

IMPACT OF SUSTAINABILITY IN TRAVEL DESTINATION DECISION OF GEN Z- A STUDY

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Abstract

This study explores the factors influencing Generation Z's (Gen Z) travel destination decisions, focusing on technology, unique experiences, and sustainability. A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 Generation Z respondents in Virudhunagar district, India, using a stratified random sampling method. The data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The results indicate that technology ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$) and sustainability ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.001$) significantly influence Gen Z's intention to visit a destination. Unique experiences, however, showed no significant direct impact ($\beta = 0.020$, $p = 0.749$). The model explains 49.4% of the variance in travel destination selection. The findings highlight the critical role of technology and sustainability in shaping Gen Z's travel decisions, underscoring the need for the tourism industry to adapt to these preferences.

Keywords: Generation Z, Sustainability, Unique experience, Technology, Tourism

1. Introduction and review of literature

Generation Z, or Gen Z, comprises individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s. This generation is characterized by its digital nativity, social media savvy, and a strong emphasis on personal experiences and authenticity. Gen Z is redefining travel trends by prioritizing authenticity, unique experiences, and cultural immersion. According to a study by MMGY Global (2020), 64% of Gen Z travellers prefer to engage in activities that allow them to connect with the local culture, such as cooking classes, street food tours, and homestays. This preference for off-the-beaten-path destinations and local experiences is driving a shift away from traditional tourist attractions. As Gen Z comes of age, their travel preferences and decision-making processes are becoming increasingly influential in the tourism industry. This research aims to explore the factors that influence Gen Z's travel destination decisions, including their use of technology, social media, sustainability, and unique experiences.

Technology

Gen Z is often referred to as the "digital generation" due to their extensive use of technology and social media (Twenge, 2017). According to a study by Booking.com (2020), 80% of Gen Z travellers use their smartphones to plan and book their trips. This reliance on technology extends to the use of travel apps, online reviews, and social media platforms like

Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Social media plays a significant role in shaping travel decisions. A survey by Skift (2019) found that 71% of Gen Z travellers are influenced by travel-related content on social media. Instagram, in particular, is a key platform for travel inspiration, with users often basing their destination choices on visually appealing posts and stories (Rončák, M., et al., 2021). TikTok has also emerged as a powerful influencer, with travel-related content generating high engagement and inspiring travel itineraries (PricopeVancia, A. P et al., 2023). The result of the study by PricopeVancia is supported by Moni, A et al., 2025. They found that along with TikTok, Instagram also help the young travellers in deciding their travel destination.

Peer reviews and travel influencers play a significant role in Gen Z's travel decision-making process. Trust in user-generated content and recommendations from friends and family is high among this generation (Yoo&Gretzel, 2011). According to a study by Expedia (2018), 70% of Gen Z travellers read online reviews before making a booking, and 45% are influenced by travel content from influencers. Travel influencers, particularly those on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, have a substantial impact on Gen Z's travel choices. These influencers often provide authentic, relatable content that resonates with young travellers (PricopeVancia, A. P et al., 2023). A survey by Hootsuite (2019) found that 58% of Gen Z travellers follow travel influencers and are influenced by their recommendations. This shows that the usage of technology among Gen Z influences their travel destination decision. The younger generation travellers have trust on the social media influencers. They decide their travel destination based on the content provided by the influencer (Sharma, M et al., 2025).

H₁: Technology usage influences the travel destination decision of Gen Z

Unique Experiences

Gen Z places a high value on authentic and unique experiences. Unlike previous generations, they are less interested in traditional tourist attractions and more drawn to off-the-beaten-path destinations and local experiences (Popşa, R. E., 2024). A study by MMGY Global (2020) found that 64% of Gen Z travellers prefer to engage in activities that allow them to connect with the local culture, such as cooking classes, street food tours, and homestays. The desire for authenticity is also reflected in their preference for sustainable and responsible travel. Gen Z is more likely to choose destinations and accommodations that align with their values of environmental and social responsibility (Gössling et al., 2020). This trend is supported by a survey by Booking.com (2020), which found that 73% of Gen Z travellers are willing to pay more for sustainable travel options.

