emotional intensity and digital expression.
5	Technology and Immersive Tourism	5, 8, 9	Analyzes Gen Z's engagement with smart technologies such as AI, VR, and metaverse tools that enhance or substitute physical travel experiences.
6	Satisfaction and Experience Evaluation	2	Investigates how Gen Z evaluates travel satisfaction through emotional, experiential, and digital lenses, influencing loyalty and revisit intent.

The following sections present a synthesized overview of each thematic cluster, highlighting core research trends, representative studies, and conceptual contributions to the field of Generation Z tourism.

Cluster 1: Generation Z Travel Behavior

This cluster provides foundational insights into Generation Z tourists' behavioral characteristics and decision-making patterns. As digital natives and ethically conscious travelers, Generation Z exhibits motivations, values, and preferences distinct from previous generations. Understanding these patterns is essential for interpreting their responses to marketing, technological innovations, and tourism experiences examined in subsequent clusters. Central to Generation Z's travel behavior are psychological and identity-driven motivations. Lin et al. (2025) emphasize self-congruity—the alignment between tourists' self-image and destination image—as critical for satisfaction and future travel intentions. Generation Z seeks emotionally resonant, socially visible, and identity-aligned travel experiences, often expressed and validated through social media interactions, reinforcing emotional and social motivational feedback loops. Complementing identity-driven travel is Generation Z's pronounced ethical orientation. Although detailed in Cluster 3, sustainable and moral considerations notably influence their travel decisions. Kharuhayothin et al. (2024) illustrate how even risk perception during the COVID-19 pandemic was evaluated ethically, highlighting their concerns for collective welfare beyond personal safety.

Additionally, research by Lin et al. (2025) and Sharma et al. (2025) underscores Generation Z's active engagement in environmentally responsible behaviors, driven primarily by eudaimonic motivations—pursuing deeper meaning and personal fulfillment. Seyfi et al. (2022) further note social media's role in facilitating Gen Z's ethical advocacy around sustainability and political consumerism. Generation Z's tourism behaviors are also characterized by digital dependency. Kharuhayothin et al. (2024) highlight the strong influence of visually compelling, emotionally engaging online narratives on their destination perceptions. Real-time navigation, itinerary flexibility, and immediate social validation via mobile apps and social media further shape their expectations and experiences throughout travel. Intergenerational comparisons reveal Generation Z's distinctiveness relative to Millennials. Studies by Damanik et al. (2022) and Popşa (2024) demonstrate Gen Z's heightened ethical sensitivity, stronger reliance on digital platforms, and deeper reflective motivations. Emotional dimensions, including empathy and biospheric concerns, significantly influence their preferences for sustainable travel (Khan, 2023; Mandić et al., 2023).

In summary, Generation Z's tourism behavior emerges from a dynamic interplay of identity expression, ethical motivations, and digital fluency. Rather than passive consumers, they actively construct personalized, emotionally rich, and digitally interconnected experiences. Recognizing these foundational behaviors provides essential context for analyzing their interactions with marketing strategies, technological developments, and tourism experiences explored in subsequent clusters.

Cluster 2: Digital Marketing and User-Generated Content

Building upon the previously outlined behavioral foundations, this cluster explores how Generation Z interacts with digital marketing to shape their travel perceptions, expectations, and behaviors. As digital natives, Generation Z actively engages in participatory interactions, emphasizing peer validation and emotionally immersive narratives. Emotional authenticity is central to digital marketing effectiveness for Generation Z. Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2021) indicate digital platforms now serve as emotionally engaging spaces rather than purely transactional tools, necessitating tourism marketing strategies that inspire, entertain, and resonate emotionally. Peer validation and authenticity substantially influence Generation Z's travel decisions. Liu et al. (2023) identify key dimensions—interactivity, informativeness, entertainment value, trendiness, and personalization—that shape Gen Z's perceptions on social media. Peer-generated narratives are perceived as more credible and persuasive than traditional marketing, positioning platforms like Instagram and TikTok as spaces prioritizing relatability and authentic connections.

User-generated content (UGC) significantly drives Generation Z's tourism decision-making. Correia et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of visual appeal and emotional relatability in peer-produced content, particularly from micro-influencers. Similarly, Kharuhayothin et al. (2024) highlight short-form video storytelling as influential in shaping destination expectations and emotional engagement pre-travel. Generation Z actively participates as digital co-creators rather than passive recipients. They regularly document and share travel experiences in real-time through social media, creating dynamic feedback loops that reflect and reinforce tourism behaviors and social identities (Kharuhayothin et al., 2024). Moreover, digital engagement extends to emotionally complex tourism segments. Hoang et al. (2025) highlight Gen Z's attraction to "dark tourism," driven by narrative intrigue,

emotional intensity, and digital shareability. Likewise, immersive technologies, including gamified platforms and the metaverse, significantly influence travel intentions by providing interactive, emotionally compelling destination previews (Kılıçarslan et al., 2024).

