

## Travel Preferences of the Generation Z (Gen Z) Generation (Case Study of Five Vocational Schools in Medan)

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**Abstract:** : This research aims to determine the preferences of the millennial generation for traveling by conducting research on 5 Tourism Vocational Schools in the city of Medan. The number of respondents used in this research was around 400 people by distributing questionnaires using Google Form. The research method used is a mix method (qualitative and quantitative), using cross-tabulation analysis (quantitative) between the respondent's gender and travel preferences, while Milles and Hubberman (qualitative), using data collection patterns, reducing data and concluding data. with the results of the analysis of tourist destinations that are in demand, namely Lake Toba, around 46%, the preferred tourist facilities are free internet (74%), the ticket application is agoda.com (38%), tiket.com (30%), the preferred transportation is buses around 52%. %, the preferred activity is taking photos (52%), the historical tourist interest is Maimun Palace (33%), the reason for traveling is because of comfort (45%), the preferred content application is Tik Tok (42%), 38% expenditure of 125,000 – 150,000 , the most preferred culinary is regional food (54%), the type of tourism that is in demand is culinary tourism (28%), the preferred payment application is OVO (40%), the preferred accommodation is homestay (45%), and the type of maritime tourism that is preferred preferred, namely diving (45%), planning tourism products for Gen Z based on the 6 A pattern (Attraction, Accessibility, activity, amenities, ancenary, available package). The conclusion is that Gen Z's preferences based on gender have the same preferences in traveling, only a few things This is only different because the characteristics of Gen Z are the same, one of which is depending on the internet or the digital generation.

**Keywords:** : Gen z, Preferences, Travel, Tourism Products

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### 1. Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z), referring to individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents a cohort that has grown up in an environment characterized by rapid technological development and intensive exposure to digital media. As true digital natives, Gen Z demonstrates a high level of familiarity with information and communication technology, particularly the internet and social media platforms, which significantly influence their daily behavior, preferences, and decision-making processes. In the context of tourism, this technological embeddedness shapes how Gen Z searches for information, selects destinations, plans travel activities, and shares travel experiences. Previous studies consistently indicate that Gen Z tourists tend to rely heavily on internet-based information sources, prefer affordable transportation options, are sensitive to price, favor visually appealing and “instagrammable” destinations, and actively use social media to document

and disseminate their travel experiences (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang et al., 2015; Gretzel et al., 2015).

**Tabel 1. Generation Cycle**

1. Baby Boomer	2. Generation X	3. Generation Y	4. Generation Z	5. Generation Alpha
<i>(born 1946–1964)</i> A generation born after World War II. The term refers to the increase in birth rates as many couples succeeded in having children. This generation is adaptive to modernization and able to adjust to changes. They are often seen as experienced individuals with extensive life experience.	<i>(born 1965–1980)</i> Grew up when the economy in several countries began to stabilize. The use of PCs (personal computers), video games, cable TV, and the internet became common. Data storage shifted from floppy disks to hard disks and flash disks. MTV and video games were very popular. The term Generation X was introduced by Jane Deverson. Some members of this generation had better education levels, became familiar with punk music, and experimented with marijuana.	<i>(born 1981–1994)</i> Also known as the net generation or internet generation. The term Generation Y began to be used in major United States editorials in August 1993. This generation widely uses communication technologies such as email, SMS, instant messaging, and social media like Facebook and Twitter. They also enjoy playing online games.	<i>(born 1995–2010)</i> Also known as iGeneration or the internet generation. They share similarities with Generation Y but are able to perform multiple activities at once, such as tweeting, browsing, and listening to music using headsets. They are very close to the virtual world. Since childhood, they have been familiar with technology and advanced gadgets, which indirectly influence their personalities.	<i>(born 2011–2025)</i> A generation born after Generation Z, descended from Generation X and Y. This generation is highly educated because they enter school earlier and learn more. On average, they have wealthy parents with fewer children. This generation is not strongly affected by economic crises from an early age. Generation Alpha is predicted to become the most intelligent generation.

