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## EXPLORING THE GENERATION Z TRAVEL TRENDS AND BEHAVIOR

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### **Abstract:**

*Tourism represents one of the sectors with the highest growth, and the upward trend of evolution implies the anticipation and adaptation to the changes in travel behavior. Currently, young travelers represent an important segment of the global tourism market. Generation Z decision-making processes are influenced both by the specific characteristics of the generation and by their travel habits. The travel motivations of the first generation born in the age of technology include socializing, acquiring unique experiences along with eco-friendly vacation options. During a trip, Generation Z visits museums, attends cultural or sports events and documents their choices by following travel influencers or social media posts. In these conditions, the paper aims to analyze the characteristics of the generation Z travel behavior and their perception of the future of travel. To achieve this objective, there will be a theoretical approach of generation Z coupled with secondary data analyses that will highlight the way young travelers organize their vacation.*

**Key words:** *tourism industry; generation Z; travel behavior*

### **1. Introduction**

The newest generation of tourists, born and raised during the most profound changes of the century, lives in a digital world that influences their travel behavior. The unique and completely different lifestyle from previous generations, causes Generation Z to choose a technology-integrated behavior, both before and after the trip

Regardless of whether we are talking about hotels, restaurants, travel agencies or transport companies, travel suppliers must allow interactive communication with consumers, thus creating opportunities to ask for opinions and analyze generation Z feedback, especially that personalization is a must-have omnichannel enhancer.

Gen Z authenticity involves promoting travel as an experience, where tourists can step out of their routine and have direct contact with local communities. Not to be neglected in the attraction of this market segment is the high social and ecological awareness among executives and managers from the tourism and travel industry.

The future of tourism in the age of Generation Z involves constant adaptation to the tech-savvy of soon-to-be the most powerful travel group, commitment to diversity, and an improved ecological performance of tourism suppliers.

In these conditions, it becomes opportune to analyze gen Z attitude towards tourism, to create products and services that meet the ever-changing needs of future generations. Understanding Generation Z is an extremely important factor and research from secondary data focused on their preferences and expectations can help specialists to connect and engage with travelers from various markets more effectively.

## **2. Brief literature review**

Globally, it has been found that today's young people have a different travel behavior than previous generations, influenced among other things by social media images, connecting to high tech systems and the desire to have a unique experience.

According to the Strauss-Howe generation theory, a generation is formed by people born over approximately the duration of a life phase, who participate in social events and have similar life experiences (Strauss & Howe, 1997). Thus, we can speak of the following generations:

- Greatest generation – born between 1901-1927.
- Silent generation – born between 1928-1945
- Baby boomers – born between 1946-1964
- Generation X – born between 1965-1980.
- Millennials – born between 1981-1996
- Generation Z – born between 1997-2012
- Alpha – born between 2013 - present.

Generations are shaped by the context in which they appeared, for example capitalism – in which generation X grew up – globalization and the emergence of the Internet – specific to Millennials – and the expansion of social networks – in which generation Z grew up – directly influence the values and attitudes of an entire generations.

In tourism and travel industry, research studies have focused on various topics, such as: Millennials and Generation Z needs and motivations (Monaco, 2018; Skinner et.al, 2018; Preko et.al, 2019; Kim & Park, 2020; Stavrianea et.al, 2020; Wiastuti et. Al, 2020; Entina et.al, 2021; Corbisiero et. al, 2022; Pui et.al, 2022; Kusumawardhana et.al, 2023; Tănase et.al, 2023).); Generation Z sustainable behavior at tourist destinations (Cavagnaro et.al, 2021; Pinho & Gomes, 2023); similarities and differences in digital behavior between Gen Z and other generations (Hanafiah et.al, 2019).

A study conducted by Expedia Group Media Solutions highlights the unique travel behavior of Baby boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z. The research showed that Baby boomers are interested in gastronomic experiences and exploration, Generation X is focused on family-oriented trips and heritage sites. Millennials who are often traveling with their children from generation Alpha are seeking outdoor experiences, while Generation Z is focused on cultural experiences and relaxation.

Travel frequency also varies between the four generations mentioned above, thus if Millennials and Gen Z tend to identify themselves as frequent leisure travelers – more than three trips per years, Baby Boomers and Gen X tend to be more casual leisure travelers – 1 or 2 trips per year.

Generation Z's contacts with social networks and online interaction influence the way young people plan and share their travel experience. In these conditions, generation Z

is permanently connected to the Internet and shows interest in using virtual reality to visit destinations that they have experienced in cyberspace (Bilinska et.al, 2023).

