Adapting Travel Business Strategies For Gen Z: The Role of Cross-Border Partnership and Technology Integration

SINTA 2

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of cross-border cooperation in attracting Generation Z travelers, particularly in Indonesia. With the rise of online travel agencies (OTAs) and direct service distribution by airlines and hotels, the travel industry has been reshaped by digital platforms. However, there is a gap in understanding how these collaborations meet the specific preferences of Gen Z as the potential market. The study investigates how selection factors, technology integration, and customer trust influence Gen Z's booking intentions. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining a stratified random sampling survey and semi-structured interviews with industry professionals involved in cross-border travel partnerships. The quantitative data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that personalized experiences, trust in brands, and seamless technology integration significantly impact Gen Z's booking decisions. This research offers insights for travel companies looking to enhance engagement with this key demographic.

Keywords: gen z, travel companies, business strategies, cross-border partnership, technology integration

INTRODUCTION

Partnerships that span international borders are becoming increasingly important for the travel industry, which is distinguished by its global nature and competitive landscape (Kvasnová et al., 2019). The opportunities and difficulties that come with international collaborations that span international borders come with a number of advantages, but they also bring about a number of issues that need to be carefully managed. Collaborations make it possible for firms to enter new markets and reach a larger audience by capitalizing on the market knowledge of local partners (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020).

Ferreira et al. (2020) added that partnerships are the driving force behind innovation because they allow for the combination of resources and knowledge, which ultimately results in the creation of new products and services. Collaborations make it possible for firms to enter new markets and reach a larger audience by capitalizing on the market knowledge of local partners (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020). Kormakova et al. (2023) stated that partnerships are the driving force behind innovation because they allow for the

combination of resources and knowledge, which ultimately results in the creation of new products and services. Ekins & Zenghelis, (2021) also mentioned that sharing resources and expenses can lead to significant cost savings for both parties, a concept known as cost efficiency.

Enhanced competitive advantage of this business collaboration is that it enables companies to differentiate themselves from their rivals by producing distinctive products and services that are the result of collaborations (Supina & Singh, 2024; Jerab & Mabrouk, 2023). Furthermore, cross-border collaboration not only enables travelers to visit many destinations, but also facilitating companies to utilize global resources and extend their operating scope (Chan et al., 2020), cross-border labor sourcing and procurement (Oriade & Cameron, 2017). Studies regarding supply chain collaboration is substantial; however, certain scholars have observed an insufficient emphasis on the cultural dimensions of these initiatives (Osei & Asante-Darko, 2024, 2023). Obstacles to Overcome Cultural and Operational Differences may shape different business practices and cultural norms can be a source of difficulty when it comes to attracting potential markets (Putra et al., 2024).