In summary, Generation Z's tourism engagement represents a shift from traditional marketing toward participatory co-creation characterized by emotional resonance, authenticity, and peer influence. Marketers must therefore prioritize interactive storytelling, digital personalization, and user-generated content, simultaneously utilizing digital channels to promote ethical and sustainable tourism behaviors, a focus further detailed in the next cluster.

Cluster 3: Ethical and Sustainable Tourism

Building upon previous discussions of digital engagement, this cluster explores Generation Z's pronounced ethical and sustainable orientation in tourism behaviors. Ethical considerations—including environmental responsibility, social justice, and moral authenticity—are central rather than peripheral to their identity and are actively expressed within digital social networks. Central to this orientation are personal values and environmental citizenship driving sustainable tourism behaviors. Lin et al. (2025) emphasize that Generation Z's participation in ethical tourism—ranging from responsible consumption to advocacy—is motivated by deeper eudaimonic goals such as identity affirmation and long-term social impact. Sustainability thus represents a personal moral imperative rather than merely a trend. Sharma et al. (2025) highlight Generation Z's proactive stance against food waste during travels, reflecting individual actions and broader social norms.

Digital platforms significantly mediate Generation Z's ethical decision-making, serving as spaces for moral narratives on ecological justice, fair labor practices, and political consumerism. Seyfi et al. (2022) illustrate how platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Xiaohongshu amplify ethical discourses, influencing Gen Z's support or rejection of brands and destinations based on perceived moral alignment. However, these ethical behaviors are marked by complexities and occasional intention-behavior gaps. Otegui Carles et al. (2023) explore Generation Z's stance against exploitative animal attractions, noting particularly strong ethical alignment among female travelers. Nonetheless, practical constraints such as peer influence and limited ethical alternatives sometimes hinder complete behavioral alignment with stated values. Additionally, emotional factors like guilt, empathy, and biospheric concerns strongly underpin Generation Z's ethical orientation, closely intertwined with performative identity expression via digital platforms (Khan, 2023; Mandić et al., 2023). This intersection of genuine ethical convictions and social signaling shapes their distinctive tourism ethos.

In summary, Generation Z's ethical and sustainable tourism behaviors represent active, digitally mediated expressions of core personal values. Their choices intentionally align travel experiences with ethical convictions, social validation, and meaningful societal engagement. These themes further manifest within specific tourism contexts, notably festival tourism, examined in the following cluster.

Cluster 4: Festival Tourism

Extending from the ethical behaviors previously discussed, this cluster explores how Generation Z expresses identity, ethical commitments, and emotional needs through festival tourism. For Gen Z travelers, festivals are multidimensional events integrating identity expression, emotional connectivity, digital interactions, and ethical values, creating meaningful and socially immersive experiences. Generation Z's festival decisions strongly depend on peer-generated digital content. Iványi (2021) highlights their preference for influencer recommendations, peer reviews, and authentic narratives over traditional marketing, underscoring their pursuit of authenticity, relatability, and social validation.

During festivals, emotional intensity and active participation significantly shape their experiences. Iványi and Bíró-Szigeti (2020) identify emotional fulfillment, novelty, social connection, and event atmosphere as primary evaluation criteria, emphasizing their desire for emotionally immersive, socially engaging environments. Post-festival behaviors also matter significantly. Iványi and Bíró-Szigeti (2021) note Generation Z's active digital content sharing on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. These actions fulfill intrinsic motivations—such as emotional satisfaction and identity affirmation—and extrinsic objectives like peer recognition, extending the festival experience through lasting digital narratives. A key aspect is the seamless integration of physical experiences with digital interactions. Digital technologies enhance emotional and social participation, facilitating identity expression and amplifying peer influence dynamics essential to their initial destination choices. Moreover, festivals serve as practical platforms for Generation Z to enact ethical values, supporting eco-friendly initiatives, advocating for inclusivity, and boycotting problematic sponsors, thus reinforcing their ethical commitments through tangible actions.

In summary, festival tourism provides Generation Z with emotionally rich spaces where identity expression, ethical advocacy, and digital interaction converge. These experiences represent a unique intersection of immersive participation and ethical engagement. The next cluster further examines emerging technologies, including AI, VR, and the metaverse, highlighting their potential to reshape Generation Z's digitally extended travel behaviors.

