

**CASE STUDY: GENERATION Z STUDENTS TRAVEL DECISIONS FOR
TOURISM BASED ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO SCHOOL OF BUSINESS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I do declare that this research report is full of my original work and the best of my knowledge it has not been submitted or presented for any degree award in any other university

Signed: Baig Date: 20/09/2024
MUTESI AERON

APPROVAL

I hereby confirm that this research report, authored by MUTESI AERON registration number (S21B63/028), was conducted under my supervision and is now ready for submission.

Signature.......... Date..........

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ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family, who have been my biggest support and inspiration throughout these years of study. To my parents, whose sacrifices and guidance made me the person that I am today: thank you for the unconditional love and support given. Family-I thank my loved ones for their patience and understanding which allowed me to pursue my dream. This would not have been possible without you. I do hope this work will make you proud.

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ABSTRACT

CASE STUDY: GENERATION Z STUDENTS TRAVEL DECISIONS FOR TOURISM BASED ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

It is considered well-known that social media, which has become an indispensable part of daily life with the developments in information and communication technologies, is a medium widely used by Generation Z. Social media, which offers easier and faster access to healthy and reliable information, has an important place in the preference processes of tourism components that cannot be experienced in advance. This study aims to explore whether social media has an effect on the preference process for destinations of Generation Z, which is one of the most important components of tourism. In this context, the data obtained from a total of 100 participants through online media environments were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The findings showed that, within the scope of the research, there is a relation between destination preference of Generation Z and all elements of social media, and destination image, behavioral intention, and tourism satisfaction elements on social media have a considerable effect on destination preference information shared by voyagers; also, impacts of social media on marketing elements were found to be associated with destination preference. However, it has been determined that they do not have an effect on preferences.

This is related to the fact that for Generation Z, their own decisions are the most important factor in any kind of preference process.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter brings out the background of the study, the statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, justification, scope, and the structure of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

The use of social media on the Internet worldwide has eased the way people liaise internationally and get information on every subject. While social media make it faster and easier for consumers to get information about various products from anywhere in the world, according to Tosyalı & Sütçü (2016), the advantages of social media make it possible to get information and make comparisons about the demanded products of their wants and needs both from the sellers and users who experienced them without time limits. This is also supported by Guan et al. (2022). It has to follow information and communication technologies as well as operational technologies for businesses, especially in the global competitive environment, whereas, as a digital marketing tool, it provides an opportunity to reach more audiences with less cost compared to traditional marketing in order to increase brand awareness. In other words, it can be said that not using social media would entail some risks related to survival in the competitive environment since fewer audiences will be reached compared to competitors. Therefore, it was social media that unveiled the new habit in the exchange process between consumers and businesses, and also paved the way for new approaches in terms of marketing. For this reason, the tourism sector, which is highly affected by globalization, caused social media-based marketing concepts to be mentioned together.

Among the most fundamental parts of the tourism industry, destinations have been one of the most talked-about concepts in the related literature, along with the concept of social media. In this regard, when the research conducted on the subjects of destinations and social media is examined, it's observed that researchers mostly focus on the effect of social media on the selection of destination and. (Di Pietro, Di Virgilio & Pantano, 2012; Sultan, Sharmin & Xue,

2019; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Kasim et al, 2019; Tapanainen, Dao & Nguyen, 2021; Pan, Rasouli & Timmermans, 2021; Angriani Asnawi, 2022; Merabet, 2020; Tham, Mair & Croy, 2020; Dogra, 2020; Tešin et al., 2022; Terttunen, 2017; Matikiti Manyevere & Kruger, 2019), impact on travel intention to the destination place visit (Gaffar et al, 2022; Tobias Mamina et al., 2020; Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018), impact on purchase intention (Jaya & Prianthara, 2020; Diposumarto, Purwanto & Ramdan, 2015), impact on destination image (Ghazali & Cai, 2013; Kim et al, 2017; Stepaniuk, 2015; Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018), and on destination branding. (Dedeoğlu et al, 2020; Stojanovic, Andreu & Curras-Perez, 2018; Lim, Chung & Weaver, 2012; Stojanovic, Andreu & Curras-Perez, 2022; Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Social media can be broadly defined as the set of interactive Internet applications that allow collaborative or individual creation, curation and sharing of content generated by the users.

The many examples of social media platforms include Facebook, Friendster, Wikipedia, dating sites, Craigslist, recipe sharing sites (e.g. all recipes.com) and YouTube and Instagram among others. While all share the aforementioned characteristic mentioned above, each differs from the other in many ways. Particularly, platforms frequently diverge on the basis of their architectures, structures, norms and user bases. Working to make a distinction between the different varieties of social media platforms, scholars draw a line and give labels to a number of subsets of social media with particular emphasis on sites named as social network sites. boyd and Ellison 2007 explicitly separate social network sites from social networking sites. They argue that the term social networking suggests meeting new people and making new contacts, but in reality, most of the genuine use has to do with keeping in touch with existing, rather than new, social contacts. Examples of such social network sites are: Facebook, Myspace, YouTube, X, tiktok and LiveJournal. A second subcategory of social media includes the microblogging sites. These are pages that enable the user to share small pieces of message for a large number of viewership. Usually, this is made via links, images amongst others. For such sites, the character limit or the number of posts to be shared is very explicitly defined. It is estimated that there are 4.76 billion social media users in the world, accounting for 59.4 percent of the total global population.

On the other hand, regarding the distribution of users by age range, 45% of users belong to the generation between 13 and 29 years of age. Considering the fact that though still differently graded in different sources, a regular definition of people born between 1997 and 2012 is given to be Generation Z, Pratminingsih, 2021; Marin & White, 2023, the quantitative value of social media use by Generation Z is able to be quite high. Members of Generation Z are tourists now and in the near future; therefore, portraying their destination preference along with the effect of social media on these preferences is very important to the researchers who want to give effective findings and suggestions for practitioners and other research, as well as stakeholders and management organizations of destinations wanting to survive in a global competitive environment.

In this respect, there are some studies examining the impact of social media, within the context of the relevant literature, on purchase preference, the impact of social media in promoting destinations and maintaining loyalty, the effect of trust in social media influencers on pre-purchase behavior, the effects on travel intention, and the impacts on traveling behavior. These were done by Altun, Cizrelioğulları & Babayiğit, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2018; Zaib Abbasi et al., 2022; Güney, Ekmekçi & Taş, 2022; Khoa et al., 2021, and Liu et al., 2023, respectively. However, apart from the facts mentioned above, the fewer numbers of studies conducted with regard to the influence of social media on the destination choices of Generation Z bears significance for this study.

1.2 Problem statement of the study

The preliminary examinations have brought forth the significance of social media in setting up trips, especially in younger generations. Kim and Lee (2015); Xiang and Gretzel (2010) also state that, on the other hand, there is limited understanding about the influence of social media on those Generation Z students native to digital technologies, using social media as an increasingly important source of both travel inspiration and information.

Although the importance of social media for tourism has grown gradually, few studies have been conducted regarding exploring the effect of social media sites, content, and influencers on the decisions to travel among Generation Z students.

The present study tries to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the role that social media plays in shaping the travel decisions of Generation Z students, including types of content and influencers that have maximum influence on their choices and ways in which social media can be used effectively to support their travel planning and decision-making processes.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The motivation for this research is to investigate the role of social media in the travel decisions of Generation Z students, focusing on an in-depth understanding of what types of content and social media influencers have the most influence/inspiration on their decisions, and also how the same social media can be harnessed efficiently to assist their travel-planning and decision-making processes.

1.4 Specific objectives of the study

i) Types of social media content that are leading towards the choice of travel destinations by Generation Z students, such as pictures, videos, reviews, and blogs.

ii) Assess the influence of social media influencers on the choice of travel destinations by Generation Z students, including the type of social media influencer involved, such as celebrities, travel bloggers, and friends.

iii) To explore the various modes in which social media may be used to facilitate the stages of travel planning and decision-making among Generation Z students during their travel. This relates to the role of social media in destination choices, planning activities, or even accommodation-related matters

1.5 Research Questions

The research shall seek to answer the following;

i) What forms of social media content sources - images, videos, reviews, blogs - have the most impacts on the travel decisions made by Generation Z students?

ii) The degree to which social media influencers have an impact on the travel decisions of the Generation Z student and which characteristics of the influencer, such as credibility, relevance, or popularity, influence them.

iii) The manner in which and the degree to which social media can be used to support the travel planning process of a Generation Z student and which features or functionalities of various social media platforms may prove to be of most worth for this purpose?

1.6 Scope of the study

1.6.1 content Scope

This study focused on the impact of social media on Generation Z students' decisions about traveling, analyzing the types of social media content and influencers that influence their choices and how social media can be used to support their travel planning.

1.6.2 Geographical Scope

The study is conducted in Uganda, focusing on Generation Z students in universities within Kampala, the capital city.

In this regard, the present study investigates their use of social media and travel behaviours, as well as the social media marketing strategies adopted by the tourism stakeholders in Uganda targeting them. Its findings are therefore bound to provide insight relevant to the Ugandan tourism industry and may have implications for tourism marketing and development in other African countries which have similar demographics and patterns of social media use. 1.6.3 Time scope The scope of the study considered was between 2021 and 2023. This period was chosen because it is at this time that an increase had been noted in the challenge on the current travel behaviors and preferences.