Source: [http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generasi\\_Z](http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generasi_Z)

The growing body of tourism literature has extensively discussed the travel preferences and behaviors of Generation Z across different countries and cultural settings. These studies generally highlight similar patterns, such as the dominance of social media in destination choice, the importance of user-generated content and online reviews, and the preference for cost-efficient travel options (Priporas et al., 2017; Akin & Şener, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). While these findings contribute valuable insights, they often treat Gen Z as a relatively homogeneous group of consumers, overlooking potential variations arising from differences in educational background, vocational orientation, and professional exposure to the tourism sector. As a result, many conclusions regarding Gen Z travel behavior appear repetitive and lack contextual depth.

This study addresses this limitation by focusing on a specific and underexplored subgroup of Generation Z, namely students enrolled in Tourism Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Pariwisata) in Medan City, Indonesia. Unlike Gen Z students in general education tracks, vocational tourism students are formally introduced to tourism concepts, service standards, destination management, and hospitality practices through their curriculum. This educational background may shape their travel preferences, motivations, and decision-making processes in ways that differ from Gen Z tourists in general. For example, their reliance on internet-based information and social media may reflect not only personal consumption needs but also professional learning interests, such

as observing service quality, destination branding, and tourist behavior. Similarly, their sensitivity to price and transportation choices may be influenced by an understanding of tourism economics and operational efficiency rather than solely by personal budget constraints.

Understanding tourist preferences is essential in tourism studies, as preferences reflect an individual's tendency to choose one option over another when making travel-related decisions. Visitor preferences play a strategic role in tourism development, particularly in designing and innovating tourism products that align with visitor expectations and experiences (Wardhani et al., 2015). Tourism itself involves temporary travel outside an individual's usual environment for purposes such as recreation, leisure, education, and personal development. In this context, tourists are individuals who temporarily visit destinations that are relatively unfamiliar to them, and their behavior is shaped by a combination of personal interests, socio-economic conditions, technological developments, and generational characteristics (UNWTO, 2019).

From a generational perspective, Generation Z is widely recognized as a cohort that is highly dependent on technology, flexible, adaptive, and tolerant of cultural differences (Noordiono, 2016; CommScope, 2017). Their daily lives are closely intertwined with digital devices, social media, and instant access to information, which in turn influences their tourism behavior. Travel decisions among Gen Z are strongly affected by online content, peer recommendations, visual appeal, affordability, and the credibility of digital platforms and influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Rachmandani et al., 2024). Integrating the concepts of preferences, tourism, tourists, and generational characteristics therefore provides a comprehensive conceptual foundation for analyzing how Gen Z forms and expresses travel preferences.

In addition, tourism products are inherently complex and integrative, involving multiple components that must function simultaneously to deliver a satisfactory experience. Buhalis (2000) conceptualizes tourism development through the 6A framework, consisting of attraction, amenities, ancillary services, activities, accessibility, and available packages. Effective tourism planning requires alignment between these components and visitor preferences in order to enhance satisfaction and destination competitiveness (Yoeti, 2013; Inskeep, 1991). For Generation Z, whose lifestyle is closely linked to digital connectivity and visual culture, tourism product planning must increasingly consider technological integration, affordability, and experiential value.

This research further contributes to the literature by providing a regional perspective on Generation Z tourism preferences in Medan City, Indonesia, and comparing its findings with previous studies conducted in other regions and countries. While international research often emphasizes Gen Z's interest in adventure tourism, sustainability, and experiential travel (UNWTO, 2019; Agustina & Astari, 2022), the local context of Medan highlights how socio-economic conditions, transportation infrastructure, and vocational education interact with global Gen Z characteristics. This comparison allows for the identification of preferences that are universal among Generation Z and those that are context-specific, particularly for individuals preparing to enter the tourism workforce.