Generation Z is the first generation to be born in a digitized environment, thus being highly inclined to use online sources when looking for inspiration for future trips (Kapusy and Lógó 2017). In this context, it should be mentioned that recent studies indicate a proportion of 86 Millennials and 83 of Generation Z that consider it is important to book a trip entirely online (Hilton, 2023).

Young travelers are influenced by attractive images when choosing a vacation destination or where to stay, generally hotels (Dimitriou and AbouElgheit, 2019) that offer them an optimal price-quality ratio.

The travel behavior of Generation Z is shaped by the political, economic and health events in which this generation grew up. Thus, this cohort appreciates the value of experiences, authenticity, and ecological initiatives (Gray, S. et.al. 2019).

Overall, the factors motivating generation Z to travel include experiencing different cultures and new cuisines, meeting new people, and enhancing existing relationships, exploration and participating in a sport event.

In 2019, Generation Z have surpassed both Millennials and Baby Boomers, becoming the largest generation, with 32% of the world's population (Spitznagel, 2020).

Gen Z will be the main target market for tourism in the coming years. Thus, tourism professionals must make efforts to identify their customers' travel expectations and consequently develop appropriate tourism strategies (Styvén and Foster 2018).

In the context of the emergence of advanced technologies (Pricope Vancia, et.al, 2023) stakeholders who do not understand the attitude and travel trends of Generation Z and will not identify effective ways to interact with them, will lose a huge share of the market.

### **3. Assessing Gen Z attitude towards tourism**

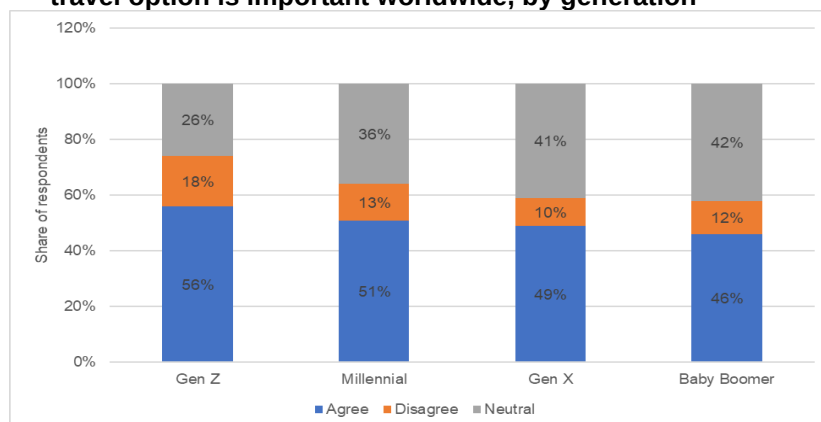
Given the aforementioned researches, that deal with the issue of the young travel behavior, it is noteworthy that exploring the generation Z attitude towards tourism represents a still insufficiently exploited research niche. The aim of this study is to investigate generation Z travel motivation and behavioral intentions, in order to determine the main vectors to renew tourism industry, considered essential to fill this gap in the literature.

#### **3.1. Methodology – research based on secondary data sources**

Globally, the carbon footprint of the tourism industry represents approximately 8% of greenhouse gases. Thus, sustainable tourism is a way of traveling that involves a commitment to making a low impact on the environment and local culture by reducing CO2 and promoting social equity.

In their travel decisions, the younger generations are environmentally conscious and focus on carbon dioxide avoidance (Figure 1 – Share of travelers that believe choosing an environmentally friendly travel option is important worldwide, by generation).

**Figure 1 Share of travelers that believe choosing an environmentally friendly travel option is important worldwide, by generation**

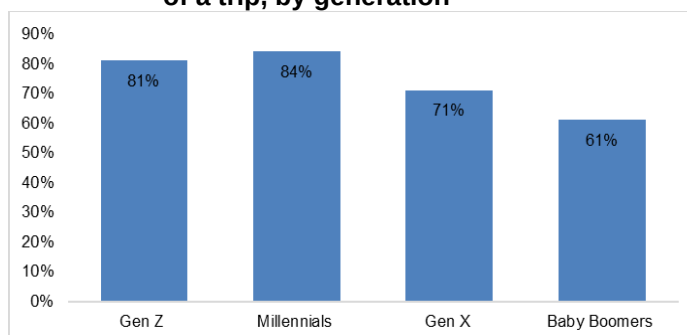


Source: STR, Hotel Management 2020: Sustainable travel and the impact of climate change on tourist perceptions

Therefore, generation Z registers the highest share (56%) of travelers who believe choosing an eco-friendly travel option is important and ensures a positive experience for local people and tourists. In contrast, Gen X and Baby Boomers were more neutral when it comes to environmentally- friendly travel.

