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# Analysis of the Behavioral Patterns of Generation Z Consumers in Iraq's Tourism Industry

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**Abstract**
The objective of this study is to design a behavioral model for Generation Z consumers in the tourism industry of Iraq.This research is qualitative in nature, employing a thematic analysis approach. The statistical population consists of 20 experts and specialists in the field of tourism, selected through theoretical sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and subsequently analyzed via thematic analysis using MAXQDA 2020 software.The research findings led to the identification of eight main themes: 1. Psychological-Motivational, 2. Digital and Media-related, 3. Economic and Perceived Value, 4. Decision-Making and Destination Choice, 5. Travel Experience and On-site Consumption, 6. Socio-Cultural, 7. Security, Risk, and Trust, and 8. Behavioral Consequences.The results indicate that Generation Z, as active, digitally driven, and personalization-seeking tourists, has transformed traditional demand patterns. They actively seek authentic experiences and interactions with local culture; however, these experiences must also be recordable and shareable on social media platforms. Furthermore, while highly cost-sensitive, this generation is willing to pay premium prices for unique and high-quality experiences. Consequently, this study emphasizes the necessity of transforming policy-making and developing digital infrastructure and tourism services tailored to the specific needs of this generation.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

The tourism industry, as one of the world's most diverse and largest sectors, is a primary source of revenue and a key driver of employment in many countries. Due to its strategic significance, it is often termed an "engine of economic development," encompassing substantial economic and social benefits, and thus remains a focal point for many governments (Bekele & Raj, 2025). As trade expands, the tourism industry serves as a cornerstone of the global economy. Its inherent stability yields positive effects for national self-sufficiency, and it encompasses key sectors characterized by rapid growth and high rates of direct and indirect value-added; consequently, it is also regarded as a medium for the development of cultural activities (Zvaigzne et al., 2025).

Tourism is recognized as a significant economic and cultural driver in the contemporary world—an industry that not only facilitates national financing but also provides opportunities for cultural exchange, the preservation of historical heritage, and the deepening of international understanding. In Iraq, despite possessing significant historical, archaeological, and natural potential, the tourism sector faces considerable challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient standards in tour operator services, policy-making difficulties, and weak stakeholder engagement (Almasooudi & Rahman, 2024).

The behavioral patterns of Generation Z consumers can serve as a catalyst for improving tourism conditions in Iraq. This generation, characterized by a high reliance on digital technology, social media, and multimedia content, creates growing demand for authentic experiences, high-quality services, and easy access to tourism information. Such expectations can drive the government and the private sector toward investing in digital infrastructure, enhancing the quality of tour operator services, and creating innovative tourism packages. Furthermore, Gen Z's inclination to share travel experiences in virtual spaces acts as a form of digital word-of-mouth marketing, potentially constructing a positive and attractive image of Iraq at both national and international levels.

The active participation of this generation in engaging with local communities, combined with their interest in sustainable tourism, provides an opportunity for policymakers and tourism stakeholders to prioritize the quality of experience and sustainable development over mere tourist volume. Thus, Gen Z behavior not only influences demand patterns but can indirectly act as a driver for policy reform, service improvement, and the enhancement of Iraq's tourism brand. Therefore, this study, by emphasizing the analysis of Generation Z consumer behavioral patterns in the Iraqi tourism industry, seeks to address the following research question through a review of relevant concepts and an analysis of expert perspectives: 'How can the behavioral patterns of Generation Z consumers in the Iraqi tourism industry be designed?'

### Theoretical Framework

#### Tourism

Tourism, as a social and economic phenomenon, carries diverse and sometimes contradictory definitions; currently, there is no clear theoretical consensus regarding its exact meaning (Bellato & Pollock, 2025). This phenomenon extends beyond mere recreational and travel activities, encompassing cultural, economic, social, and environmental dimensions. As a multidimensional process, tourism simultaneously influences the individual behavior of tourists and their interactions with the host society; conversely, it is shaped by the macroeconomic and infrastructural structures of nations.

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## Generation Z Consumers

Generation Z, encompassing those born from 1997 onwards, has grown up in the digital and high-speed internet era, possessing extensive access to technology and social networking platforms (Williams & Page, 2011). This cohort demonstrates a propensity for short, fast-paced experiences, an openness to emerging technologies, and a deep appreciation for cultural diversity, as well as social and environmental concerns. Their behavior is significantly influenced by social media, peer and family recommendations, and content marketing, with a particular focus on quality, innovation, and social responsibility (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Sfodera et al. (2024) examined Generation Z's perceptions of sustainable tourism in developing nations. The study findings demonstrated that technology is positively correlated with the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions of sustainable tourism perception among Generation Z. Thus, technology can be regarded as a dimension of sustainable tourism perception for local populations; however, these perceptions vary significantly depending on the type of tourism.

Furthermore, Hammad (2024) investigated the factors influencing smart tourism marketing aimed at Generation Z tourists visiting Egypt. The findings revealed that Generation Z tourists are consistently dependent on modern tourism technology applications, such as online travel agencies (OTAs), tourism-related social media platforms, and websites. The study also determined that this generation maintains a keen interest in emerging technological trends within the tourism sector. Consequently, the research recommends strengthening and enhancing the utilization of digital marketing practices.

## Research Methodology

In terms of implementation, this study adopts a qualitative approach using thematic analysis. The statistical population consisted of 20 experts and specialists in the field of tourism, who were selected through theoretical sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection.

## Research Findings

The findings were analyzed using thematic analysis and MAXQDA 2020 software. The results revealed eight main themes, namely: 1. Psychological-motivational, 2. Digital and media-related, 3. Economic and perceived value, 4. Decision-making and destination choice, 5. Travel experience and on-site consumption, 6. Socio-cultural, 7. Security, risk, and trust, and 8. Behavioral consequences.

The results further indicated that Generation Z, as active, digitally driven, and personalization-oriented tourists, has transformed traditional demand patterns. They seek authentic experiences and interaction with local culture; however, these experiences must also be capable of being recorded and shared on social media. In addition, although this generation is highly cost-sensitive, it is willing to pay more for unique and high-quality experiences.

This study underscores the need for policy transformation and the development of digital infrastructure and tourism services tailored to the needs of this generation.

## Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the objective of analyzing the behavioral patterns of Generation Z consumers in Iraq's tourism industry. The results of this study align with the findings of Ahmadian et al. (2026), Yaghoobi Zanjani et al. (2025), Sfodera et al. (2024), Hammad (2024), Pricope Vancia et al. (2023), Kimili (2023), Buhalis et al. (2023), Sánchez et al. (2022), Choirisa (2022), Uysal (2022), Gözel & Baş (2021), Dashtlaali et al. (2020), Farzin et al. (2020), and Haddouche & Salomone (2018). Specifically, Sfodera et al. (2024)

demonstrated that technology is positively correlated with the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions of sustainable tourism perception among Generation Z. Consequently, technology can be considered a key dimension of sustainable tourism perception for local populations, though these perceptions vary significantly based on the specific type of tourism.

From a practical and managerial standpoint, the findings of this research carry direct and inevitable implications for policymakers, marketers, and active stakeholders in the Iraqi tourism industry. To address the dimension of "seeking authentic experiences," responsible authorities and tourism organizations must focus on developing and standardizing local accommodation experiences (such as eco-lodges), local culinary tours, and handicraft workshops, as well as promoting them effectively on digital platforms.

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**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest relevant to this work.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

**Data Availability Statement**

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**AI Use Statement**

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation, writing, or editing of this manuscript.

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**Ethics Approval**

All procedures performed in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible institutional and national research committee.