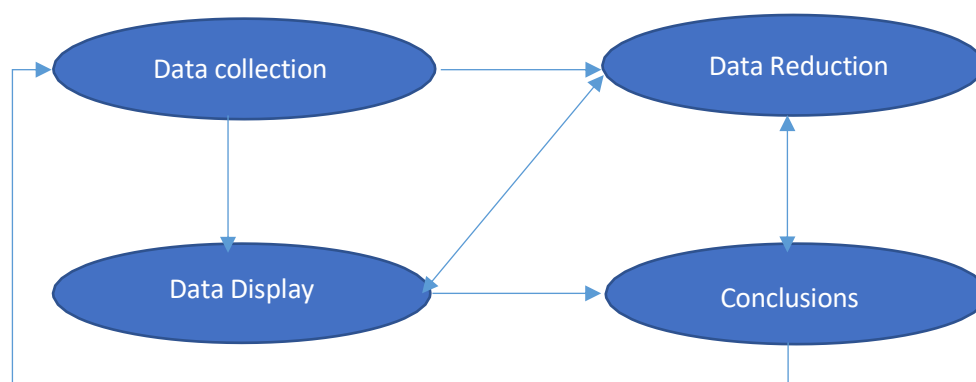
Therefore, this study aims to analyze the travel preferences of Generation Z students enrolled in five Tourism Vocational High Schools in Medan City and to examine how these preferences can inform tourism product planning. By focusing on Gen Z as both tourists and prospective tourism professionals, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the literature on generational tourism behavior and practical implications for tourism education institutions, destination managers, and policymakers in designing

tourism products and marketing strategies that are aligned with the needs and expectations of Generation Z.

## 2. Method

This research was conducted in five (5) vocational high schools (SMK) specializing in tourism in the city of Medan, namely SMK Sandhy Putra Telkom 2 Medan, SMK Negeri 8 Medan, SMK Negeri 14 Medan, SMK Negeri 7 Medan, and SMK Swasta Pencawan. In conducting this research, the researcher used a mixed method (descriptive qualitative and descriptive quantitative) with a case study approach based on phenomena and issues that were then converted into data obtained in the field. The objects of this study were students from five different vocational schools in the city of Medan. According to Patton in Moleong (2000: 103), data analysis is the process of arranging data in sequence, organizing it into patterns, categorizing it, and creating basic descriptive units.

The data analysis conducted in this study was crosstab analysis and the Miles and Huberman model. Crosstabulation is a tabular analysis method that displays cross-tabulations of observed data. Crosstabulation analysis is a method for tabulating several different variables into a matrix. Cross tabulation analysis can be performed on ordinal or nominal variables (Ghozali, 2011). This study uses the Miles and Huberman model. According to Miles and Huberman in Sugiyono's book (2018:246), data analysis in qualitative research is performed during data collection and after data collection is completed within a certain period. Activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and continuously until completion, so that the data is saturated. Miles and Huberman offer a general pattern of analysis by following the following interactive model:



**Figure 1. Miles and Huberman's Analysis Model Pattern**

According to Sugiyono (2018:247-249), data reduction is summarizing, selecting key points, focusing on important matters relevant to the research topic, identifying themes and patterns, and ultimately providing a clearer picture and facilitating further data collection. After reducing the data, the next step is to present the data. In qualitative research, data presentation can be done in the form of brief descriptions, charts, relationships between categories, flowcharts, and the like, but what is often used to present data in qualitative research is narrative text. According to Sugiyono (2018:252-253), conclusions in qualitative research can answer the research questions formulated at the outset, but may also not, because, as mentioned earlier, the problems and research questions in qualitative research are still temporary and will develop after the research is conducted in the field.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Travel Styles and Preferences of Generation Z

From the cross-tabulation results, the choice of tourist destinations in North Sumatra based on the gender of respondents shows that Generation Z (Gen Z) tourists' preferences based on gender indicate that many males choose to travel to Mount Sibayak, around 22 people (17%), and Lake Toba with the same number, 22 people (17%). This is because Mount Sibayak is a favorite mountain for the city of Medan and its surroundings.