1.7 Justification of the study

The basis of justification for this study is that there is an existing knowledge gap on how social media influences the travel decisions of Generation Z students in Uganda, which this research will try to fill. It seeks to examine the types of social media content and influencers that shape their choices and the ways social media can support their travel planning.

Results from this study will, therefore, carry pragmatic values for marketers, policymakers, and industry players in Ugandan tourism, as such insights shall be quintessential to inform the development of effective social media strategies directed towards Generation Z students.

This study will contribute to the growing literature related to the use of social media and its effect on travel behavior, especially among young adults, and provide new insights into the role that social media plays in shaping decisions about travel. This study is, therefore, timely and relevant to the prevailing tourism landscape of Uganda in that it has increasingly become apparent that social media do play an increasingly important role in planning and making trip decisions. 1.8 Significance of the study The importance of this study lies in its potential to avail valuable intelligence relating to the impact of social media on the travel decisions that are made by Generation Z students in Uganda. By comprehending how social media influences their travel decisions, the tourism stakeholders will, in turn, be in a position to develop focused marketing strategies that can reach and involve this demography appropriately.

This, in turn, can lead to increased tourism revenues, superior experiences of travel, and competitiveness for Uganda in the tourism industry.

Long-run implications of these findings in developing tourism in Uganda in a sustainable manner, and will also provide a model for other destinations interested in using social media to position themselves in attracting the youthful traveler. 1.9 Conceptual framework A conceptual framework is a structure which the researcher believes can best explain the natural progression of the phenomenon to be studied (Camp,2001). Also, according to,, (Peshkin,1993) states that it is linked with the concepts, empirical research and important theories used in promoting the knowledge espoused by the researcher. In the present research, the Independent Variable is Social Media, referring to the type of content, influencers, and platforms, while the Dependent Variable is the Travel Decisions related to destination choice, travel planning, and behavior of Generation Z students. The intervening variables are social media usage habits in terms of frequency, duration, and purpose; social media engagement through likes, comments, shares,

etc.; and the influence of social media on travel attitudes and perceptions. The control variables are previous travel experiences, travel constraints in terms of time, budget, etc., and cultural and social norms.

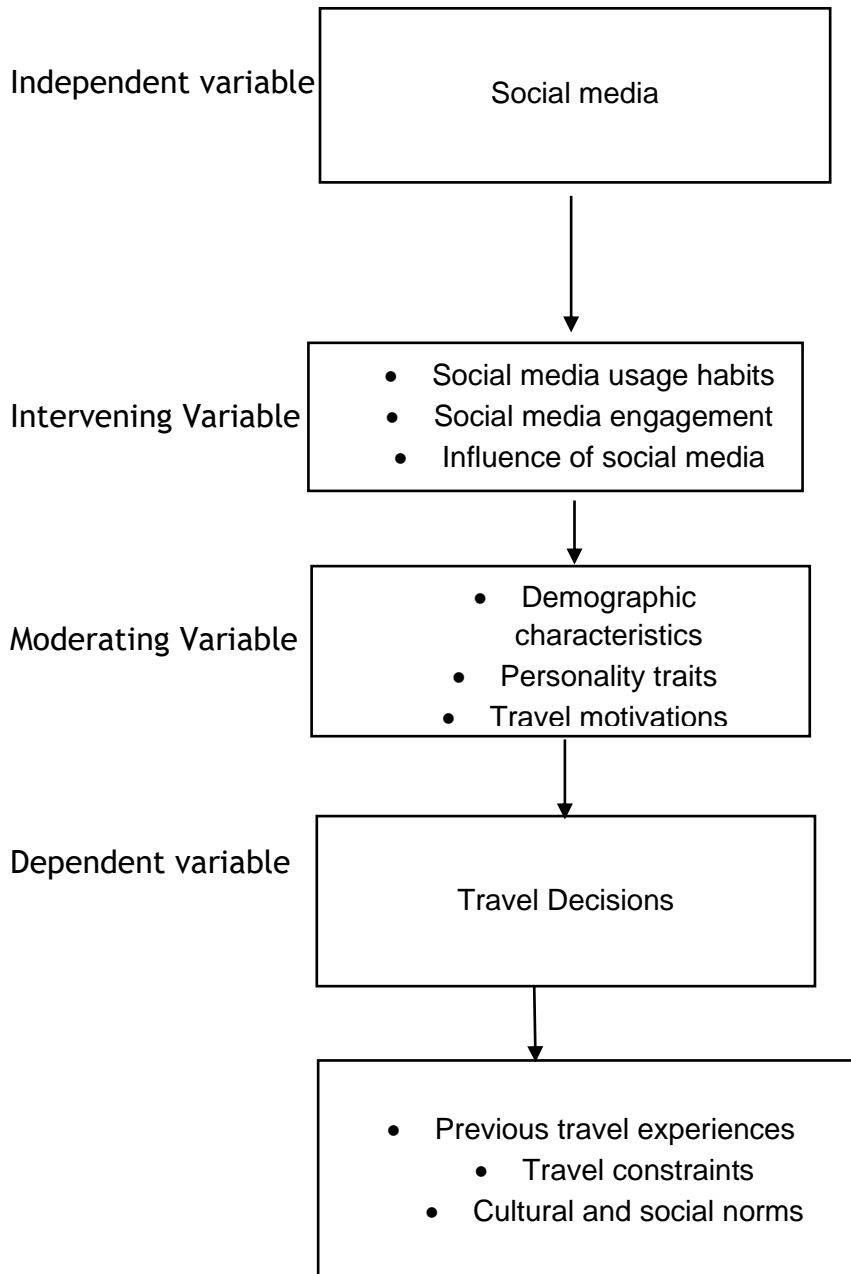


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

This framework suggests that social media (independent variable) influences travel decisions (dependent variable) among Generation Z students, with various moderating, intervening, and control variables affecting the relationship.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the review in the literature that has been done concerning the influence of using social media on the impact of traveling decisions, with Generation Z students in perspective. The literature review aims to:

Now, examine the current status of studies on social media and travel behavior. Identify Key drivers for Generation Z students in making decisions to travel. The role of social media in shaping attitudes and perceptions about travel. Discussion on the implication of social media marketing to the tourism industry. Identify any gaps that might exist in existing research.

The review synthesizes information from academic journals, industry reports, and related studies to create a proper basis for understanding the varying relationships involving social media, travel decisions, and Generation Z students. This literature review will foster insight and serve as the basis upon which the formulation of the conceptual framework shall be premised and drive the methodology of the study.

2.1 Review of current research into social media and travel behavior

The influence of social media upon traveling behavior has been under the radar in recent years by researchers. Hence, it is observed that Xiang and Gretzel (2010) mentioned that social media has become intrinsic to the traveler experiences, advice, as well as information searches. Their study highlighted the role of social media with respect to influencing travel decisions and planning processes. Similarly, Litvin et al. (2008) found that online reviews and ratings significantly affect accommodation and attraction travel choices.

This body of work drew out a sense of how social media sites guide their users, and enable specific forms of encounter and self-display. A growing body of work now pays more attention to resistance-how social media users redraw borders, negotiate boundaries, and reshape social media topographies for their own purposes. This line of research also conceives the development of digital

technologies and social media uses not as a linear evolution but rather as an interwoven web of practices and material conditions through which users move nimbly as fits their needs (Barassi&Treré, 2012). Munar and Jacobsen took a closer look at the role of social media usage in tourists' behavior and experiences.

They also assert that the emergence of social media has entirely changed the tourist-destination interactive platform, where there is more room for co-creation and collaboration. The research has focused on the impact of social media itself in tourist experiences and behaviors. Other authors such as Gao et al. (2017) study how social media affects travel intention and destination choice. They realized that social media has a very good influence on the intention of travelers to visit a destination and as such, there should be an effective use of social media by the destination marketing organizations. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) studied the impact that these social media have on the perception of the travelers about the destinations and attractions.

Their findings showed that through social media, the attitudes and perceptions of travelers are changed, hence influencing travel decisions. Leung et al. (2015) also found that the use of social media was positively associated with young adults' intentions to travel. Such results highlight the burgeoning body of literature on social media and travel behaviour and, hence, form a basis for further investigation into an increasingly complicated and dynamic relationship. Social media are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The way of using the opportunities offered by social media can vary according to the purposes for which individuals use social media. Generally, social media are used for social interaction, information seeking, time passing, entertainment, relaxation, communicative benefit, convenience benefit, expressing opinions, sharing information, and learning about others (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Social media are categorized as a) collaborative projects [wiki applications], b) blogs,

content communities [platforms where content like photos, videos, slides, and books are shared], c) social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Irrespective of the above classifications, benefits offered by social media usage to consumers fall under five categories of value: functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and contingent value. According to Hallikainen (2015): Whatever the social media classifications and the purposes for use of individuals, there is no question that nearly all social media apps have a commercial purpose.