Figure 1 below outlines the diverse intentions of Generation Z regarding international vacations across various nations, and Figure 2 is about the diversity regarding domestic vacations. Analyzing these global trends underscores the impact of cultural and generational characteristics on the travel activities of this age, offering significant insights into their preferences and expectations. This data can guide initiatives for brands and travel companies aiming to engage Gen Z. Targeting Generation Z is a strategic decision due to their considerable importance as a consumer generation at this period (Chen et al., 2023). This generation exerts significant impact on shopping decisions and overarching cultural trends. Gen Z are those who were born between 1995-2012 (Lopez & Abadiano, 2023).
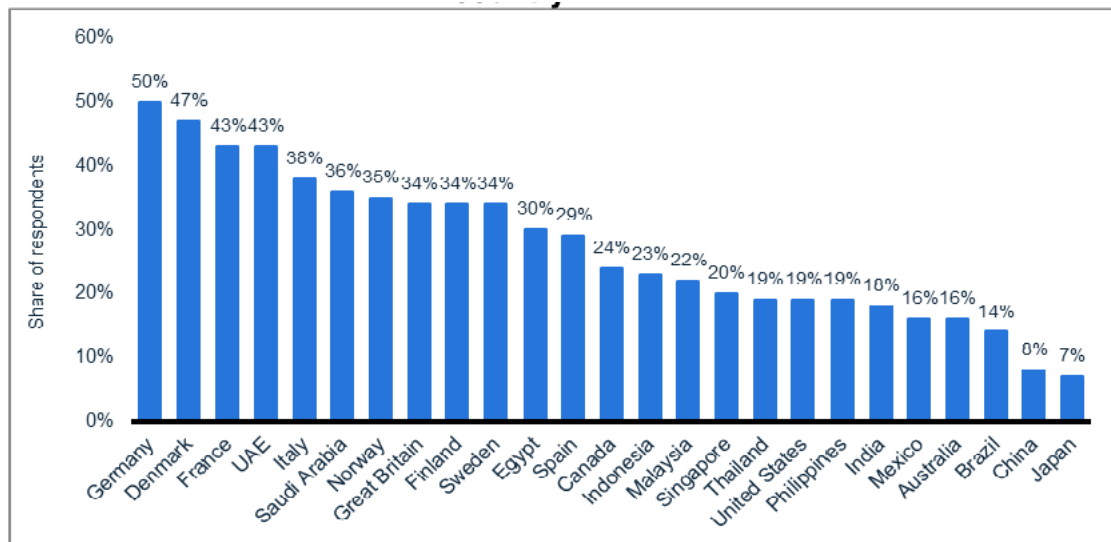
Figure 1. Intention of Gen Z to Take an International Vacation Worldwide by Country
Source: Travel & Tourism Report (2022)
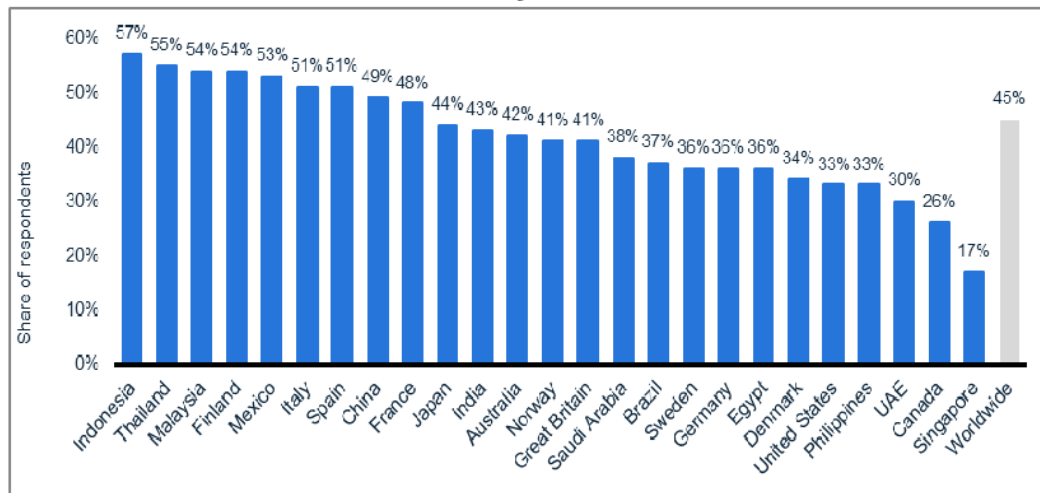
Figure 2. Intention of Gen Z to Take a Domestic Vacation Worldwide by Country
Source: Travel & Tourism Report (2022)

Figure 2 reveals that Gen Z from Asian countries, specifically Indonesia (57%), Thailand (55%), and Malaysia (54%), show a greater inclination towards domestic holidays compared to young travelers from European countries such as Germany, Denmark, and France, who display a higher preference for international vacations. These figures illustrate the diverse intentions of Gen Z regarding domestic travel globally, with Indonesia emerging as the nation where Gen Z exhibits the greatest propensity for both domestic and international travel—23% for international travel and the highest percentage for domestic travel as well. Once travel companies understand the intention of Gen-Z to travel, they must also understand the necessary updates to cater to this age group. This information helps us learn more about how people of different ages, including Gen Z, see the value of technology in making their trip experiences better. The growing importance of these technological tools closely links to changing business strategies of travel companies. These companies are adapting their services to meet the demand for smooth, stress-free journey experiences. Companies can make their services more appealing to today's tech-savvy tourists if they know what these travelers want.
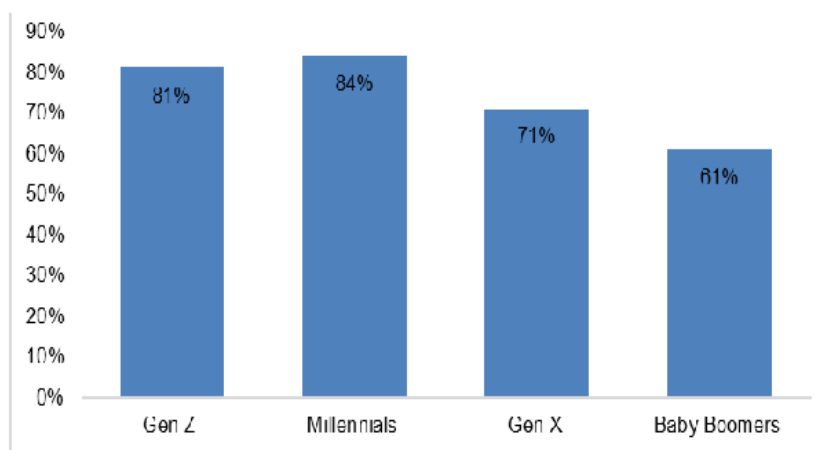
Figure 3. Share of Travellers Who Appreciate Travel Apps That Reduce the Stress of a Trip, by Generation
Source: Hilton, Trends Report 2024 – The Year of the Great Recharge (Popşa, 2024)