The most frequently visited tourist attractions by respondents based on gender showed the following results: female respondents chose Lake Toba as their most popular choice, with 102 respondents or 37%, while male respondents chose it as their most popular choice, with 46 respondents or 35%. Lake Toba is a leading tourist attraction in North Sumatra. In addition to being popular with local tourists, Lake Toba is also favored by foreign tourists. The type of facility preferred by both male and female respondents is toilets, with 39 male respondents and 77 female respondents answering this. Tourism facilities are all types of facilities specifically designed to support the creation of convenience, comfort, and safety for tourists visiting tourism destinations. Facilities such as toilets are also mandatory facilities that must be provided, because we never know when we are at a destination and suddenly feel stomach pain, need to urinate, and so on. The results of the cross tabulation conducted by the author on respondents regarding the online airline ticket purchasing system show that the most popular choice among the younger generation is the online system, with 81 female respondents choosing tiket.com, while male respondents prefer agoda.com. In this digital age, everything can be purchased online, including airplane tickets, which are as easy to buy as checking out online shopping.

**Table 2. Cross Tabulation of Ticket Purchase Application Media by Gender**

Platform	Male	Female	Total
Agoda.com	44	73	117
Pegi-peggi.com	14	57	71
Tiket.com	33	81	114
Traveloka.com	38	60	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>400</b>

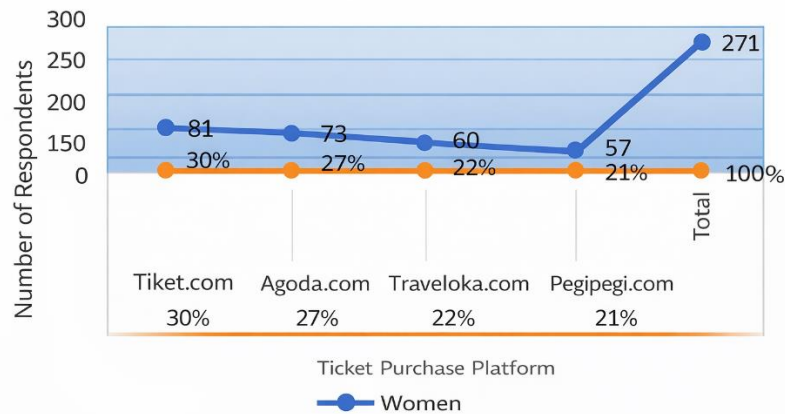
Technology makes it easier for us to carry out various activities. From daily tasks that can be assisted by advanced technology, such as machines, to the ease of booking transportation. In the past, you had to spend time booking tickets in person. Now, this can be done simply by using a smartphone. Digital platforms such as apps that you download or websites on your mobile phone can facilitate the online purchase of transportation tickets. One of the most popular forms of transportation for online ticket purchases is air travel.

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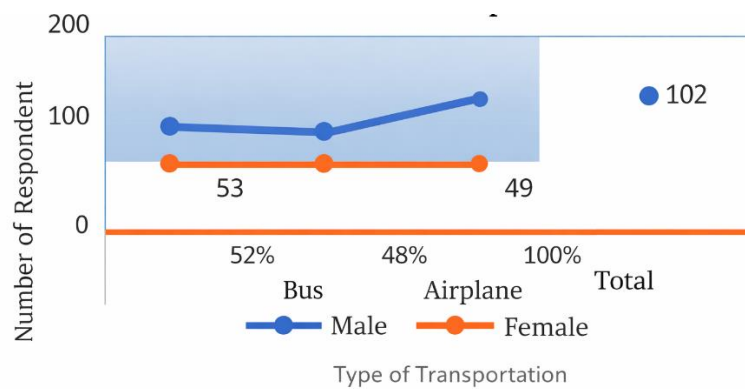
Regarding the type of transportation used by respondents in the case of the green generation when traveling to tourist destinations, after analysis using cross tabulation with respondents based on gender, the results show that 118 female respondents chose to take the bus, while 53 male respondents chose to take the bus and 113 male respondents chose

to fly. chose buses (53 people), while 113 female respondents and 49 male respondents chose to take planes.



**Figure 2. Ticket Purchase Applications That Demand**

Based on the analysis of ticket purchasing platforms, it is found that Tiket.com is the most preferred application among female respondents, while Traveloka is more favored by male respondents. This indicates differences in perceptions and preferences among Generation Z users. For airline ticket purchases, Tiket.com not only offers competitive and affordable prices but also provides a fast transaction process and a wide variety of payment methods, allowing consumers to choose the payment option that best suits their needs. In addition, several other factors contribute to the preference for using the Tiket.com application, including its user-friendly interface, frequent promotional offers, and reliable service quality.