Cluster 5: Technology and Immersive Tourism

Building upon the integration of digital expression and physical tourism experiences previously outlined, this cluster explores how emerging technologies—including artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and the metaverse—transform Generation Z's tourism behaviors. These technologies surpass convenience, becoming essential elements of their exploration, emotional engagement, identity expression, and ethical values. The adoption of AI in tourism significantly shapes Gen Z's expectations. Abed (2024) identifies performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, and ease of use as key factors influencing Gen Z's acceptance of AI-driven tourism platforms. These technologies must not only enhance efficiency and personalization but also align emotionally with Generation Z's expectations for human-like interactions (Vitezić & Perić, 2021). Similarly, the acceptance of service robots among Generation Z is nuanced. Ayyildiz et al. (2022) show context-dependent acceptance influenced by cultural norms and service environments, highlighting a crucial balance between technological automation and human warmth, critical to meaningful interactions (Vernandes et al., 2025).

Immersive technologies, especially VR and metaverse platforms, significantly shape Generation Z's tourism experiences. Studies by Jorge et al. (2023) and Wiangkham et al. (2024) demonstrate that VR substantially enhances emotional arousal, destination imagery, and travel intentions, providing viable alternatives to physical travel when constrained or environmentally sensitive. Hanji et al. (2024), employing an extended UTAUT-2 model, further clarify that hedonic value and perceived usefulness significantly drive Generation Z's engagement with virtual tourism, underscoring their preference for autonomous and individually optimized digital experiences. Additionally, these immersive technologies align with Generation Z's ethical and sustainability priorities. Mavrin et al. (2024) highlight virtual experiences as environmentally responsible alternatives, while Hua et al. (2024) emphasize Gen Z's proactive involvement in cultural heritage preservation via digital storytelling on platforms like TikTok, transforming technology into a medium for activism and ethical engagement.

In summary, Generation Z's tourism behavior is characterized by a hybrid blend of digital and physical experiences. Emerging technologies enable personalized, emotionally meaningful, and ethically engaged tourism narratives, significantly influencing their overall satisfaction, loyalty, and brand engagement—topics further detailed in the subsequent and final cluster.

Cluster 6: Satisfaction and Experience Evaluation

Concluding the analysis, this cluster investigates how Generation Z evaluates tourism experiences, emphasizing satisfaction and its influence on loyalty, revisit intentions, and brand advocacy. For Generation Z, satisfaction extends beyond traditional post-consumption assessments, encompassing emotional fulfillment, ethical alignment, and seamless digital integration throughout the tourism experience. Generation Z prioritizes experiential over functional satisfaction criteria. Adiwijaya and Nurmala (2023) highlight their emphasis on sensory, emotional, and relational elements rather than purely efficiency or cost. Attributes like authenticity, emotional connection, and meaningful engagement significantly shape perceived experiential value, reflecting Generation Z's preference for emotionally immersive experiences. Stavrianea et al. (2020) further demonstrate the multidimensional nature of satisfaction, including room ambiance, essential services, amenities, and perceived value, while identifying demographic differences. Female travelers prioritize comfort and ambiance, whereas males are more attuned to cost-value alignment, indicating the need for demographic-sensitive service approaches.

Digital convenience notably influences Generation Z's satisfaction. Ghosh et al. (2023) illustrate how digital ease, such as app functionality and online ordering in hospitality settings, substantially affects satisfaction and behavioral intentions, underlining Gen Z's expectation for seamless digital integration in tourism services. Overall, Generation Z evaluates tourism experiences holistically through emotional depth, ethical congruence, and digital fluency. Satisfaction arises when these elements synergistically enhance travel experiences, reinforcing identity and values. Such satisfaction significantly influences subsequent behaviors, including content sharing, loyalty, and advocacy through active social media engagement, creating a dynamic feedback loop distinctive to this generation.

In summary, recognizing satisfaction as both an evaluative outcome and behavioral driver completes the analytical framework of Generation Z tourism behavior. This nuanced understanding requires revisiting traditional tourism behavior theories to effectively capture this generational paradigm shift.

Discussion

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric and thematic synthesis of the growing body of research on Generation Z within the context of tourism and hospitality. Drawing on publication trends, keyword analyses, and thematic clustering, several key insights emerge that advance both theoretical understanding and managerial application.