Gen Z is also drawn to travel for cultural and educational experiences. They are more likely to engage in activities that provide learning opportunities and cultural immersion (Robinson, V. M., & Schänzel, H. A., 2019). Generation Z college students are deciding their travel destination based on the availability of verities of tourism activities. Especially they prefer to engage in water sport activities while gone for tourism (Sumatra, E. J. 2025). A study by the National Geographic Society (2020) found that 60% of Gen Z travellers are interested in educational travel, such as language immersion programs, historical tours, and volunteer projects. Immersion and happiness are two major factors that shape the behavioural intention of the Gen Z in deciding their travel destination (Weerasekera, D., & Assella, A. P. N. 2025). Hence, Gen Zs' are interested in experiencing new things and that influence them in deciding the travel destination.

H₂: Gaining unique experiences influence the travel destination decision of Gen Z.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a critical factor in Gen Z’s travel decisions. This generation is more aware of and concerned about environmental issues, and they are increasingly seeking out eco-friendly travel options (Wee, D, 2019). According to a report by the World Tourism Organization (2019), Gen Z travellers are more likely to research and choose destinations that have a positive impact on the environment and local communities. Ethical travel, which includes considerations such as animal welfare, cultural preservation, and fair trade, is also gaining importance. A study by the Travel Foundation (2020) found that 55% of Gen Z travellers consider the ethical implications of their travel choices, such as avoiding destinations that exploit animals or harm local communities. A study with British Gen Z travellers revealed that they are concerned about the environment. They strongly believe that the environmental protection will provide a bright future to the next generations. This shapes their attitude in selecting their travel destination (Ribeiro, M. A., et al., 2025). The sustainability concern among the UK Gen Z travellers is shaped by the internal drivers such as personal norms, ascription of responsibility and the awareness of consequences (Salinero, Y et al., 2025).

Cultural exchange programs and volunteer travel, which combine travel with meaningful experiences, are particularly appealing to this generation. These experiences not only provide a deeper understanding of different cultures but also align with Gen Z’s values of social responsibility and personal growth (Rončák, M., et al., 2021). A study by Prayag, G., et al., 2025, revealed that there is a generational gap in sustainability concern. Compared to the previous generations, Gen Z is focused greatly on sustainability. This sustainability concern shapes their attitude in deciding their travel destination. In all their encounters the Gen Z are giving much importance to sustainability and it influences the selection of travel destination.

H₃: Sustainability influences the selection of travel destination among Gen Z.

2. Research Methodology

The aim of this study is to know how the Gen Zs’ are deciding their travel destination. To easily identify the Gen Z, the researcher considered their target population are the one who were born between the 2000 and 2005. Hence, they are the right one to whom the researcher can gather data.

Table 1: Population Size

S. No.	Taluk	Population (2011)	Population (2005)	Gen Z Population
1	Virudhunagar	215097	214446	11186
2	Sivakasi	426753	414282	21573
3	Aruppukottai, Narikudi	246236	243693	12702
4	Rajapalayam	347668	339546	17686
5	Srivilliputhur, Watrap	293209	278083	14490
6	Kariapatti	105428	99629	5211
7	Tiruchuli	103290	97609	5106
8	Sattur	168607	160334	8367

For this purpose, a total of 400 responses were collected from college students in Virudhunagar district. The district is administratively divided into ten taluks: Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, Aruppukottai, Rajapalayam, Srivilliputhur, Kariapatti, Narikudi, Tiruchuli, Sattur,

and Watrap. Notably, Watrap and Narikudi were recognized as independent taluks only after 2011, whereas before this reclassification, Watrap was part of Srivilliputhur and Narikudi was under Aruppukottai.

According to Census of India data, the population of Virudhunagar district was 1,751,301 in 2001, which increased to 1,942,288 in 2011, indicating a decadal growth of approximately 11% or about 1.1% annually. Based on this growth trend, the estimated population in 2005 was around 1,847,622. From this projection, the Generation Z population in Virudhunagar district during that period is estimated to be approximately 96,321.

Considering this, the total study population was defined as 96,321. Since surveying the entire population was not feasible within the available timeframe, the researcher employed a stratified random sampling technique. Each taluk in the district was treated as a stratum, and from every taluk, 40 respondents were selected, resulting in a total sample size of 400.