Mobile technologies allow travelers to customize the tourist products and services they want to purchase, but also to communicate and post photos or impressions from the trip. Young travelers are also interested in travel apps that reduce the stress of a trip – lack of price transparency, difficulty navigating around sites, technical glitches etc. – 84% of Millennials and 81% of Gen Z appreciate apps that ensures them a seamless digital journey (Figure 2 Share of travelers who appreciate travel apps that reduce the stress of a trip, by generation).

**Figure 2 Share of travelers who appreciate travel apps that reduce the stress of a trip, by generation**

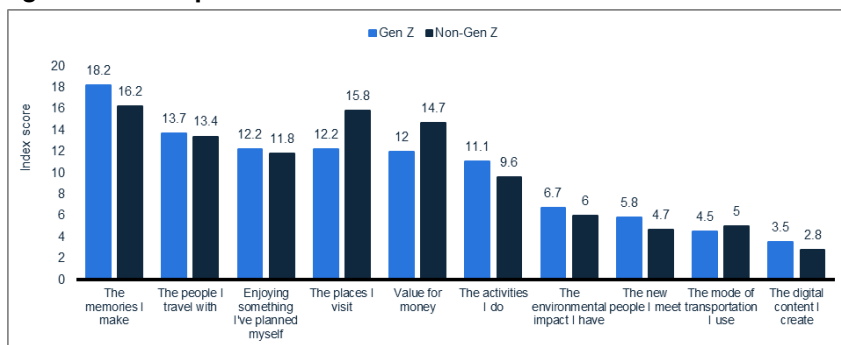


Source: Hilton, Trends Report 2024 – The Year of the Great Recharge

A global survey conducted by Northstar Research Partners in August 2022 have shown that making memories during a trip, the people who accompany them and planning

the trip itself are considered travel decision-making priorities for generation Z ((Figure 3 – Travel priorities of Gen Z vs. non-Gen Z travelers worldwide 2022).

**Figure 3 Travel priorities of Gen Z vs. non-Gen Z travelers worldwide**

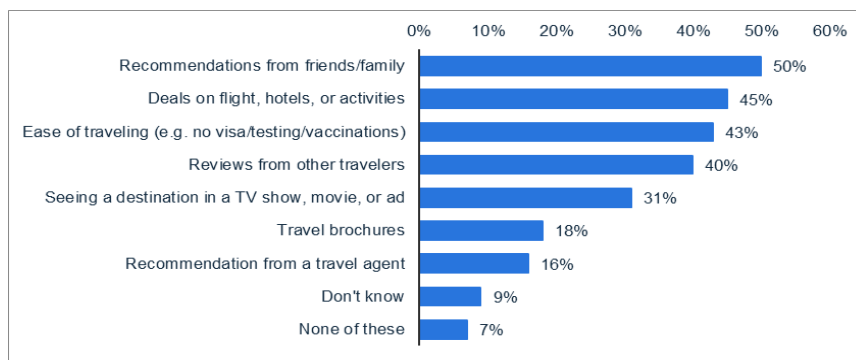


Source: Amadeus; Northstar, Traveler Tribes 2023, page 22

Members of the younger generations seek connection with people and culture, so a survey carried out by Ipsos in July 2023 and published by Hilton, indicates that 44% of Millennials and 43% of Generation Z will travel to learn about different cultures. At the same time, a proportion of 32 Millennials and 26 of Generation Z are travelling to connect with their culture. Furthermore for 2024, 30% of both Millennials and Generation Z plan to travel to attend cultural events or concerts.

The main factors behind the decision to choose a travel destination, mentioned by half of generation Z respondents was recommendations from friends or family, followed by deals on flight, hotels, or activities (45%), ease of traveling (43%) and reviews from other travelers (40%). Travel brochures and recommendations from a travel agent were also mentioned with much lower frequency (Figure 4 – Main aspects influencing Gen Z to choose a travel destination worldwide)

**Figure 4 Main aspects influencing Gen Z to choose a travel destination worldwide**



Source: YouGov, Travel & Tourism Report 2022: Youth of today, travel of tomorrow, page 35

Many organizations in all tourism sectors – hotels, festivals and events, food establishments, etc. – encourage influencers to promote their products or services to their