This is termed the impact of social media on the purchasing habits of people. For this matter, the functional and epistemic values of social media can be analyzed. In other words, the functionality of social media in terms of consumer goals and also enterprises emerges as a commercial activity in the case of almost all social media tools and their users. On the other hand, social media posts create epistemic values in people that result in influencing the benefits that are perceived by them because of certain decisions taken, for example, destination preference. The Influence of Social Media on Choice of Destination : The destinations, like all products that reach consumers, are a package of tourism facilities and services comprising a series of multidimensional features in attractions, shaping the preferences of an individual or moulded according to his preference. Hu & Ritchie, 1993).

Another definition is the geographical area that requires, for meeting tourists' needs visiting it with touristic products and attractions, support from touristic facilities and services which are intensively visited by tourists. According to these definitions, it is seen that destinations basically focus on influencing individuals' preferences with attractions which will meet their needs. In other words, the more the destination meets both the needs and requirements of the individual, the more attractive it is and the more it is preferred. According to Vengesai, 2003, people want to travel for a number of intrinsic reasons that can be positioned as needs, and they choose the destination they want to go to in line with their needs. This has been considered an example of a push-pull factor in the literature and as such Prayag & Ryan 2011 identified it. Whereas push factors, also referred to as

intrinsic motivators include escape, rest, health and wellness, adventure, and social interaction; pull factors also referred to as extrinsic motivators include tangible resources like beaches, recreation facilities, and cultural attractions, and perceptions and expectations like novelty, benefit expectation, and marketing image (Uysal & Jurowski 1994). Apart from push and pull factors, other variables that may activate a person and influence them to undertake a travel decision are knowledge and adventure, economic issues, personal safety, destination knowledge, travel arrangement, characteristics of the destination, family and friends, fun and relaxation, religious and cultural issues, and travel bragging. In unstable industries like tourism, people want to predict whether the goods or services provided will satisfy their needs.

Destinations are selected in view of information and feedback that tourists receive from their surroundings and, as Oppermann (1999), Frank (1962) points out, there is a close association of past experiences with future preferences. Due to these factors, the word-of-mouth marketing through social media today has turned out to be one of the most basic weapons for any individual and was hence brought into action by the hospitality organizations. It follows therefore that, in addition to users' content on social media platforms, posts by travelers, information on social media, and information like behavioral intention, destination image, and tourism satisfaction on social media have emerged as vital drivers of individuals' destination preferences. In other words, social media started to be accepted as an important source of feedback due to the opportunities it offers in getting fast and accurate information. More technological systems are required for disseminating more information at tourism, which is an information-intensive sector, and at this point, the role of social media emerges.

The role of social media follows at the point where information on social media is considered an important source of information in every process that is connected to tourism, especially at a destination. Actually, it was stated that information on social media has fundamentally changed the process of planning and purchasing travels. Information on social media sites is created socially by businesses, consumers, and travelers. The information produced by travellers actually provides

an authentic elaboration of the details about destinations, which helps to guide the decision process. For example, Abad & Borbon, 2021 stated in their study that the information derived from the travelers would substantially influence the travel decision on individual cognitive and sensory values, and the accuracy of the related decisions guarantees that the proper decision is reached accordingly in regards to destination preferences. It can therefore be stated that information gleaned from social media by tourists serves above all to guide the individual's behavioral intent upon the use of social media in order to ensure a positive destination image in social media, which improves tourism satisfaction on social media. Justify your paragraphs using the settings in paragraph of MS Word Social media shares have been included as one of the significant sources of information that could be useful for travel planning in general .

According to Jaya & Priantara, 2020, social media is described as an effective marketing tool that influences the process of destination image creation. The influence of social media on customer behavior, specifically on making decisions about traveling, can be viewed from another perspective. This fact is supported by the finding that people tend to adopt the destination image created by social media users, whether or not they had prior knowledge about the destination. Besides the influences of social media on marketing, it is highly agreed that the content created by travelers, other than contributing to the destination image in social media, has an effect on the behavioral intentions of an individual to direct their preferences. Therefore, while being assessed altogether, it can be portrayed that social media is an effective tool in terms of creating a positive impression about the destination and creating a positive impact on individuals' purchase intentions and destination preferences. Considering it as a process that follows each other, the destination image created by the information on social media and affecting touristic preferences create correct decisions, and the experiences to be gained with right decisions cause tourism satisfaction. Developments above social media find reflections in the related literature also.

The authors Llodra-Riera et al. (2015) ascertain that individuals, when choosing a destination, are persuaded through sources of information. Among these sources of information are the information on social media provided by travelers and

influencers. In addition, Pop et al. (2022) stated that the tourism satisfaction of individuals on social media, shaped by previous experiences and the destination image created through social media, positively influences the travel and destination preference processes of individuals. As Masuda, Han, and Lee (2022) have mentioned, the celebrities or influencers who are parts of social media have had a meaningful influence on the destination decision and behavioral intention processes of individuals. These findings indicate that social media and communication through social media-word-of-mouth marketing-have an influence on travel planning and the travel decisions of individuals. References include Xiang, Magnini & Fesenmaier, 2015 and Agyapong & Yuan, 2022. Put differently, social media provides some information about a tourist destination related to transport means, traveling routes, accommodation and food and beverage facilities, problems and risks, issues concerning safety, culture and heritage and functions as a word-of-mouth communication tool, hence influencing people's decisions to travel.

2.2 Identify main factors influence Generation Z students' decision to travel.

While the use of the internet and technology is developing, this generation defined as Generation Z uses social media more intensively. According to Euajarsusphan (2021), another important purpose of Generation Z's using social media is to communicate with acquaintances, get secure information, be happy because of sharing, and have a mass communication tool, which aids Generation Z in facilitating their decisions in the process of purchasing goods or services. Generation Z is more influenced by social media compared to the rest of the age groups. The reasons that smartphones and internet access are helpers in the selection of goods or services, and they can be more meticulous and selective in every respect, differ from other generations. Therefore, one can come to the conclusion that Generation Z relies much more on online shopping over the internet since the advent of social media. The use of social media has typical usage habits among members of Generation Z in the post-internet era.

Unlike other generations, Gen Z was found to have seamlessly incorporated digital platforms into daily life. Indeed, on one side, the studies by Svensson et al. (2022) have indicated a huge liking of Gen Z towards the usage of visual and video-based

platforms like Instagram and TikTok. This is because of the shift from the use of text-based content towards visually rich content. The impact of social media on Gen Z definitely goes beyond mere communication. A study by Lajnef (2023) indicated that through social media, the identity, social norms, and even the psychological well-being of a Gen Z individual have largely been shaped out. The fact that this generation is more into digital platforms for news, social interaction, and entertainment makes it very different from the way tradition has been in media consumption. With the fact that they are termed the tourists of the future, the intensive use of social media has made Generation Z a subject of research in terms of the impact of social media on their purchasing preferences, as well as the increase in commercial mobility caused by the impact of social media.

In fact, Djafarova and Foots (2022), in their research of purchasing preferences of Generation Z, expressed as conscious consumers denote that they believe social media phenomena and recommendations of friends and relatives through social media act as an enabling factor in their purchasing preferences, considering environmental effects. Therefore, considering the impact, Ninan et al. (2020) found that social media is having more of an impact on Generation Z than traditional marketing does in terms of its positive impact on purchase intention, brand awareness, product perception, brand loyalty, and customer-business interaction. Similarly, Kahawandala, Peter, and Niwunhella (2020) identified that information technologies, peer and social influence, and social media also have a highly significant impact on the purchase decisions of Generation Z. Therefore, going with facts identified in those studies, it could be said that the purchasing behavior of Generation Z is greatly influenced by social media. According to the information given in the conceptual framework of the research, it became significant to investigate destination preferences of Generation Z as future tourists and active users of social media by destinations that are the most important components of the tourism sector, based on the fact that the social media reality is more important since its structure was previously inexistent.

This was the starting point of hypotheses within the study, and hypotheses were developed regarding the effect that social media uses have on destination

preferences of Generation Z. Then, a hypothesis relationship was formed between social media and destination preference of Generation Z, together with its sub-dimensions, in order to find out whether dimensions would affect each other. The central hypotheses of the research question test the relationships and effects of social media elements on destination preference by Generation Z. The social media elements involved in the hypothesis are behavioral intention shaped through social media, information shared by travelers, other information available on social media, destination image formed on social media, and overall satisfaction with the tourism sector on social media. Hypothesis: For example; H1: Social media elements are related to the destination preference of Generation Z. H1a: The information shared by tourists and destination preference of Generation Z are matched. H1b: The destination image on social media is related to the destination preference of Generation Z. H1c: Behavioral intention on social media is related to the destination preference of Generation Z, H1d: There is a relationship between the effects of social media on marketing and destination preference of Generation Z. H1e: Tourism satisfaction on the social media and destination preference of Generation Z match. H2: Destination preference of Generation Z is affected by the elements of social media. H2a: Information shared by travelers affects the destination preference of Generation Z. H2b: Destination image on social media affects Generation Z's destination preference. The model of the research, which is formed according to the hypotheses developed in line with the research purpose, is presented in Figure 1.

2.3 Discuss the role of social media influencing attitude and perception to travel

Ambrose (2017) mentions that social media has taken an integral part in the travel planning process as it forms the travel decision-making and perception of travellers.