To gather the data a structured questionnaire is framed. Direct survey method was used to collect the data. The questionnaire is explained by researcher to each respondent and gathered 400 samples in Virudhunagar district. The collected data were analysed by using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Factors	Author
Technology	Twenge (2017), Skift (2019), Rončák, M., et al., (2021), PricopeVancia, A. P et al., (2023), Yoo&Gretzel, (2011), Hootsuite (2019), Sharma, M et al., (2025), Moni, A et al., (2025)
Sustainability	Wee, D(2019), Rončák, M., et al., (2021), Ribeiro, M. A., et al., (2025), Prayag, G., et al., (2025), Salinero, Y et al., (2025)
Unique Experience	Popşa, R. E. (2024),Robinson, V. M., &Schänzel, H. A., (2019)Gossling et al., (2020), Weerasekera, D., &Assella, A. P. N. (2025), Sumatra, E. J. (2025)

3. Discussion

Demographic Description about the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Description

Variables	Categories	Frequency
Gender	Male	171
	Female	229
Educational Status	UG	240
	PG	160
Occupation	Private Employee	281
	Government Employee	119
Monthly Income	<25000	67
	25000-50000	194
	>50000	139

Table 1 depicts that samples are collected from 171 male and 229 female respondents regarding how they are deciding their travel destination. From the collected data 240 respondents are PG degree holders and 160 respondents are UG degree holders. All the 40 respondents are employed. Out of 400 respondents 281 are working in private organisation and 119 are working in government organisation. Majority respondents (194) monthly income falls in the category of Rs.25000 to Rs. 50000 followed by 139 respondents are in the category of above Rs. 50000 as their monthly income and 67 respondents monthly income fall in less than Rs. 25000 category.

Travel Destination Decision

An exploratory model on selection of Gen Z on travel destination was constructed based on the influences of Technology, Unique Experience and Sustainability on intention to visit the place and deciding the places to visit. Dependent variables are the observed, endogenous variables and the independent variables are the observed, exogenous variables used for framing the model.

Based on the influences of Technology, Unique Experience and Sustainability on intention to travel and selecting the places to visit, an exploratory model on Gen Z selection of travel destinations was built. Endogenous variables that are observed serve as dependent variables, while exogenous variables that are observed function as independent variables in a model.

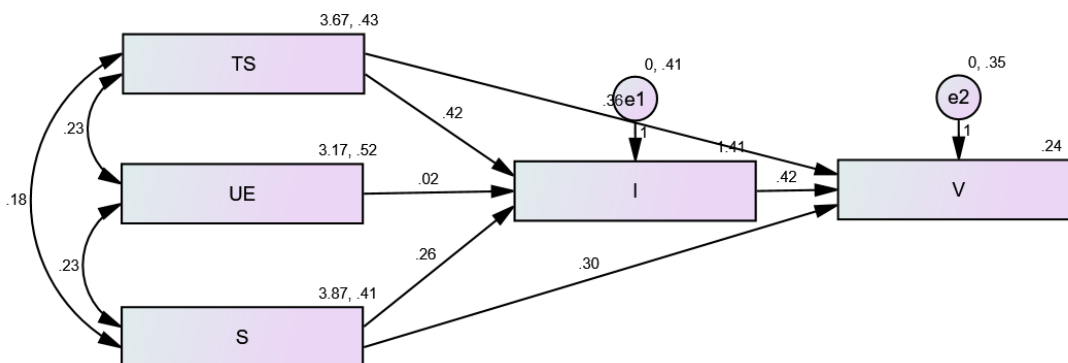


Fig. 1: Travel Destination Decision among Gen Z

Table 2: Fitness of Travel Intention Model on Destination Decision

Chi-Square	Probability level	DF	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	RFI	TLI	NFI	CFI
1.087	0.297	1	1.087	0.017	0.967	0.997	0.998	1.000

The above table describes the adequacy level of the constructed travel destination selection model. The probability level of getting chi-square statistic for the above constructed model is 0.297 which is greater than 0.05. It ensures the statistical correctness of the assumptions of relationship made between the variables used in the specified model.

The appropriateness level of the created travel destination selection model is described in the above table. For the above-mentioned developed model, the likelihood level of obtaining the chi-square statistic is 0.297, which is greater than 0.05. It guarantees that the relationships between the variables employed in the defined model are assumed to exist statistically correctly.