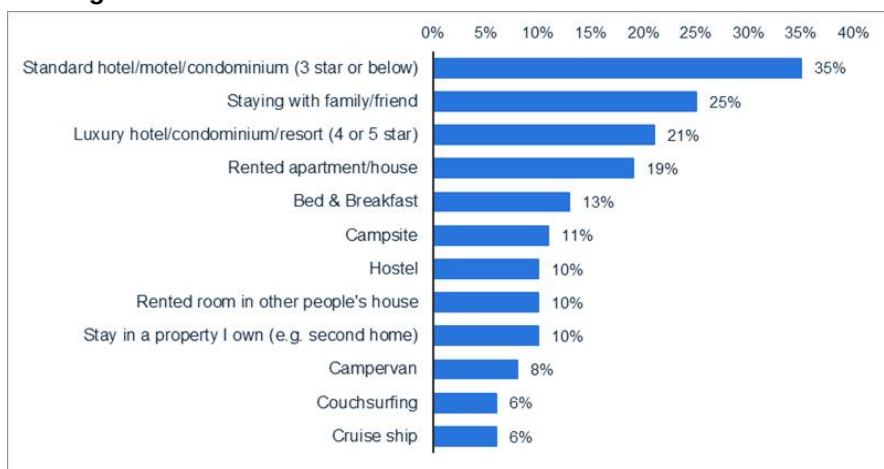
followers, thus globally 19% of gen Z travelers mentioned that they follow a travel influencer on social media. Influencers provide young travelers the necessary support to plan a vacation through posts about the latest trends, travel destinations, hotels, restaurants, airlines, or tour options. In this context, the highest interest in following a travel influencer is registered among generation Z from India (30%), Italy (28%), Indonesia (26%), Hong Kong (26%), Spain (24%), Mexico and UAE, both with 23%. At the same time, just 6 percent of the sample in Sweden stated they follow a travel influencer.

In choosing a destination, young travelers are seeking adventure, space for relaxation or well-being, to broaden their horizons, take on a new challenge or develop new skills. At the same time, for digital natives a phone or tablet will improve their traveling experience.

There is also an interest in exploring cities, especially those with historical and cultural heritage, 44% of Generation Z choosing city destinations worldwide (Hilton, 2023).

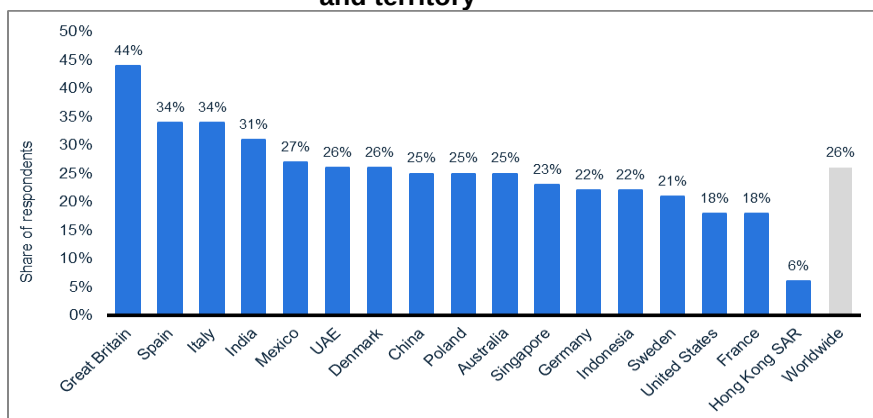
When asked about the preferred travel accommodation, worldwide members of Generation Z mention budget-friendly hotels – rated three stars or below – as their primary option (35%), followed in order of frequency of responses by staying with family or friends and luxury hotel/condominium/4-5-star resort (Figure 5 – Preferred travel accommodation of Gen Z worldwide).

**Figure 5 Preferred travel accommodation of Gen Z worldwide**



Source: YouGov, Travel & Tourism Report 2022: Youth of today, travel of tomorrow, page 35