The necessity of examining cross-border cooperation in the travel sector, particularly with Generation Z as the predominant developing consumer demographic, is critical. Despite a growing amount of research on global business practices and cross-border partnerships, there is a dearth of studies specifically examining how these collaborations meet the distinct preferences of Gen Z, both internationally and in places like Indonesia. This disparity is particularly alarming considering the huge business potential that Generation Z embodies. As the inaugural generation raised wholly in the digital era, Gen Z has unique habits and beliefs, including a preference for customized, technology-oriented experiences, social awareness, and a requirement for authenticity in brand engagements (Singh et al., 2022; Marta et al., 2022). Despite their considerable purchasing power, there is insufficient research on how cross-border cooperation may strategically engage and cater to this group (Wilson, 2019). In Indonesia, a swiftly expanding market characterized by rising internet penetration and a burgeoning adolescent demographic, this disparity is particularly evident.

In the absence of a comprehensive strategy to penetrate this crucial sector, travel companies jeopardize a significant growth opportunity. Business evaluation approaches and initiatives that neglect the distinct attributes of Generation Z, especially for cross-border relationships, are likely to be unproductive or irrelevant. Consequently, there is an imperative requirement for research that investigates the impact of cross-border cooperation in attracting Generation Z, both internationally and within Indonesia, to guide future corporate strategies and enhance market penetration. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how these collaborations can align with Generation Z's expectations, thereby creating a more effective and targeted strategy to engage one of the most profitable and dynamic consumer demographics today.

The travel industry has experienced substantial changes in recent years, necessitating that companies within this sector adjust their strategies to remain competitive and address the changing demands of consumers. A significant trend is the emergence of the sharing economy, which has transformed conventional travel company structures. Platforms such as Airbnb have disrupted the strategy of conventional hotel companies by providing more flexible and economical alternatives for travelers. Ruggieri et al. (2018) mentioned that the emergence of these online platforms has granted consumers greater autonomy, eliminating their exclusive dependency on traditional travel agents for expertise and services (Noor et al., 2020).

The emergence of the sharing economy, along with the expansion of online travel agencies and the direct distribution of services via airline and hotel websites, has transformed the travel business. These modifications have transformed the manner in which consumers organize and reserve their travels, with digital platforms now assuming a predominant position. In reaction to these changes, travel enterprises have had to adopt a more customer-centric approach and be more responsive to client demands. Travel and hospitality companies have had to modify their business strategies to provide more personalized, differentiated, and unique experiences for their guests to maintain market share and profit margins (Giannoukou, 2024).