**Figure 3. Preferred Mode of Transportation**

Based on the analysis of transportation modes, it is found that buses are the most preferred mode of transportation for both male and female respondents. One of the key factors influencing this preference is budget consideration. As Generation Z generally has limited financial resources, choosing an affordable mode of transportation such as buses becomes a rational option. Beyond cost efficiency, traveling by bus also offers several advantages, including comfort and practicality, the opportunity to enjoy scenic views along the journey, new travel experiences, and more time for rest during the trip. Lake Toba, which is internationally renowned, is located in North Sumatra and is surrounded by seven regencies: Simalungun, Karo, Dairi, Humbang Hasundutan, North Tapanuli, Samosir, and Toba Samosir Regency. As the largest lake in Southeast Asia, Lake Toba features a volcanic island at its center, known as Samosir Island. Within Samosir Island itself, there are two

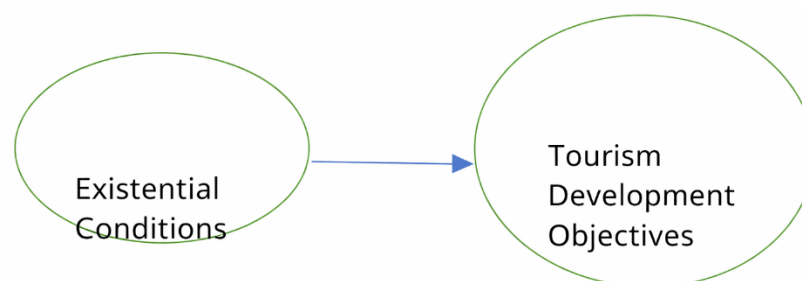
additional beautiful lakes, namely Lake Sidihoni and Lake Aek Natonang, which further enhance the area's tourism appeal and natural uniqueness.

Generation Z demonstrates a higher dependence on internet usage compared to other age groups in Indonesia. This is evident from the large proportion of Generation Z individuals categorized as addicted users, spending more than seven hours per day accessing the internet. This condition highlights the importance for tourism business operators to prioritize the provision of fast and reliable internet facilities to support tourism activities, particularly for Generation Z. The preference for buses among Generation Z is also influenced by several factors, including safety and comfort, lower ticket prices, diverse and extensive travel routes, environmental friendliness, and easy accessibility.

Instagrammable destinations have become one of the leading tourism trends in recent years, as tourists increasingly compete to produce visually appealing and up-to-date photos. Instagrammable destinations represent a form of digital tourism, deliberately designed to look attractive when captured on camera. Consequently, many tourists, especially those from Generation Z, enjoy taking photos at tourist destinations, as visual content creation and social media sharing are integral parts of their travel experience.

### 3.2 Planning Tourism Products for Generation Z

Planning tourism products for Generation Z requires careful consideration of several factors to align their needs with the products offered. This generation tends to prefer planning their trips independently. Therefore, destination owners and managers need to intensify promotional efforts through social media platforms that are widely used by Generation Z, such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Promotional content should feature visually attractive images accompanied by clear and easily understandable information. This approach is supported by the Millennials Travel Statistics and Trends 2020–2021 survey, which indicates that 86 percent of millennials travel to gain new cultural experiences, 44 percent travel for leisure and entertainment, 28 percent seek the excitement of shopping for unique local products especially abroad and approximately 76 percent travel for educational purposes, including learning about the history of a destination. These findings demonstrate that visiting destinations with strong historical and cultural value is a crucial component of the overall travel experience.



**Figure 4. Tourism Planning Process**

*Source: Inskoop, 1991*

In terms of booking travel services and products, approximately 66 percent of millennials rely on smartphones. Regarding accommodation preferences, Generation Z is attracted to nomadic tourism amenities such as caravans, glamping (glamorous camping), and home pods. This aligns with information obtained from respondents, who reported an average travel expenditure of IDR 100,000–150,000. This indicates that accommodation providers must meet Generation Z's preferences by offering affordable prices and providing

discounts without reducing the quality of facilities. According to the American Multi-Generational Travel Trends survey by Expedia Group, millennials generally are not interested in repeating the same type of trip; instead, they seek variety, a mindset that is strongly influenced by high budget awareness and financial limitations.