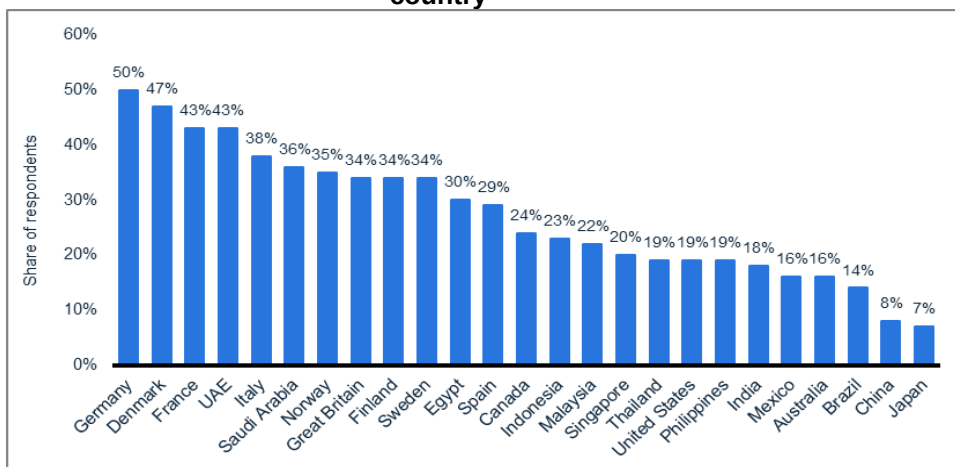
Regarding the intention to spend more on travel products in the next year, the opinions of Generation Z worldwide were divided. Thus 44% of Britains stated they are willing to pay more on travel, with 10 percent more than the young tourists from Spain and Italy (Figure 6 – Intention of Gen Z to spend more on travel worldwide, by country and territory).

**Figure 6 Intention of Gen Z to spend more on travel worldwide, by country and territory**

Source: YouGov, Travel & Tourism Report 2022: Youth of today, travel of tomorrow, page 13

Overall, considering the focus countries, 26 percent of Generation Z are willing to spend more on travel products and services.

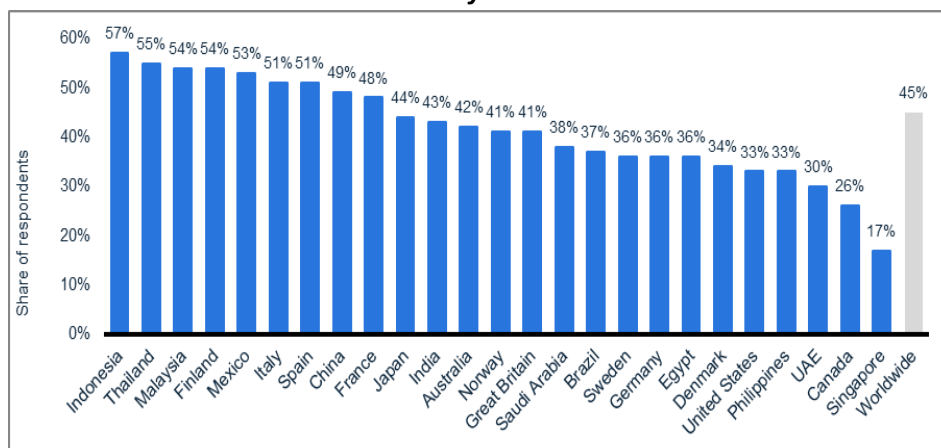
Gen Zers forms a growing group of future travelers, for whom knowledge and integration of different cultures, learning a foreign language and the value of new experiences are essential elements in the decision-making process. Thus, among the members of gen Z who prefer to take an international holiday in the next 12 months can be mentioned the Germans (50%), Danish (47%) and the young travelers from France and UAE both with 43% of responses. In contrast, travelers from Japan are quite reluctant when it comes to travel abroad, only 7% are willing to take an international vacation (Figure 7 – Intention of Gen Z to take an international vacation worldwide, by country).

**Figure 7 Intention of Gen Z to take an international vacation worldwide, by country**

Source: YouGov, Travel & Tourism Report 2022: Youth of today, travel of tomorrow, page 18

Furthermore, worldwide 45% of the young generation tend to take a domestic vacation in the next 12 months (Figure 8 – Intention of Gen Z to take a domestic vacation worldwide, by country).

**Figure 8 Intention of Gen Z to take a domestic vacation worldwide, by country**



Source: YouGov, Travel & Tourism Report 2022: Youth of today, travel of tomorrow, page 17

The focus of the young generation on experiential tourism activities and practice sports event while travelling has contributed to the growth of the off-grid adventure tourism sector. Thus, in a survey carried out by booking.com in August 2022, 57% of gen Z across the glob stated that traveling off-grid would allow them to escape from reality, with only 5 procent less than the travelers from generation that agreed the most with the statement, namely Millennials.

### 3.2. Results and discussions

In the current socio-economic context, the investment in research Gen Z behavior allows travel suppliers to adapt to their customers' new expectations and needs, and therefore to upgrade to the most suitable sales and promotion strategies.