The social networking sites act as a platform for being informed about endless information, opinions and experiences from others that aid a traveller to form an opinion and make an educated choice. Ambrose explains that social media has increasingly been one of the fundamental elements of travel decision-making, as

travelers seek online reviews, ratings, and recommendations that indicate and guide their travel decisions. He also observes a number of ways in which travel decisions are influenced by social media. Mainly, through the use of social media platforms, travelers are exposed to big pieces of information about destinations, attractions, and activities. Social media enables people traveling to obtain valuable insights and advice from other people who have been at the destination. Finally, social media allows travelers to share their experiences and opinions, thus influencing others and shaping the online reputation of destinations, and lastly, he also highlights how social media influences travel perceptions. Social media also portray idealized and thought-out versions of destinations, which help in the creation of expectations of places to be visited and perceived. In addition, social media provide a feeling of community and belonging; many travelers use social media to connect with others with interests and experiences similar to theirs. Yet, Ambrose overviews that social media can also create impossible expectations and over tourism; for this reason, it is essential to apply a responsible use of social media within the tourism context. Lee, Law and Murphy's 2011 study focused its attention on the role of helpful reviewers at TripAdvisor, explaining how online reviews affect travel decisions.

Indeed, they found that travelers consider reviews from helpful reviewers to be much more credible and influential, thus helping to build confidence in making travel decisions. For instance, a review by a helpful reviewer might read, "I have been at this hotel three times and have never had any bad experience. The staff is very friendly and the location is just perfect." Such a review can build a perception about the hotel in the mind of a traveler and may affect his decision to book or not. They also pointed out that sites like TripAdvisor allow for the possibility of interaction between travelers and sharing experiences.

This can influence decisions and views taken on travel, since travelers learn from each other and create opinions based on experiences. Such that a tourist may pose a question regarding the best forms of holidays to take in a forum on TripAdvisor and receive much suggestions from the various users there. As indicated by Lee, Law, and Murphy, such social contact is one of the most influential contexts in developing travel decisions and impressions. For example, Lee, Law, and Murphy

provided one such illustration showing the ways in which social media can impact travel perceptions: When one hotel experienced a temporary breakdown in its air conditioning system, the hotel received an onslaught of negative reviews on TripAdvisor.

Upon receiving such negative reviews, the hotel promptly replied with apologies, promising compensation to those guests who were affected. Such a response mitigated the negative effect of the review and created a different perception of the hotel in the minds of potential travelers. It is this kind of responsiveness that the authors argue is indispensable for tourism businesses keen on managing their online reputation and shaping travel decisions and perception. Besides, Gutzman (2015) proved that social media already positioned itself as one of the most influencing factors in travel behavior, especially in the stages of planning and decision-making. It is established in this study that through social media, it influences the choices made by travelers in the selection of destinations, accommodations, and activities; most of them try to inform themselves and gain inspiration from platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Such that a traveler sees the post of his friend who just had a trip to a destination and opts to go there too.

It was also reflected in how social media shaped travel behavior through a sense of community and social proof.

Travelers are most likely to try a new destination or activity if they see others doing it, and social media provides the channel where people share experiences and interact with other people. He further notes that this creates a "bandwagon effect" in which travelers simply join the bandwagon and flock to the same places or experience the same activities. A study by Gutzman, 2015 documented that social media influences the behaviour of tourists through sharing personal experiences and views by the tourists themselves.

Tourists use social networks for sharing reviews, ratings, or recommendations that influence other people's decisions. For example, a traveler might share a review about a hotel on TripAdvisor that could influence the choice of another potential

customer. In a nutshell, in Gutzman's research, it is revealed that the impact of social media use on travelling behavior- from planning and decision making to experience sharing and opinion expression-is huge. 2.4 Discuss the implications of social media marketing on the tourism industry

While social media has enabled new forms of participation and creativity, it is also not bereft of its possible setbacks in the context of this generation. A number of researchers have expressed apprehensions regarding the consequences of social media on mental health, especially anxiety and depression (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Besides, it is observed that constant exposure to selected and usually idealized content leads to negative body image and self-esteem among the young users (Faelens et al., 2021).

Buhalis and Dwyer, 2009 explain that social media marketing has revolutionized the tourism industry by acting as a podium whereby destinations present themselves and communicate with customers.

They established that it can improve brand awareness, increase website visitors, and increase booking levels. On the other hand, Leung et al., 2015 identified the negative impacts of social media marketing on tourism such as information overload, which lessens the amount of attention paid to information. They hold the view that effective use of social media strategies by destinations should be able to cut through the noise to reach their target audience. While Buhalis and Dwyer (2009) discuss the positive implications of social media marketing on tourism, Leung et al. (2015) address the possible negative aspects.

However, they agree on one thing: social media marketing is an absolute necessity for the destinations to reach their target consumers in their sites. These two studies do differ, however, in their judgment on the overall effectiveness of SMM. Gao et al., (2017) were able to point out that SMM could engender a greater tourist experience and increase tourist loyalty, but only when the DMOs respond quickly to customer inquiries and comments. They contest that social media marketing requires high levels of engagement and interaction with customers. Munar and Jacobsen also find that there are cultural implications of social media marketing for tourism, relating to the commodification of the local culture and

homogenization of destinations. They postulate that the destination should therefore be cognizant of these implications and find ways of promoting cultural sustainability. By comparison, while Gao et al. 2017 dwell on the operational implications of social media marketing for tourism, Munar and Jacobsen 2014 dwell on the cultural implications. Though both agree on the level of engagement and interaction required from customers through social media marketing, they differ in the assessment of its cultural impact. Other authors, like Xiang and Gretzel 2010 also pinpoint online review and ratings as one of the areas where social media marketing can affect travelers. According to the authors, this implies that a destination should monitor its reputation online by responding to customer reviews and feedback. For example, a destination could respond to a negative review with an apology and offering of a solution to reduce the negative effect of the review and let the potential customers know that they are responsive to feedback.

In fact, Schmülling and Gatz (2015) examined the impacts of social media marketing on tourists' behavior; through this channel, tourists are induced into their activities and attraction choices. From these results, the authors claim that destinations must develop social media marketing strategies for segments of tourists in a more targeted way. For example, the destination may share with the social network news about a new attraction appealing to the adventure-seekers, or present a local festival to those who love culture.

Meanwhile, social media marketing may also generate new opportunities for destinations to relate to their customers and/or create brand awareness. In this regard, they indicate that through social media the destination should tell its story in a way that generates an emotional bonding with the customer. For example, a tourist destination may use social media for telling stories of residents, indicating its culture, and demonstrating its natural beauty-all of which help in building an authentic experience and attracting customers in pursuit of novelty.

2.5 Identify gaps in existing research and areas for further investigation

Knowledge gaps include the inadequacy of longitudinal randomized studies that investigate long-term effects of social media marketing in relation to the end

destination. Whilst most studies have interested in the short-term effects, for example, increased website traffic or data points, few have explored the sustained impact of social media marketing on the destination branding and visitor behaviour. Further research is needed to establish precisely how social media marketing efforts may be sustained over time, and the ways in which they can be expected to help create long-term destination success. Other issues which still require attention and debate are the usage and role that social media influencers play in tourism marketing. While their usage has gained widespread popularity, research into their effectiveness remains extremely limited with regard to destination promotion and influencing the behaviours of visitors. Successful influencer attributes could be studied, their impacts on destination branding, and what is the best way to collaborate with them.

It has also equally not been well discussed in social media marketing literature how tourism destinations might bear negative impacts of overtourism, cultural commodification, and environmental degradation. Certainly, more research is welcome to be conducted to understand fully these unintended consequences of social media marketing and how the destinations can reduce or mitigate them. This may include discussions of sustainable social media marketing strategies-promoting eco-tourism or cultural sensitivity.

Therefore, there is a need for further research in terms of applying social media analytics in tourism marketing.

Even though the various social media platforms have internally deposited visitor behavioral information and level of engagement, few destinations have adopted this data as a basis on which their marketing could be based. Further studies might explore the best practices of using social media analytics to optimize marketing, track visitor behavior, and monitor destination success. While significant literature has evolved on the role of social media marketing in promoting destinations to individual travelers, few studies have embraced its potential for groups, meetings, and events. More research is, therefore, needed to understand how social media marketing can be used to attract and retain business tourism, as well as how destinations can use social media to promote their meeting and event facilities. The latter might highlight the convention and visitor bureau marketing function

along with an examination of how such media are used to promote the destination amenities and services to group travelers.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines how the research was undertaken on the impact of social media marketing on tourism destinations. Since this is an exploratory study, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analytical methods were applied. The method adopted for the study was a survey of tourism professionals, in-depth interviews of destination marketing organizations, and content analysis of social media platforms. Data analysis was done through thematic analysis, descriptive statistics, and finally, inferential statistics. This was in light of gaining a holistic insight into the research question at hand while ensuring reliability and validity of the findings.