The value of Minimum Discrepancy Function divided by Degrees of Freedom (CMIN/DF) for the buying intention model is 1.087 which is less than 5 and it represents the better fit of the data used for the construction of the model. The statistical value of Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.017 which is less than 0.08 and it is a good indicator of model fitness. The fit index value more than 0.9 represents good indicator of model fit and for the above buying intention model the values of Relative Fit Index (RFI) is 0.978, Tucker – Lewis Index (TLI) is 0.998, Normed Fit Index (NFI) is 0.998 and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) for the model is 1.000. All the fit index values are greater than 0.9 which explains the statistical fitness level of construct.

Selection of Travel Destination Model Path and Hypothesis Testing

The relationships between the theoretical constructs are represented by regression coefficients between the constructs. The below table shows the casual relationship between exogenous variables and endogenous variables present in the model.

Table 3: Casual Relationships in Travel Destination Selection Model among Gen Z

Influences of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables			Estimate	S.E.	Critical Ratio	P
Intention	<---	Technology	.421	.067	6.257	.000
Intention	<---	Unique Experience	.020	.063	.320	.749
Intention	<---	Sustainability	.265	.069	3.827	.000
Overall	<---	Intention	.416	.054	7.735	.000
Overall	<---	Technology	.360	.063	5.717	.000
Overall	<---	Sustainability	.298	.062	4.843	.000

The single headed arrow shows the relationship between casual factors and the travel destination selection among Gen Z. The above table shows that when the intention of the Gen Z goes up by one unit their travel destination selection goes up by 0.416 units. The p value for the variables dependency of technology among Gen Z in travel destination selection is 0.000 which is less than significant value of 0.05 hence there is a significant relationship between these variables. The one unit of change in dependency of technology among Gen Z in travel destination results in 0.360 units of change in the selection of travel destination among college students. The p value of 0.000 between the sustainability factors and the travel destination selection of Gen Z is lesser than the significant value of 0.05 which shows that there is a significant relationship between these exogenous and the endogenous variables. When the sustainability factors goes up by one unit, the travel destination selection of Gen Z goes up by 0.298 units.

Table 4: Effects of Visit Intention Model on Travel Destination

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	R²
Intention	Technology	0.421	0.000	0.421	0.271
	Unique Experience	0.020	0.000	0.020	
	Sustainability	0.265	0.000	0.265	
Overall	Technology	0.360	0.175	0.535	0.494
	Unique Experience	0.000	0.008	0.008	
	Sustainability	0.298	0.110	0.409	

The standardized direct, indirect and total effects of independent variables on travel destination selection among Gen Z are given in the above table. The exogenous variables like technology, unique experience and sustainability are able to predict the travel destination selection to the extent of 49.4 per cent. In other words, the error variance in prediction of travel destination selection by using independent variables is approximately 50.6 per cent.

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for the tourism industry, particularly in catering to the unique preferences of Generation Z (Gen Z). Given the strong influence of technology on Gen Z's travel decisions, tourism stakeholders should invest in advanced digital tools and platforms. Developing user-friendly travel apps, enhancing online booking systems, and leveraging social media for marketing and customer engagement are essential. Travel companies should also collaborate with influencers and user-generated content to tap into Gen Z's trust in peer recommendations.

Sustainability is another critical factor. Tourism businesses should prioritize eco-friendly practices, such as reducing carbon footprints, supporting local communities, and promoting ethical travel. Offering sustainable options and transparently communicating these efforts can attract Gen Z travellers who are willing to pay more for environmentally responsible choices.

Unique experiences, while not showing a direct significant impact, are still valued by Gen Z. Therefore, destinations and accommodations should offer immersive cultural activities, such as cooking classes and homestays, to cater to this generation's desire for authentic experiences. By aligning with Gen Z's values and preferences, the tourism industry can better meet their needs, drive innovation, and ensure long-term sustainability and growth.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the travel destination decisions of Gen Z are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including technology and social media, the desire for authentic and unique experiences, a commitment to sustainability and ethical travel, and the influence of peer reviews and travel influencers. Understanding these factors is crucial for the tourism industry to effectively cater to the needs and preferences of this generation. As Gen Z continues to grow in influence, their travel decisions will shape the future of the tourism industry, emphasizing the need for innovation, sustainability, and authentic experiences. The result of the study is applicable to Virudhunagar District of Tamilnadu. To generalise this result the study can be conducted in the different districts and states of India.

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