Young travelers are seeking meaningful travel experiences, that a allow them to learn about their own cultural, discover local heritage and crafts, try new cuisines, practice the local language, explore nature or do a wellness activity.

Part of generation Z is not yet integrated into the labor market, due to their age, and has a low budget so that it becomes necessary for travel suppliers to create tourist packages at affordable prices. At the same time, the travel behavior of young travelers is characterized by sustainable initiatives, like eat and shop in places owned by locals, stay in eco-friendly accommodation or book a flight with lower CO2 emission.

Overall, generation Z is willing to pay more for eco-friendly accommodation, considering that hotels who implemented sustainable practices, treat better communities, and reduce their impact on environment.



Gen Zers may choose different types of trips, among which can be mentioned volunteering and eco-tourism, sports events, visual arts festivals, music or film award ceremonies, food and drink festivals, caravanning, sailing or winter sports. Their travel behavior revolves around seeking unique and adventure, from polar expedition cruises to remote destinations.

Thus, considering the core characteristics of Gen Z, eco-tourism establishments should be able to provide them specific products and services, namely: local food menu, zero-waste and recycling services, rental of bike or other eco-transport, eco-tourism hiking, but also natural and animal testing-free cosmetics or cleaning products.

The different demographic characteristics of Generation Z led to different preferences for the selection of the tourist destination, so the financial constraints faced by certain groups of young travelers can be an impediment for choosing an international vacation.

The comparative analysis of the data recorded in figure 7 and figure 8 highlights the fact that the young travelers from Asian countries particularly Indonesia (57%), Thailand (55%) and Malaysia (54%) are more interested in taking a domestic holiday, compared with European countries like Germany, Denmark, and France where the desire for international vacation within this cohort is higher.

Known as digital natives or post-millennials, generation Z shows a great affinity towards technology, especially for the changes in continuous evolution, namely artificial intelligence and virtual reality that could influence the trends and developments of the tourism sector. Thus, online travel agencies, such as Booking, TripAdvisor, Expedia, Agoda, etc. are the preferred channel for online bookings, and new information technologies are used to save money during travel.

In this context, virtual reality can be used by Gen Z for several travel activities, namely: explore a country they have never visited before, experience dining and socialising in a select hotel brand, go snorkelling or diving in a destination abroad or visit a business or first-class cabin on an aeroplane.

The digital behavior of Generation Z, indicates that the use of technology during vacation is focused on travel guide apps, visit websites to research attraction to see and events to attend, apps that ensure them a seamless digital journey, take and share pictures on social media networks, make phone calls or text messages, post online ratings of their experiences.

Therefore, travel suppliers must create an effective customer communication strategy that can be used to enhance loyalty, especially since generation Z tend to use mobile messaging with a company to receive booking notifications, track and redeem loyalty benefits, get information on related-travel products or receive personalized promotions.

Members of Gen Z are expecting tailored experiences and many hotels have developed applications that allow travelers to manage the technology in the room and select their preferred streaming applications, in addition there is the possibility to communicate with hotel employees through mobile messaging systems. In this way, the guests can receive recommendations for visiting various tourist attractions, for dining, or the answer to various questions so that the experience is a pleasant one throughout the stay.

Finally, in order to be well positioned on the global market and to future-proof their businesses' success, travel suppliers need to understand that Gen Z attitude towards tourism is redefining the consumer behavior with their authenticity and unique digital experiences.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Emerging trends in the decision-making process indicate drastic changes in the travel behavior and expectations of Generation Z compared to previous generations.

Although the Millennials are also influenced by the new information technologies, being raised in the digital age and that there are some similarities in terms of travel behavior, such as the desire to know new cultures, these two generations of tourists differ substantially in terms of preferences and expectations from a trip. Thus, for Millennials, the value of a hotel or food and beverage brand comes first, while for Generation Z it is important that that brand is focused on social and environmental responsibility and make efforts to meet and connect with tourists both online and offline.

Travel or social media applications are used to document and organize vacations, and it is important for young travelers to book their entire trip online.

Furthermore, the newest generation of tourists is planning vacations that will offer them one-of-a kind experiences, being willing to allocate a larger budget for travel in the next period, valuing connections over things.

In these conditions, it is essential for tourism stakeholders to know the behavior and travel attitude of generation Z to offer them vacations that cater to their unique expectations.

The future growth of the tourism industry will depend on the identification of the new ways of tourism consumption of Generation Z, a cohort oriented towards the non-repetitive character of vacation destinations.

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