Different kinds of international partnerships established in the tourism sector. Partnerships that span international borders in the travel sector can take several forms, each of which contributes in its own unique way to the expansion of businesses. Such as:

corporate partnerships which is the formation of a new corporation with worldwide partners for the purpose of accomplishing particular business goals is what is known as a joint venture. Through these partnerships, travel companies are able to expand their operations into new markets and share their resources and experience (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020). Another one is strategic alliances where the term "strategic alliance" refers to partnerships in which organizations work together to achieve common goals while still retaining their autonomy. Some examples include the formation of alliances amongst airlines in order to provide integrated travel services (Kormakova et al., 2023). There are also licenses and franchising opportunities, it is possible for travel companies to expand internationally through the use of franchising and licensing agreements, which allow them to leverage local knowledge and infrastructure. According to El-Ebiary et al. (2022), this strategy assists brands in expanding their presence in new locations in an efficient manner. The last one is partnerships for cross-promotional activities to co-marketing activities between travel organizations, such as joint promotions or bundled deals, are examples of cross-promotional partnerships. These collaborations are designed to recruit and keep clients with respective businesses. According to Hudson (2020), technology partnerships in travel businesses are collaborations that consist of the development or integration of technological solutions. These solutions may include booking systems or customer relationship management tools, and their purpose is to improve both operational efficiency and the customer experience.

Popşa (2024) also observed that the political, economic, and health events during their formative years influence the travel patterns of Generation Z. This cohort recognizes the importance of experiences, authenticity, and ecological initiatives (Gray et al. 2019). The primary motivations for Generation Z to travel include immersing themselves in diverse cultures and trying new culinary experiences, connecting with unfamiliar individuals, strengthening existing relationships, exploring new territories, and engaging in sports events (Marta et al., 2022), due to the fear of being excluded (Supina & Lautama, 2024). As of 2019, Generation Z has overtaken both Millennials and Baby Boomers to become the largest generation, comprising 32% of the global population (Slivar et al., 2019).

Agustina & Astari conducted the most recent study in 2022 on the evolving travel microtrends of Gen Z, highlighting the significant impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, on the transformation of tourism patterns, particularly within the travel industry. Trends can be defined as the act of observing and analyzing the present seasonal behavior and patterns (Irfan & Sukirno, 2019; Kumar et al., 2023) Researchers have discovered that individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 have been responsible for driving new trends in tourism in the year 2022 (Arlou, 2022). According to Vancia & Băltescu (2022), there are two travel microtrends emerging as a result of the pandemic. Firstly, visitors will increasingly travel with the intention of supporting local businesses. Secondly, tourists will opt for boutique hotels when going on vacation. The pandemic will cause travellers to prioritize their health and return to the prevailing trend of natural tourism.

Three factors influence an individual's preferences: The characteristics of individuals encompass age, gender, educational attainment, income level, and nutritional understanding. Furthermore, the product consists of various components, including both tangible items and intangible services. Finally, the characterization of the environment includes factors such as the number of families, social aspects, mobility, and seasons (Hunter et al., 2019).The younger generation's preference for traditional travel agents (38%

of Millennials and Gen Z) is unexpected considering their well-documented inclination towards digital behaviors rather than analogue ones. In sharp contrast to Generation X and Baby Boomers, barely 12% and 2%, respectively, utilize the services of a conventional travel agent. On the other hand, Generation X greatly prefers to utilize online travel agencies (OTAs) for making their holiday travel arrangements, accounting for 35% of their bookings. The resurgence of travel agents among the younger generation has resulted in only 22% of respondents directly ordering hotel stays and airline tickets through the vendors' websites (Talwar et al., 2020).

Based on Octaviani et al. (2023), it is evident that Gen Z travellers show a minor inclination towards Online Travel Agents (OTA). Out of this group, 64% have utilized an OTA, while 59% have sought the assistance of a travel adviser, 50% have engaged a travel concierge, and 45% have utilized a destination management company (DMC). This indicates the ease and familiarity that Gen Z travellers have with online services (Suwitho et al., 2023). Specifically, Generation Z is the first generation to have grown up with the internet at their fingertips, which naturally equips them with digital technology skills. However, it is important to note that Gen Z/Millennial travellers are more likely to choose an online service for booking their vacation. Additionally, compared to travellers aged 43 and above, Gen Z travellers are twice as inclined to utilize travel services in order to make their vacation reservations. Furthermore, they continue to rely on travel brokers even after scheduling a trip.