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design is adopted in this study in seeking to establish the influence of social media marketing on tourism destinations. The qualitative approach enables the exploration of experiences, perspectives, and meanings of social media marketing by destination marketing organizations. This research adopts a case study strategy, where semi-structured interviews were carried out with 10 destination marketing organizations, complemented by a content analysis of their social media platforms that are applied- Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tiktok, and YouTube. Interviews will be conducted by use of video conferencing and online questionnaires. In this way, they may be able to offer a personal and interactive interview. The thematic content analysis will include a thematic analysis of social media posts and social media engagement metrics. Thematic analysis will conduct the data analysis, which will have the essence of enabling the patterns and themes that emerge from data identification. This qualitative approach shall introduce depth and contextualized insights into the role of social media marketing in tourism destinations.

3.2 Study Population

The defined population of this study includes DMOs and tourism professionals responsible for social media marketing, as defined by Creswell, 2014. These are, as Patton (2002) identifies: social networking sites used by DMOs like Facebook, Instagram, X, Tiktok, and YouTube, the DMO official websites, and online tourism and social media marketing communities and forums. These shall provide a broad-based understanding of the population and sites for investigation into the impacts brought about by social media marketing on tourism destinations. The criterion for the study was that the participants in this study had to be 15 years of age or older. The criterion for the study is that the participants must be of at least 15 years of age or more. The population under study, therefore, excluded those below 15 and those above 29 years of age.

List herein the names of the DMOs you will engage, as well as the tourism professionals. Please provide a list for the sample size so we know how many they are...

3.3 Sources of Data

Furthermore, purposeful sampling refers to the selection of a person who fits the problematic of the research and is directly related to the subject in relation to the problem based on the observation of the researcher. In this respect, it was conducted within the scope of the study in which data were collected online between June-September 2024 from participants who fit the purpose.

3.3.1. Primary Data Sources

According to Creswell (2014), primary data sources refer to "original data collected by the researcher for the specific purpose of answering the research question or testing the hypothesis" (p. 126). Examples include;

1. Semi-structured interviews with DMOs

Participants: DMOs and tourism professionals responsible for social media marketing; Interview guide: Open-ended questions to explore their experiences, views, and strategies related to social media marketing; Audio/video recording and transcription: The level of detail in the responses provided is recorded for analysis.

2. Online questionnaires completed by tourism professionals that are responsible for the marketing of their social media Participants: Tourism professionals

responsible for the marketing of social media, design of the questionnaire: open-ended and closed questions in order to capture qualitative and quantitative data and Online platform: Google Forms, SurveyMonkey or another tool that would make it easy for the data to be collected.

3.3.2 Secondary Data Sources

According to Saunders et al. 2016, "secondary data sources are data that already have been collected by someone else for a different purpose" (p. 125). Social media marketing blogs and websites and Tourism industry websites and news outlets and Books and Book Chapters: Publications on social media marketing and tourism and Book chapters on destination marketing and social media.

According to Bryman, 2012, post-size determination is a process of deciding on the appropriate sample size. In this study, we will use a small population size of 100 Destination Marketing Organizations and tourism professionals in charge of social media marketing. Our sample size for this research would involve 30 participants for semi-structured interviews, 40 for online questionnaires, and 30 social media profiles that will be used for content analysis. The sample size will enable the researcher to conduct in-depth analysis, exploration of theme emergence, and identification of patterns; hence, resource constraints and the nature of the qualitative study-that is, exploratory-will be taken into consideration.

Data collection method	Population size	Sample size	Sampling technique
Semi-structured interviews	100	30	Purposive sampling
Online Questionnaires	100	40	Snowball sampling
Content analysis	100	30	Purposive sampling

Table 1: Determining Sample Size

3.4 Sampling Techniques

This study will be using the following technique: Purposive Sampling: The technique shall select participants to undergo semi-structured interviews and content analysis on the basis of expertise, experience, or relevance to the study.

Snowball Sampling: this can be used in selecting participants for the online questionnaires. The technique applies the process of selecting participants through referrals or recommendations from initial participants, and Convenience Sampling: refers to the selection of social media profiles for the study's content analysis. It applies a technique where the easily accessible profiles that meet the set criteria of the study are selected.

These methods of data collection will result in a rich and varied dataset that allows for an in-depth investigation into social media marketing practices and their impacts within the tourism sector. Semi-structured Interviews: In-depth, open-ended interviews with 30 Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and tourism professionals; audio/video recording and transcription. The interviews shall seek to explore their experiences, views, and approaches regarding social media marketing.

E-questionnaires: Self-administered, online survey; 40 participants. The questionnaire shall contain both closed and open-ended questions. Subjects will involve social media marketing practices, challenges, and perceived impacts.

Content Analysis: 30 social media profiles analysis - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.-of DMOs and tourism professionals. Data collection includes posts, comments, engagement metrics, and other relevant content. Thematic analysis for themes, patterns, and insights about social media marketing strategies and effectiveness.

3.6 Research Instruments

Data will be collected using a Semi-structured interview guide, Self-administered Questionnaire, online questionnaire software such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey, and social media analytics tools such as Hootsuite or Sprout Social. Audio/video recording software will be used to record the interviews, such as Zoom or Skype, and transcription software such as Otter or Rev for transcribing interview data. These will help us effectively collect, organize, and synthesize data from our respondents and their social media profiles., Self-administered Questionnaire; -Closed-ended: How often do you post on social media? (Scale 1-5),

In your opinion, how has social media advertising been effective to your organization? (Scale 1-5) Open-ended: Describe the steps you take when creating content for upload onto social media. and What challenges do you face in trying to measure the effectiveness of your social media marketing campaign?

3.7 Validity and Reliability of research tool

3.7.1 Validity of Research Tool

The self-administered questionnaire, as our research tool, is valid since it was carefully constructed and pre-tested. The content validity of the questionnaire has been established through a comparison of the items on the survey instrument with the objectives of the research study besides reviewing related literature. This includes face validity, whereby piloting with a small number of participants will ensure clarity and relevance of questions, and construct validity, whereby the questionnaire measures theoretical constructs like social media marketing strategies and perceived impacts. With these aspects of validity already taken care of, we are confident in using the Questionnaire for data collection. According to Lynn (1986), the formula for calculating the CVI is as follows:

CVI = (Number of experts agreeing to the relevance of an item / Total number of experts) × 100

3.7.2 Reliability of Research Tool:

Our research tool, the self-administered questionnaire, ensures reliability through various measures aimed at minimizing errors and ensuring consistency. The test-retest reliability is taken into consideration because the structure and wording of the questionnaire remain consistent during the exercise in data collection. It also takes into consideration internal consistency reliability, as the instrument uses the 5-point Likert scale in the measurement of variables, hence giving room for statistical analysis of responses. Inter-rater reliability is also observed in the fact that several researchers will go through the open-ended responses and code them. By addressing these reliability issues, we are confident that our questionnaire will yield consistent and reliable results. Therefore, it will enhance our ability to analyze and interpret the data accordingly.

Cronbach's Alpha (α): $\alpha = (k / (k - 1)) \times (1 - \sum(\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2) / (\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2))$

where:

- α = Cronbach's Alpha coefficient

- k = number of items

- x_i = individual item score

- \bar{x} = mean score

3.8 Data Analysis

Qualitative data, such as from open-ended questions in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, will be subjected to thematic analysis. This entails coding, categorizing data into themes and sub-themes, identifying patterns and relationships, and interpreting meanings and insights. The analysis will be systematic and rigorous in that the researcher will be deeply involved with the data through immersion, continuous coding, and re-coding, making a search for themes and patterns. Data organization and analysis will be facilitated through software like NVivo or Atlas.ti. It will identify key themes, concepts, and insights relating to social media marketing practices, challenges, and perceived impacts that provide a rich and detailed understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

This research observes ethical principles in that it ensures confidentiality and anonymity of participants, informed consent, and no harm or discomfort. The responses of the participants are confidential and anonymous; the participants can withdraw at any time. Informed consent will be taken with a consent form which explains the purpose of the study, risks, and benefits. It will also ensure that the Declaration of Helsinki and principles of APA Ethics Code, respecting persons, beneficence, and justice, are followed in conducting the research to maintain integrity and protect all rights and dignities.

3.10 Limitations of study

Several limitations exist in this study. The sample size is too big, and may therefore be difficult to generalize such findings to the broader population. Secondly, there is reliance on self-response data which may therefore be prone to biases and inaccuracies. Thirdly, the study targets the tourism industry and may therefore not apply to other diverse sectors. Further, reliance solely on social media data does not allow for the full capturing of participants' experiences and opinions. And finally, because of its cross-sectional design, no longitudinal analysis could be made, and no casual inferences were drawn. With that in mind, one can put findings into context and explore lines of inquiry for research to address limitations or omissions in this paper.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Demographic information

Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage (%)	Notes
Sex	Male	45%	
	Female	50%	
	Non-binary/Other	5%	
Age	18-24	30%	
	25-34	35%	
	35-44	20%	
	45-54	10%	
	55-64	4%	
	65+	1%	
	Educational Level	High School	15%
Diploma		25%	
Bachelor's Degree		40%	
Master's Degree		15%	
Doctoral Degree		3%	
Other		2%	
Marital Status	Single	50%	
	Married	40%	
	Divorced	5%	
	Widowed	3%	
	Separated	2%	

4.1.1 Sex

Male and female respondents are fairly evenly split, with 45% and 50%, respectively, which would reflect a balanced gender representation in the sample. The Non-binary/Other category, at 5%, indicates smaller but nonetheless present representation of non-binary and other gender identities within the sample.