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that tourism products targeting Generation Z must adopt a psychological approach that resonates with their lifestyle, which is highly dependent on internet connectivity. Considering that many individuals in Generation Z are still of school age with limited financial capacity, tourism marketing strategies should focus on affordability first to attract their interest and then build emotional attachment. When searching for information about destinations, accommodations, and tourist activities online, reviews and testimonials from other travelers play a crucial role in their decision-making process. Therefore, destinations and tourism activities alone are insufficient for promotion; credible reviews and user-generated content are essential to strengthen Generation Z's intention to travel. Tourism managers are encouraged to collaborate with influencers to shape travel decisions among Generation Z. As true digital natives, Generation Z is highly comfortable with smartphones and digital platforms; however, recommendations from friends, family members, and fellow travelers remain the key factors in marketing destinations, accommodations, and tourism activities in Indonesia. For Generation Z, destinations are important, but cultural experiences within those destinations are even more valuable. As future consumers of the tourism industry with a long time horizon, Generation Z represents a sustainable and enduring market with significant business potential.

### **3.3 Transportation Choice and Economic Rationality**

The preference for buses as the primary mode of transportation among both male and female respondents reflects a combination of economic rationality and behavioral adaptation. From an economic perspective, Generation Z, particularly students, generally faces budget constraints, making affordability a dominant factor in transportation choice. However, behavioral tourism theory suggests that this choice is also influenced by experiential value. Traveling by bus allows longer travel time, scenic enjoyment, social interaction, and a sense of journey, which contributes to the overall travel experience.

Interestingly, the choice of buses also aligns with emerging pro-environmental attitudes among Generation Z. Buses are perceived as more environmentally friendly compared to private vehicles or frequent air travel. This supports youth tourism theory, which posits that younger generations increasingly integrate ethical and sustainability considerations into their travel behavior, even when economic factors remain primary.

### **3.4 Social Media, Visual Culture, and Instagrammable Tourism**

The strong inclination toward photographing destinations and sharing travel experiences on social media reflects the integration of tourism behavior with digital self-expression. Instagrammable destinations represent a form of visual consumption, where tourism experiences are valued not only for personal enjoyment but also for their representational value in digital spaces. From a behavioral perspective, this reflects the role of social validation, identity construction, and peer influence in shaping travel motivation.

For Generation Z, tourism is not complete without visual documentation and online sharing. This supports digital consumer behavior theory, which emphasizes user-generated content as a powerful driver of destination image formation and travel intention. Theoretical implications suggest that destinations are increasingly consumed as visual and symbolic

products, where aesthetic appeal directly influences perceived attractiveness and competitiveness.

#### 4. Conclusions

The travel style of Generation Z shows that they still prefer popular tourist destinations, such as Lake Toba. This preference is influenced by the respondents' background, as most of them come from Medan, making Lake Toba an easily accessible and familiar destination. In choosing accommodation, Generation Z tends to select homestays and hotels due to their affordable prices. Internet access is the most preferred facility, reflecting the characteristics of Generation Z as true digital natives who are highly dependent on technology and internet connectivity. Regarding payment methods, OVO is the most favored application because it offers various affordable promotional products. In terms of food preferences, fried rice is the most popular choice, as it is inexpensive and widely liked for its taste. At tourist destinations, the activity most enjoyed by Generation Z is taking photos. Using smartphones, they can easily capture moments and immediately share them on their preferred social media platforms, particularly TikTok and YouTube.

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that tourism product planning for Generation Z must be closely integrated with digital technology, especially internet-based services. This is strongly related to the characteristics of Generation Z, who are technologically literate, creative, open to diversity, socially conscious, and expressive. These characteristics encourage the development of tourism products that are digitally oriented, making it easier for Generation Z to search for information, access services, and share their travel experiences. Therefore, the utilization of digital technology is not merely a supporting element but a fundamental requirement in designing tourism products that align with the needs and expectations of Generation Z.

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