METHODS

For the quantitative survey, a random sampling method was utilized to ensure that the sample accurately reflects the diverse demographic characteristics of Generation Z travelers. The target population consisted of individuals aged 18 to 43 who have traveled internationally within the past three year. When determining sample size for an unknown population, a systematic approach is essential for ensuring the reliability and validity of research findings. Due to the large and unknown number of Gen Z travellers who have travelled overseas in the last three years, a Z-score sample size determination method is utilized. First, it is crucial to define the target population based on relevant characteristics, such as age, demographics, or interests (Creswell., 2019). Then a 5% margin of error was set for this study, where 1.96 is for a 95% confidence level, resulting sample size as follow:

$$n = (Z - score)2 \times StdDev \times (1 - StdDev) / (margin\ of\ error)2$$

$$n = (1.96^2 \times .5(.5))/(.05)^2$$

$$n = (3.8416 \times 0.25) / .0025$$

$$n = .9604 / .0025$$

$$n = 284.16$$

This systematic method allows this study to acquire significant and generalisable data, even without specific demographic factors. The quantitative data in this study was analyzed using SmartPLS version 4, a specialized tool for partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2021).

To strengthen the quantitative survey results, qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews with a varied array of industry professionals engaged in cross-

border cooperation in the travel and tourism business. The study included participants from numerous international travel agencies, including tour planners, ticket managers, and general managers. Each interview employed a semi-structured style, facilitating comprehensive exchanges while permitting the exploration of developing themes. We documented, transcribed, and thematically analyzed the qualitative data to identify repeating patterns and significant discoveries. This mixed-methods approach enhances quantitative findings and offers thorough knowledge of the effects of cross-border cooperation on travel enterprises targeting Generation Z, providing significant insights for both academia and industry practice. This approach aimed to capture a wide array of perspectives on how cross-border collaborations are implemented and their effectiveness in addressing the needs of Gen Z travelers. The criteria for participant selection included relevant experience in cross-border initiatives and a demonstrated understanding of Generation Z travel preferences.

Table 1. Informant Profile

Initials	Gender	Age	Profession
SN	Male	52	General Manager AY
SG	Male	49	General Manager BA
IM	Male	37	Ticketing Manager AY
MS	Male	39	Ticketing Manager BA
IR	Female	36	Tour Manager AY
SB	Male	42	Tour Manager BA

Source: Data processed, 2024

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The respondents in this study are Gen Z travelers who have employed services from both online travel agencies (OTAs) and conventional travel agents, and the studied data met the preliminary requirements.

Table 2. Respondents Socio-Demographic

Category	Range	Freq.	%
Gender	Male	234	49
	Female	247	51
Instagram users	Yes	389	81
	No	92	19
Facebook Users	Yes	453	94
	No	28	6
TikTok Users	Yes	328	68
	No	153	32
Having OTA app	Yes	410	85
	No	71	15
Doing travel transaction online with or without app	Yes	439	91
	No	42	9

Source: Data processed, 2024

Based on the table above, the measurement model meets all the necessary standards for validity and reliability. This study utilized the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) to enhance the validity and reliability of the survey instrument. To check the discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was used. This was done by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct with the correlations between the constructs. Also, the findings validate that each construct is unique, as the square roots of the AVEs surpass the corresponding correlations. This study also computed the HTMT ratio to evaluate the discriminant validity. All HTMT values were below the advised threshold of 0.85, signifying that the constructs are adequately different from each other.

Table 3. Reflective Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Type	Loading/Weights	CR	rho_A	AVE
Selection Factors for Travel Companies		Reflective		0.925	0.918	0.754
	FS1		0.832			
	FS2		0.820			
	FS3		0.893			
	FS4		0.925			
Technology and Travel Experiences		Reflective		0.736	0.713	0.522
	TCE1		0.754			
	TCE2		0.764			
	TCE3		0.827			
Customer Trust and Reputation		Reflective		0.783	0.742	0.548
	CTR1		0.722			
	CTR2		0.795			
	CTR3		0.769			
Booking Intention		Reflective		0.803	0.736	0.545
	BI1		0.744			
	BI2		0.770			
	BI3		0.835			
	BI4		0.738			
	BI5		0.876			