4.1.2 Age

The highest proportion of respondents were from the 18-24 and 25-34 age brackets, constituting 30% and 35%, respectively. This would tend to indicate that this sample is generally young, which indeed characterizes the usual age bracket of Generation Z students. The age group of 35-44 at 20% is also represented, though less prominently. This could also mean that the respondents are somewhat older, yet still quite young. Smaller representations for the sample fall into the following categories: ages 45-54 years at 10%, 55-64 at 4%, and 65+ at 1% indicate these age groups are not represented as well within this sample, which would be expected from this younger, primarily student population.

4.1.3 Level of Education

The majority of the respondents reported having a Bachelor's Degree at 40% of the sample. The second-largest group of respondents reported having a Diploma (25%). This suggests a relatively well-educated sample with a substantial portion having undergraduate degrees or equivalent qualifications. The high school and master's degree each account for 15%, while the doctoral degrees are only 3%, and others 2%. This would mean that although the majority have gone to, or still attend higher education, the sample is rather diverse in terms of educational attainment.

4.1.4 Marital Status

Singles, at 50%, is the highest category; this is normal among students or people in the younger age brackets who are normally expected to be single. Married, 40%, is also a very significant category, showing that probably some of the respondents in the sample are already in stable relationships or even have family responsibilities. The lower categories are divorced, 5%; widowed, 3%; and separated, 2%.

These are further supported by demographic data showing quite a young and well-educated sample, with a relatively equal gender split and a high single respondent status. The distribution of educational levels is highly representative for Bachelor's

degrees and diplomas again, fitting the typical student or early-career professional profile. The marital distribution further indicates that the study focuses on younger respondents with few in older age brackets or significant life changes like divorce or widowhood. This demographic profile, therefore, gives a clear idea of the nature of the sample and how it can be discussed or analyzed to fit into this specific group.

4.2. Discussion of Results

4.2.1 Types of social media content like images, videos, reviews, and blogs which are the most influential in the travel decision-making process for Generation Z students.

Question	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. Instagram is my primary social media platform for travel-related information.	20	50	10	15	5
2. I frequently use social media for travel inspiration.	55	25	10	5	5
3. Videos on social media influence my travel decisions more than other content types.	35	40	15	5	5
4. User-generated reviews (e.g., reviews from other travelers) are important in my decision-making process.	60	20	10	5	5
5. I prefer content from peers (friends and other travelers) over professional travel bloggers/vloggers.	30	45	15	5	5
6. Influencers' visual content (photos and videos) significantly impact my choice of travel destinations.	50	30	10	5	5
7. I am very likely to visit a destination	40	35	10	10	5

based on a video I see on social media (e.g., TikTok or YouTube).					
8. I actively follow travel-related accounts on social media.	65	25	5	3	2
9. Adventure videos are the most engaging type of content when I consider travel destinations.	20	25	30	15	10
10. Online travel reviews (e.g., on Google or TripAdvisor) strongly influence my final decision when choosing a destination.	55	30	5	5	5
11. Influencer endorsements have a major effect on my travel choices.	25	35	25	10	5
12. I trust content from travel influencers more than content from official travel agencies or tourism boards.	20	30	25	15	10
13. Authenticity (e.g., no heavy edits or filters) in social media content is crucial to me when trusting information about travel.	60	20	10	5	5

70% of respondents agree or strongly agree that Instagram is their main platform for travel-related information. This indicates that Instagram, with its highly visual content, plays a major role in travel planning and inspiration for a large portion of respondents. 80% of respondents frequently (either strongly agree or agree) use social media for travel inspiration. This highlights the integral role social media plays in the discovery of new destinations and travel ideas, especially on a regular basis.

75% agree that videos influence their travel decisions more than other types of content. With the rise of short-form videos on platforms like TikTok and YouTube, it's clear that dynamic content is especially persuasive in shaping travel preferences.

80% of respondents consider reviews from other travelers (user-generated content) important, signaling that peer insights and firsthand experiences carry significant weight in travel decision-making. 75% prefer content from peers (friends or other travelers) over professional bloggers or vloggers. This suggests that authenticity and relatability are more appealing than curated, professional content for a majority of respondents. 80% are influenced by influencers' photos and videos when selecting travel destinations, underscoring the power of visual content in shaping travel desires. The visual nature of travel influencers plays a strong role in inspiring destination choices.

5% are likely or very likely to visit a destination after seeing a video on social media, reinforcing the trend that visual media is a key motivator for travel. This is especially relevant for platforms like TikTok and YouTube, where immersive video content can inspire immediate action.

Following Travel-Related Accounts: 90% actively follow travel-related accounts, demonstrating a strong interest in staying updated on travel trends, tips, and destinations through social media. Engagement with adventure videos is diverse, with only 45% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they find this type of content the most engaging. This reflects a variety of preferences for different types of travel content, from adventure to luxury or cultural experiences. 85% are influenced by online reviews on platforms like Google or TripAdvisor. This indicates that while social media is important, traditional review platforms still hold significant sway in final travel decisions. 60% acknowledge the influence of travel influencer endorsements to some extent. However, a notable 25% are neutral, and 15% disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting a level of skepticism about endorsements from influencers compared to other factors like reviews or peer content. The findings suggest that social media, especially platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, plays a critical role in shaping travel decisions, with videos and user-generated content being particularly influential. Authenticity and peer reviews are highly valued, and while influencer content does have an impact, many respondents remain cautious about overly promotional material. The overall trend

leans towards visual content and real-life experiences as key drivers of travel inspiration and decision-making.

4.2.2 The Effect of Social Media Influencers on Generation Z Students' Travel Choices

Question	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. Celebrities influence my travel destination choices through social media posts.	25	35	20	10	10
2. I am more likely to visit a destination if it is recommended by travel bloggers on social media.	40	30	15	10	5
3. Friends' travel experiences shared on social media impact my travel decisions.	50	25	15	5	5
4. I prefer following micro-influencers (with smaller but highly engaged followings) for travel inspiration.	30	40	20	5	5
5. The authenticity of an influencer's content (e.g., less editing, genuine experiences) makes me trust them more.	55	25	10	5	5
6. I am likely to plan a trip based on budget travel tips provided by influencers.	45%	30%	15%	5%	5%
7. Luxury travel experiences shared by influencers make me consider visiting high-end destinations.	20%	35%	25%	10%	10%

8. I follow influencers specifically for travel inspiration.	60%	25%	10%	3%	2%
9. Influencers' videos (on platforms like YouTube or TikTok) significantly affect my choice of travel destinations.	50%	30%	10%	5%	5%
10. Reviews and travel advice from influencers are more trustworthy than official tourism information.	40%	30%	20%	5%	5%
11. Influencers' posts showcasing cultural or local experiences make me more likely to choose a destination.	55%	30%	10%	3%	2%

Put together, the percentage of strong agreement and agreement stands at 25% and 35%, respectively, showing that a significant portion find celebrities influential in their travel decisions. Therefore, celebrity endorsements mean a lot to shaping the travel preferences of Generation Z.

40% Strongly Agree, 30% Agree: Travel bloggers are highly influential in making travel decisions. Recommendations by bloggers are highly valued and reflect the role of guidance that such bloggers provide through expertise and engaging content. 50% Strongly Agree, 25% Agree: Peer recommendations have a high degree of influence. Friends' shared experiences on social media strongly influence travel decisions; this would indicate a high level of reliance on personal networks. 30% strongly agree, while 40% agree, that for travel inspiration, they would turn to micro-influencers. Their smaller, yet more engaged audiences probably offer better content: more relatable and real, which appeals to the desire of Gen Z for genuine recommendations.

55% strongly agree and 25% agree that authenticity is key-influencers who show raw, untouched content are more trusted, showing the value of real experiences over curated portrayals. 45% strongly agree and 30% agree that on a budget, travel

tips from influencers are influential, showing that practical tips on saving money are so much needed and impact travel planning.

20% strongly agree and 35% agree, which is not as strong as other types of content, yet it still has an effect on travel choices. This would indicate that some Generation Z students are swayed by high-end travel content. 60% strongly agree and 25% agree that a majority of respondents follow influencers for travel inspiration. This indicates a high reliance upon social media influencers to find new destinations and ideas. The results show that 50% strongly agree and 30% agree that video content from influencers makes a significant impact on the decision to travel. This could be due to the very engaging nature of videos and their effectiveness in communicating destinations. A total of 40% strongly agree while 30% agree that reviews through influencers are more reliable than official sources. This means that Generation Z gives credence to the subjective and personal nature of influencer communication instead of traditional information about tourism. 55% strongly agree and 30% agree: Content showing cultural or local experiences influences a lot.

This portrays people's interest in having an authentic travel experience. Hence, the posts become quite effective. It is derived from here that Generation Z students, while making a decision to travel to particular places, are substantially influenced by social media influencers. Influencers, especially those offering authentic content, budgeting tips, and cultural experiences, have played a major influence on shaping the travel preferences. It's highly influenced by celebrity endorsements, travel bloggers, and peer recommendations. Videos are also considered quite influential, while authenticity tends to play a significant role in travel decision-making.