Thematic Integration and Research Coherence

Co-citation cluster analysis identified a diverse yet interconnected body of literature on Generation Z in tourism and hospitality, initially comprising 12 discrete clusters. These were consolidated into six broader thematic categories: Generation Z Travel Behavior, Digital Marketing and User-Generated Content, Ethical and Sustainable Tourism, Festival Tourism, Technology and Immersive Tourism, and Satisfaction and Experience Evaluation. This thematic restructuring enhances conceptual clarity, reduces redundancy, and highlights intellectual convergence. For example, studies on social media engagement and digital storytelling were unified under digital marketing, while research on virtual reality and artificial intelligence was grouped within immersive tourism technologies. Such consolidation establishes an integrated framework, illustrating how Generation Z's values, behaviors, and expectations influence tourism and hospitality interactions. Additionally, this synthesis highlights a scholarly shift from macro-level industry perspectives toward micro-level, psychologically nuanced analyses focusing on emotional, ethical, and identity-based considerations. This evolution indicates a maturation in research, increasingly recognizing behavioral complexity and sociotechnical dynamics.

Strategic Implications for Tourism and Hospitality

The findings provide valuable strategic insights for tourism and hospitality practitioners aiming to effectively engage Generation Z consumers. Firstly, digital fluency is essential. Gen Z travelers extensively use mobile apps, influencer-driven content, and immersive technologies (e.g., VR, metaverse previews) throughout their travel decisions. Thus, brands should ensure seamless digital integration from initial engagement to post-travel interactions. Secondly, emotional authenticity and identity resonance significantly influence Gen Z's experience evaluations. Instead of purely transactional messaging, marketers should emphasize narrative-driven, emotionally compelling interactions, particularly on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Thirdly, ethical alignment is vital for cultivating loyalty. Generation Z favors brands demonstrating transparency, sustainability, and social responsibility. Tourism providers that authentically align operations and messaging with these values can better foster long-term brand advocacy.

Fourthly, humanizing technology is critical. While receptive to AI, robotics, and automation, Generation Z expects these technologies to deliver personalized, emotionally intelligent interactions, augmenting rather than replacing human service. Finally, experiential depth increasingly defines satisfaction. Gen Z prioritizes emotional richness, ethical congruence, and social validation over basic functionality. Brands offering experiences with

meaningful storytelling, ethical festivals, sustainable tourism initiatives, or immersive cultural heritage activities are positioned advantageously to enhance revisit intentions and social advocacy.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of scholarly literature on Generation Z in tourism and hospitality. Utilizing longitudinal publication analysis, keyword frequency mapping, burst detection, and co-citation clustering, it outlines both the evolution of academic interest and the thematic structure of this emerging research field. Findings reveal a notable increase in publications from 2018 onward, aligning with Gen Z's growing consumer significance. Keyword analysis highlights a scholarly shift from traditional hospitality topics ("hotels") to contemporary themes such as sustainability, virtual reality, and behavioral theories. Twelve initial clusters were consolidated into six core thematic categories, clarifying how Generation Z engages with tourism through ethical considerations, digital content creation, immersive technology, and value-driven experiences.

This study makes several important theoretical and contextual contributions to the field of tourism and hospitality. Theoretically, it integrates fragmented literature into a coherent analytical framework that captures Generation Z's tourism behavior through psychological, technological, and ethical dimensions. By applying co-citation analysis and thematic synthesis, the research advances understanding of how Gen Z's identity-driven, digitally mediated, and value-conscious characteristics shape their travel motivations, decision-making processes, and satisfaction evaluations. This framework contributes to the ongoing evolution of consumer behavior theories by foregrounding constructs such as self-congruity, digital co-creation, and performative ethics, which are increasingly relevant in the post-digital consumer landscape. Contextually, the study offers insights tailored to the contemporary tourism and hospitality sectors. First, brands should embrace emotion-driven digital storytelling by leveraging platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to co-create authentic, peer-generated content that fosters emotional resonance and social validation. Second, aligning service offerings with ethical and sustainable values—including transparency in environmental practices, fair labor, and cause-driven messaging—can strengthen brand loyalty and position firms as socially responsible leaders in a values-conscious marketplace.

While this study presents a robust synthesis, it is limited by its reliance on published, peer-reviewed English-language literature, which may underrepresent insights from non-Western contexts. Future research should consider cross-cultural comparisons, deeper exploration of intention–behavior gaps, and real-time behavioral data analysis from social media platforms. Additionally, further theoretical development is needed to build hybrid models that integrate constructs such as performative ethics, digital selfhood, and immersive tourism intention, reflecting the complexity of Generation Z's behaviors and expectations.

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