Source: Data processed, 2024

The results indicate strong validity and reliability, thereby reinforcing the robustness of the methodology and the credibility of the analysis employed for complete data analysis by using assessment structural model.
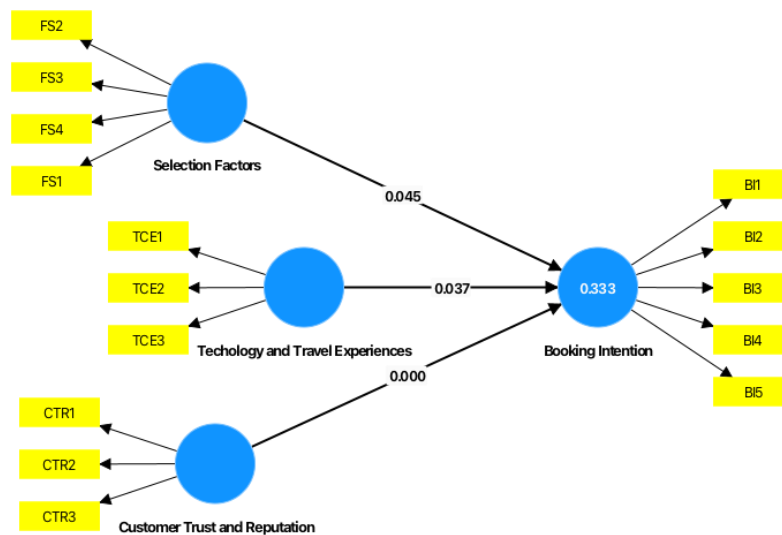
Figure 4. Structural Assessment Model
Source: Authors, 2024

Table 4. Result of Hypothesis Testing

	Direct Effect	*P-value*	Result
Selection Factors → Booking Intention	0.084	0.045	Accepted
Technology and Travel Experiences → Booking Intention	0.112	0.037	Accepted
Customer Trust and Reputation → Booking Intention	0.491	0.000	Accepted

Source: Data processed, 2024

Based on the table above, it was discovered that there is a statistically significant link between selection variables and booking intention (β = 0.084, p = 0.045). These findings suggests that the selection criteria examined in this research ranging from travel companies chain to personalized travel options play a key role in shaping customers' intentions to book travel services. These findings were aligned with previous research that emphasizes the significance of selection criteria in the decision-making process for customers (Ahmad & Nesamani, 2020; Hiezl & Gyurácz-Németh, 2020). These findings also highlight the ways in which an assortment of service characteristics, such as the availability of trusted travel brands and the capacity to customize services, influence booking behavior.

The insights that were collected from interviews with the general manager of a conventional travel agency shed further light on this trend, particularly with regard to the manner in which travel companies are responding to the changing requirements of Gen Z tourists. Both traditional and online travel companies are being challenged to innovate and improve their service offerings in order to cater to the interests of Generation Z, which has distinct preferences for individualized experiences and the seamless integration of technology. The general manager made the observation that in order to maintain a competitive edge in a market that is becoming increasingly digital and experience-driven, it is vital to comprehend and include selection factors, such as bespoke itineraries and

booking platforms that are easy to use. The insights from the general manager of the conventional travel agency reveal significant trends in the adaptation to changing consumer needs among Gen Z.

"Whether conventional or online, Indonesian travel agents operate with the same worldwide wholesalers. Despite having subsidiaries or sister firms in some countries, we don't focus much on that. If another foreign chain offers us a better deal, we'll take it. This is why pricing competition is so tough. However, the younger generation of travelers poses a challenge. While they are aware of the terms and conditions and are primarily concerned with the price, they frequently neglect the smaller nuances. During their trips, they realize it may not be as comfortable as expected." **(IR/SB)**

"The younger generation accounts for the vast bulk of our online travel agency's sales. They commonly reserve their tickets six months or one year in advance. Most of them merely book flights, hotels, and occasional local transportation. Customers rarely purchase whole packages. Currently, the top three most popular destinations are China, Europe, and Turkey." **(IR/SB)**

"In this industry, it makes little difference whether we sell only tickets or entire packages. We have developed a wide range of strategies to improve our companies' futures. Technology does not undermine our progress; rather, it facilitates it. **(IR/SB)**