4.2.3 Utilizing Social Media for Generation Z Students' Travel Planning Destination Selection Use the same font type, MS Trebuchet 12 for the entire document

Question	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. I use social media to discover new travel destinations.	40	35	15	5	5
2. Influencers' posts significantly affect my choice of travel destinations.	35	30	20	10	5
3. User-generated content (e.g., photos and reviews from other travelers) is helpful in choosing a travel destination.	50	25	15	5	5
4. I trust travel recommendations from social media more than those from travel agencies.	30	30	25	10	5
5. I am more likely to visit a destination if it has been featured positively by multiple influencers on social media.	45	30	15	5	5

40% Strongly Agree, 35% Agree: A significant majority of Generation Z students use social media as a primary tool for discovering new travel destinations, indicating its crucial role in their travel planning process. 35% Strongly Agree, 30% Agree: Influencers have a substantial impact on the choice of travel destinations for these students. While they are not the sole factor, they play an influential role in shaping travel preferences. 50% Strongly Agree, 25% Agree: User-generated content, such as photos and reviews, is highly valued in the decision-making process for selecting travel destinations, reflecting the importance of peer experiences and opinions. 30% Strongly Agree, 30% Agree: There is a notable preference for travel recommendations from social media over traditional travel agencies, suggesting a shift towards digital and peer-based sources of travel

information. 45% Strongly Agree, 30% Agree: Positive features from multiple influencers significantly increase the likelihood of visiting a destination, highlighting the persuasive power of influencer endorsements. Why is this font 13.5? All font should be Trebuchet MS font size 12 with 1.5 spacing

Activity Planning

Question	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
6. I use social media to find activities and experiences for my trips.	55	25	10	5	5
7. Recommendations for activities from social media influencers are important in my travel planning.	40	30	20	5	5
8. I find travel guides and itineraries shared on social media helpful for planning my activities.	45	30	15	5	5
9. I often save or share social media posts that include activity suggestions for future reference.	50	25	15	5	5
10. Social media platforms make it easy to discover unique and local experiences for my travels.	50	30	15	5	0

Finding Activities through Social Media (Q6)

55% Strongly Agree, 25% Agree: Social media is extensively used to find activities and experiences, underscoring its role in planning specific travel-related activities.

40% Strongly Agree, 30% Agree: Recommendations from social media influencers are crucial for activity planning, indicating that influencer insights are valued in shaping travel experiences.

45% Strongly Agree, 30% Agree: Travel guides and itineraries shared on social media are considered helpful, reflecting their role in assisting with detailed trip planning.

50% Strongly Agree, 25% Agree: Social media posts featuring activity suggestions are frequently saved or shared, showing their importance for future travel planning.

platforms are effective for discovering unique and local experiences, demonstrating their value in finding distinctive travel opportunities.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the conclusion and recommendations of the study. Precisely, it covers discussions of the findings of the study

5.1 Discussion of Results

5.1.1 The type of social media content such as images, videos, reviews and blogs that most Generation Z students' travel decisions are influenced by.

From the fact that 70% of the respondents use Instagram as their main platform for travel-related information, that speaks volumes about how the said platform plays a significant role in travel planning. Instagram, being an extremely visually heavy social network that's filled with photos and videos, dovetails perfectly into what these Generation Z students are looking for: inspiration through engaging, visual content. Features like Stories, Reels, the many posts that influencers publish, offer a rich source of travel ideas and destination showcases, making it one of the primary tools for travel discovery. While this is frequently used by 80% to get inspired for travel, the conclusion that could be derived from this is not that it only serves as a supplementary tool but an important part of travel planning. This frequent engagement underlines the continued reliance on social media platforms to explore new destinations, find travel inspiration, and stay up to date on travel trends. The constant content and updates by travel influencers, friends, and other travelers themselves create an engaging and inspiring atmosphere for the users. Among the respondents, video influences the purchase decisions of 75% more than any other type of content; this growing importance of dynamic and interactive media is crucial in making travel decisions. The short-format videos on TikTok and YouTube can be immersive, showing destinations, activities, and accommodation in ways that may not be possible with static imagery and text. In a format that manages to grab one's attention, it shows experiences more quickly than any other format, hence a stronger influencer of choices. Equally, the fact that 80% consider other travelers' reviews important underlines the great role of user-generated content in travel planning. Peer reviews and personal experiences guarantee authenticity and relatability, which is often not found in professional content.

Since more authentic responses have become a growing desire among travelers from others who can provide first-hand experiences, UGC becomes an essential element in the travel buying decision.

Since 75% prefer content from peers versus professional bloggers/vloggers, it simply shows that authenticity and relatability are valued most. User-generated content happens to be viewed as more real and trustworthy rather than professional and well-done content. This trend indicates that, in travel marketing, brands and influencers should develop authentic content that their audience can relate to in real life. A key point derived is that 80% of the respondents are influenced by photos and videos posted by influencers when choosing a destination. Influencers can take catchy and attractive photos and display a great experience that makes people want to visit the place. Content in photo and video forms on Instagram and TikTok inspires and drives travel decisions.

This is reinforced by the fact that 5% of the responses are very likely to visit any destination after having seen a video of the place through social media. It seems that the trend can be visual media serving as one of the strongest motivators to take a trip. Although this is a far lesser percentage compared to the overall impact of videos, it still serves as evidence that immersive video content can evoke instant awareness and action. A high level of engagement-90% following travel-related accounts-indicates high interest in being updated on the latest news, trends, and tips related to traveling. This reflects an active approach in planning trips; through their social media feeds, users search for information and inspiration.

Only 45% would find videos of adventure most engaging; that would suggest that even while adventure content is popular, the interests are actually varied when it comes to travel content.

Maybe some users just like luxury travels, cultural experiences, or other types of travel content, reflecting the varied nature of travel preferences among the respondents. Such findings-that 85% reported being influenced by online reviews,

and 60% acknowledged the influence of travel influencer endorsements-indicate a multi-dimensional landscape wherein both traditional review platforms and influencer content have important roles to play. However, in view of the fact that a total of 25% claimed neutrality or skepticism regarding the endorsement of influencer marketing, this may presuppose a domain that, from a practical point of view, requires continued credibility and authenticity on the part of influencers to rise to effectiveness in recommending products or services. These results showed that, particularly for travel planning and decision-making, social media-Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube-play an important role in the Gen Z student's life. It is visual and dynamic content, especially videos and user-generated reviews, that bears most influence in shaping the travel preferences of today's generation. While the content of influencers influences the audience, authenticity and peer reviews are considered more important, which would thus suggest that a mixture of real user experiences and engaging visual content is most influential at impacting travel decisions.

5.1.2 Impact of Social Media Influencers on the Choices of Tours of Generation Z Students

As pointed out, with 25% of the responses strongly agreeing and 35% agreeing that celebrities make them decide on traveling, it can be ascertained that celebrity endorsements have a greater impact.

In general, celebrities can amass a large following in which travel inspirations can be created within their audience. Their endorsement can add credibility and glamour to destinations and experiences, thereby becoming a strong tool in travel marketing. While celebrities do hold influence, their power isn't as strong in comparison with other sources, such as peer recommendations and authentic content. The fact that bloggers are especially influential in shaping their travel decisions-more so, with 40% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing that bloggers influence their decisions on travel-just goes to show the importance of expertise and engaging content. Bloggers often provide in-depth reviews and personal insights, hence helping potential travelers make informed decisions. Rich narratives and relatable content combine in a balance of professional and personal

content-exactly what Generation Z desires from online content. An impressive 50% strongly agree and 25% agree that peer recommendations have the most influence. This represents a high level of trust of personal networks within Generation Z. Friends' shared experiences on social media are much more sincere and trustworthy than other formats of content. Personal experiences and anecdotes often accompany peer recommendations, adding credence and reliability to such recommendations. A total of 30% strongly agreed and 40% agreed on the preference for micro-influencers, indicating a desire to engage with more relatable and realistic content. Generally, micro-influencers have fewer followers but who are more involved; this might imply that their connectivity and trust with their following is much stronger. The advice that is perceived as more genuine to the interests of the individuals means that, therefore, Generation Z loves them more. The fact that 55% strongly agree and 25% agree that authenticity is important suggests a need for authenticity. GEN Zs want to see unedited and realistic shots rather than processed and manicured video and images. They do trust more those influencers who show real experiences and candid reviews; hence, there is more preference for travel content that seems more realistic and transparent.

Saving money advice is really valued-45% strongly agree and 30% agree that tips on budget travel are influential. Budget travel tips make the whole concept of travel more accessible and attractive, particularly to students and young travelers who do seek affordability in accommodations. This shows how influencers can play a role beyond inspiration to practical value. Although only 20% strongly agree and 35% agree that luxury travel content influences their decisions, there's still interest in high-end experiences. That suggests a segment of Generation Z aspires to high-end travel experiences, even if the content may not be as influential universally. This raises the validity of video content as a strong driver, with 50% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing. Videos provide the richness of the destination or experience, together with the dynamics that cannot be shown from static images or text. This goes in hand with increased usage on both TikTok and YouTube for video content. This would mean 40% strongly agree, while 30% agree, that the reviews from influencers are considered more trustworthy than those from official

sources. There is, therefore, a shift toward valuing subjective insights and personal opinion over traditional tourism information.