This study highlights the critical role that selection criteria play in determining booking intentions, hence highlighting the necessity for travel companies to customize their services to the increasing expectations of consumers who are members of the Gen Z. By concentrating on these essential factors, travel companies may increase their appeal to this generation, which will ultimately have an effect on the decisions that they make regarding bookings. The interviews provide insights into the complex and dynamic nature of Indonesia's travel sector, especially on the preferences and habits of Gen Z. Although functioning via global wholesalers, both traditional and online travel agents encounter fierce pricing rivalry, frequently propelled by opportunistic choices rather than enduring brand loyalty. This dynamic illustrates the commodification of travel services, when price emerges as the primary factor influencing client selection. Generational transitions are transforming the market. The Gen Z travelers, while cost-conscious and proficient with technology, frequently overlook the experiential compromises associated with budget-oriented planning. Their inclination to reserve essential travel components, such as flights and hotels, well ahead of time—while eschewing whole package deals—indicates a preference for flexibility and autonomous travel. Travel agents view technology advancement not as a threat but as a fuel for innovation and strategic diversification. Collectively, these viewpoints emphasize the necessity for travel companies to reconcile price competitiveness with value-added services while utilizing technology to personalize and elevate the client experience. By doing so, they may more effectively fit with the expectations of Gen Z travelers and maintain relevance in a rapidly evolving global travel market.

The direct impact of technology and travel experiences on booking intention was also shown to be statistically significant ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = 0.037$). This implies that the utilization of technology and previous travel experiences has a beneficial impact on Gen Z's intention to book their traveling activities. This finding supports Pinto & Castro, (2019), Wijaya & Eppang, (2021), Garcia et al., (2022), and Liu et al, (2020) which similarly highlight the role of technology and customer experience in shaping consumer behavior. These results

emphasize the growing influence of technology and experiential factors in the travel booking process, particularly within the Gen Z demographic. However, the interview results below shows that for Indonesia's travel companies to not having so much worry and blindly swift to online travel services. Since, the conventional and online travel companies have their own pros and cons.

"Our travel firm is well-established in Indonesia, with a strong customer base that includes both individual and corporate clients. However, in order to keep up with the quickly changing technological landscape and appeal to the younger generation of travelers, we have established a smaller online travel agent with a different name and branding. We specifically created this website for the Free Independent Traveler (FIT) industry, with a focus on ticket and accommodation bookings." **(SN&SG)**

"Our online travel agency has had excellent volume sales, but the profit margins are significantly lower than our traditional sales channels. Nonetheless, there has been a huge increase in travel to China recently. The Chinese government and local travel operators are offering extremely low-cost packages to promote new tourist destinations. This has piqued the interest of the Indonesian market, particularly those under 35, who are acquiring these bundles in big quantities. As a result, we have started selling these China-bound packages at a substantially higher volume recently." **(IM/MS)**

The establishment of an online travel agent under the same company umbrella demonstrates a strategic response to the demand for an engaging and user-friendly website that appeals to these younger generations. However, the current offerings are limited, primarily consisting of basic ticket and hotel sales, which generate low profit margins. Furthermore, the focus on selling travel packages for a minimum of six months to a year in advance indicates a cautious approach to maintaining profitability while safeguarding the brand identity of the main travel agency. As the travel landscape continues to evolve, it will be crucial for the agency to enhance its offerings and innovate its online presence to better align with the preferences of Gen Z travelers, thereby ensuring long-term sustainability and competitiveness in a dynamic market.

Customer trust and reputation which encompass factors such as online reviews and the reputation of well-established global travel brands exhibited the most significant impact on booking intention ($\beta = 0.491$, $p = 0.000$), underscoring the essential role of trust in travel service providers in influencing Gen Z's intention to book their traveling activities. These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasizes the significance of selection criteria in the decision-making process for customers (Kim & Kim, 2022; Jin et al., 2021; Singh & Kathuria, 2019; Lattu et al., 2023). These findings also highlight the ways in which an assortment of service characteristics, such as the availability of trusted travel brands and the capacity to customize services, influence booking behavior.

Online evaluations and ratings are vital markers of a brand's legitimacy, particularly for members of Gen Z who are firmly ingrained in digital areas. This is especially true for Gen Z. Therefore, travel firms that have good reputations, which are reinforced by positive evaluations and recommendations from word-of-mouth, are more likely to inspire confidence and promote booking intentions among this group.