Many influencer reviews are based on personal experiences, which make them more honest and relatable. This is further supported by the strong influence of content featuring cultural or local experiences that show a high belief in immersive, authentic travel experiences. In essence, content portraying the underpinning of local culture, tradition, and unique experiences blends well with Generation Z's yearning for meaningful and memorable travel. The influential role of social media influencers in the travel decisions of Generation Z students also emerges from this analysis.

For Generation Z, authenticity, peer recommendations and practical advice-like how to plan on a budget-are very much considered, while celebrity endorsements and content of luxury are influential yet play a less central role. Video content, especially by trusted influencers, tends to be very impactful, not surprisingly reflecting the power of dynamic media. In sum, most of Generation Z's travel planning decisions is based on authentic and relevant content that shows real value and practicality.

5.1.3 Use of Social Network Sites for Travel Planning among Generation Z Students

Results showed that 40% of Generation Z students strongly agreed and 35% agreed that they use social media as one of their main tools in finding out about new travel destinations.

It therefore shows the significant position of social media right at the very beginning of the travel planning process. A platform like Instagram and TikTok is visually and interactively perfect to showcase potential travel destinations. Social media platforms are increasingly updating their feeds, which also makes them an excellent channel to explore and choose destinations in real-time or through a variety of content. Although 35% strongly agreed, 30% said that influencers do have an impact on their travel destination choices; it would be fair to say that even though influencers are not a sole choice factor, they are highly influential. Influencers can personally endorse products or destinations through compelling content that their followers may connect with. This influence is even much

stronger among the Generations Zs who seek to emulate social media personas for inspiration or recommendations. The fact that 50% strongly agree and 25% agree that user-generated content-in other words, photos and reviews-is highly valuable to their decision-making, underlines the value of peer experience.

User-generated content is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy compared to professional content. Reviews and images from fellow travelers represent real-life insight and detailed experiences; therefore, user-generated content is a crucial component when considering a possible travel destination. It follows that 30% strongly agree and 30% agree with the statement that "social media recommendations are more useful to me than traditional travel agencies." This also reflects a general trend whereby travelers are in search of more personal and immediate recommendations. Social media offers a site of real-time updates and peer feedback, which contrasts with often more generalized advice from traditional travel agencies. Such findings show that 45% strongly agree and 30% agree that multi-influencer positive features increase the likelihood to visit a destination, therefore underlining the persuasive power of collective endorsements.

When several influencers feature a destination in a positive manner, there could be a stronger perception of credibility and appeal, thus making it more likely that travelers will actually visit the destination. Activity Finding-Q6: High consensus on finding activities and experiences that were undertaken with the use of the social media-55% strongly agree 25% agree-states that it is an important factor in planning some particulars of the travel. The volume of ideas and recommendations concerning activities coming from social media platforms constitutes significant support at the time of planning unique and customized experiences. Influencer Recommendations-in a nutshell, 40% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that the recommendation of social media influencers was an important factor in planning activities. It becomes quite clear that the so-called influencers do an important job in activity suggestion and validation.

Their recommendations are valued for perceived authenticity and relevance. Usefulness of Travel Guides and Itineraries: The finding that 45% strongly agree

and 30% agree that in social media, shared travel guides and itineraries are useful underlines their role in detailed trip planning. These can, therefore, be useful in structuring and providing practical information to help organize travel activities. Saving and Sharing Proposals for Activities. Those who strongly agree and agree both make up 50% and 25%, respectively, to the statement of saving or sharing social media posts containing activity suggestions, proving that the posts are important to refer to in the future. Moreover, most travelers refer to the posts they save as a resource for planning. The high agreement that social media makes unique and local experiences easy to find emphasizes the effectiveness of the platform in finding unique travel opportunities. Visual and interactive elements make the medium well-suited for showcasing the local culture and experiences that may not be highlighted as much through traditional travel channels.

The findings show the dominance of social media both in discovering travel destinations and planning activities.

Social media use among Generation Z students is strong on all three dimensions: inspiration, practical advice, and authenticity. Influencers and user-generated content are especially important, for which there is a clear predisposition toward authenticity and real-life experiences. Moving from traditional sources of travel information to digital platforms reflects broader changes in how travel information is consumed and valued. Social media's dynamic and interactive nature makes it an essential tool for modern travel planning and decision-making.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Conclusions

The findings from this study reveal that social media, particularly platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, plays a fundamental role in shaping the travel decisions of Generation Z students.

This demonstrates that 70% of them only use Instagram for travel-related information, which proves to be a very influential source with the highly visual content and engaging platform. Social media isn't just some kind of secondary research but a core part of travel planning; 80% are regularly looking for inspiration and ideas via these channels. The preference for videos, at 75% stating the content is more influential than other types, underlines the growing importance of dynamic media in the capture of attention and in depicting experience effectively. User-generated content becomes a crucial touchpoint in decision-making, as 80% of the respondents place more trust in reviews coming from fellow travelers.

This reflects a strong desire for authenticity and relatability, whereby 75% prefer content provided by their peers over that coming from professional bloggers. This would seem to point out that for any brand that wants to do travel marketing, it needs to be authentic and created with real-life experiences in mind. Influencers also are obviously very important; 80% of respondents say so, but there is a corresponding skepticism regarding overtly promotional material. This would indicate authenticity to still be key in driving travel choices. Another important finding is the high importance of peer recommendations, which follows at 50%. This same personal network trust further supports the fact that authentic and relevant experiences have more resonance than traditional advertising. Interest in micro-influencers captures this same desire for more personalized and trustworthy content, in that they are able to build much closer relationships with their audiences.

Altogether, the findings suggest that Generation Z students are heavily reliant on social media, not only for finding out about new destinations to travel to but also for planning activities and experiences.

This shift from traditional sources of travel knowledge to digital platforms shows a broader transformation in how travel information is consumed and valued. Social media have currently become an important tool in modern travel planning due to its high degree of interactivity and visuality, while a very key imperative for brands and influencers in the course of formulating marketing strategy is to prioritize authenticity, user-generated content, and engaging visual storytelling. Understanding these dynamics into the future will be integral to trying to reach and influence this Generation Z audience effectively.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study into the influence of social media on Generation Z students' travel decisions, strategic recommendations for enhancement in travel marketing and better engaging the demographic will be provided.

First, travel brands should develop high-quality content that is visually appealing and planned in a special way, especially for Instagram and TikTok. Since 70% of contributors take Instagram as the primary source for information on travel, it is eminent to apply the highly visually rich nature of the medium for the attention of likely travelers. In this regard, the interactive photos and short videos showcasing destinations, experiences, and activities can really create a penchant among members of Generation Z to visit new places; hence, visual storytelling remains one of the key elements of any travel marketing strategy. Furthermore, brands should give incentives to create UGC through the creation of campaigns that encourage customers to share their experiences of traveling. That includes running social media contests, creating hashtags, and showcasing user stories on their brand pages. UGC creates an aura of authenticity and relatability; moreover, it will speak to the Generation Z consumer who would trust peer content over professionally marketed content. Secondly, micro-influencers can help extend the reach and build credibility of the brand.

This goes to reveal that relatable and authentic content is valued by Generation Z, something which micro-influencers are best poised to offer. With a smaller but highly engaged following, these influencers often maintain a much stronger connection with their audience. Working with them, travel brands can tap into their genuine storytelling ability to prompt interest in destinations and experiences, speaking their language. Moreover, the marketing strategies should keep the front-page authenticity intact. What Gen Z wants is the raw aspect of the real travel experience, not too much polished content. Instead, travel brands should focus on real adventure, candid moments, and the realities of travel that actually create a deeper emotional bond with the audience.

This attention to authenticity also extends to the use of user reviews and testimonials in marketing materials. Since 80% of the respondents consider peer reviews significant, showcasing authentic customer feedback front and center on the website and social media will help to build credibility and drive decisions for potential travelers. Travel brands should complement the advertisement with tips on how to travel on a shoestring budget, including saving money strategies, recommendations for economy accommodations, and value-for-money experiences.

By doing so, the brand is poised as a useful resource that makes it easier and more possible for students and all young travelers to take trips. Second, this could be done through engaging social media guides or itineraries of special local experiences that help travelers make an informed plan for the trip while showcasing the brand in the process. Another effective way: engagement with hot topics and challenges on social media platforms. Time alignment will raise the visibility of travel brands, especially on TikTok and Instagram, and will make them more relevant to a greater audience in a fun and engaging way. Continuous analysis of social media engagement and resonance of different types of content will also allow brands to tailor their approach to audience preferences. It, in turn, could allow clear comprehension of what type of posts work, thus assuring better and more efficient marketing campaigns that engage Generation Z. Lastly, brands should train the influencers to capture authenticity in the endorsements of their

products. The guidelines themselves make it crystal clear that brands do not want them to blast hard-sell advertising; they should weave a story that keeps their voice credible and relatable.

By embracing such recommendations, travel brands can do a better job of engaging the minds of Generation Z students. This would not only help nurture better brand loyalty but also ensure a relationship that encourages future decisions to travel. This, combined with an increasingly changing travel space, will mean that unique tendencies and behaviors within this demographic are key to success.

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