"Unquestionably, both offline and online evaluations and ratings have an impact—especially for Gen Z. Whether it's ratings or customer reviews, people believe a great deal of what they observe online to be accurate compared to offline reviews. However, for my travel company, our confidence is much raised if it has a strong reputation supported by

good comments and word-of-mouth referrals. Conversely, Gen Z will swiftly go on to a rival if the reviews are negative or if there is no internet presence." **(IR&SB)**

"Furthermore, the expansion of tourism trends has proven to be highly beneficial. Currently, our approach requires the reservation of full flights. Thus, I am always willing to collaborate if my company reserves two or three planes for a trip and another travel agent requests my help. The same situation arises if they reserve the planes before I do. We believe that this is a collaboration rather than a type of competition. Collaboration is more important than competition in ensuring our shared future." **(SN&SG)**

The importance of trust in this study sheds light on a trend in which members of Gen Z place a high value on travel companies when it comes to transparency, authenticity, and consistency. When it comes to travel businesses, this indicates that it is essential to keep an ideal reputation by utilizing consumer feedback, social proof, and effective online interaction in order to influence the booking choices of this generation. Based on the findings of this survey, it is clear that establishing trust should be a top focus for travel companies that want to attract the attention and loyalty of Gen Z passengers.

The overall interviews underscore the growing influence of online evaluations and digital presence on travel decision-making, particularly among Generation Z. As one respondent stated, "people believe a great deal of what they observe online," and "Gen Z will swiftly go on to a rival if... there is no internet presence" (IR&SB). This behavior reflects a broader generational reliance on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), with studies showing that over 50% of Gen Z travelers consult online reviews before booking, and nearly 84% are influenced by social media for travel planning (Tham et al., 2020). Nekmahmud et al. (2022) similarly found that Gen Z travelers' perfectionist and sustainability-oriented decision-making styles are strongly associated with their dependence on digital reviews in selecting accommodations. While online feedback is essential for capturing Gen Z's attention, businesses also derive long-term credibility from positive word-of-mouth and brand reputation, reinforcing the signaling function described in consumer trust literature. In parallel, the travel sector is demonstrating a shift toward collaboration rather than competition, particularly in large-scale group bookings such as full-flight reservations. As another participant noted, "We believe that such activity is a collaboration rather than a type of competition" (SN&SG). This perspective aligns with the concept of coopetition, where firms cooperate and compete simultaneously to secure shared value and industry resilience. Together, these dynamics point to the need for travel firms to actively manage their digital reputation while fostering strategic partnerships to remain competitive in a trust-driven and interconnected marketplace.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this investigation robustly corroborate the three hypotheses, all of which were affirmed. From selection criteria to technology and travel experiences, together with customer trust and reputation, were identified as having substantial direct impacts on booking intention, underscoring the essential variables that shape Gen Z's travel choices. These factors aligned closely with the related theories in this study which highlights the importance of attitude, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms in decision-making processes. Specifically, the influence of trust and reputation reflects the role of social capital theory, emphasizing how relational trust and credibility guide consumer choices in digital environments.

Based on these findings, some essential methods arise for travel companies seeking to address the changing needs of consumers. The integration of technology is essential since the demand for smooth booking experiences via digital platforms necessitates investment in user-friendly websites and AI-driven services. Individualization is crucial, as individualized itineraries and data-driven marketing techniques are vital for providing customized experiences. The brand's trust and reputation are fundamental, highlighting the necessity for businesses to prioritize trust-building via transparent communication, favorable evaluations, and outstanding customer service. In the context of global vs. local strategy, enterprises must reconcile the dependability of multinational corporations with the distinctive services provided by local agencies, as each addresses varying consumer preferences. Moreover, loyalty and incentive programs are becoming increasingly significant, indicating that the enhancement of reward systems may bolster client retention. Ultimately, it is essential for companies to prepare for future trends, like memorable travel experiences and increased desire for personalization, in order to sustain a competitive edge. Collectively, these methods offer an extensive framework for travel enterprises to adjust and prosper in a swiftly evolving market.

Although this study addresses a gap in the sparse research on Gen Z's travel preferences, it has drawbacks, such as concentrating on a singular demography and country application. Subsequent research ought to broaden the sample to encompass additional age demographics and investigate actual booking practices for more comprehensive insights. Furthermore, examining the influence of upcoming technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality may improve comprehension of forthcoming consumer trends. To bolster potential consumer trust, travel companies must also look into the verification of online reviews and the mitigation of misinformation even though they are already an established brand and have loyal customers. Travel companies ought to be incentivized to invest in digital platforms and technologies that align with Gen Z's expectations, thereby ensuring competitive service delivery and sustained customer engagement.

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