Factors Influencing Omani Gen Z Tourists' Destination Choices: Does Gender Make a Difference?

Ummanlı Z Kuşağı Turistlerin Destinasyon Seçimlerini Etkileyen Faktörler: Cinsiyet Bir Fark Oluşturur Mu?

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Abstract: Research on the travel preferences of younger generations is the primary approach that tourism service providers should undertake, as they are one of the main target customers. The "post-millennials" or "Generation Z (Gen Z)" are the new generation, and they significantly influence how tourism is currently characterized by its goals and behaviours. As a result, the goal of this study is to evaluate the economic, personal, social and cultural aspects that affect Omani Gen Z tourists' choice of travel location. Additionally, gender-based differences among these aspects were also tested in the current study. Because the group being researched is heterogeneous, this study used descriptive research and implemented stratified sampling to ensure that each attribute was fairly represented. 228 participants responded to the survey that the study used to get the data. The following are the most important factors in the categories of personal, economic, social, and cultural: The location offers security and personal safety (4.35); the destination has low fees for using ATMs and currency exchange centres (4.12); the destination was recommended by social media and influencers (4.07); and traditional and Halal foods are available at the destination (4.30). Also, gender-based difference was found in social aspect only. By considering these factors, tour operators and tourist destinations can modify their products to better cater to Omani "Gen Z" travellers' wants and interests and deliver a more genuine and immersive travel experience that takes into account their diverse demands and preferences.

Keyword: Gen Z, Omani, Tourist Attractions, Destinations Choice

JEL Classification: Z30, Z32, Z38

Öz: Genç kuşakların seyahat tercihlerinin araştırılması, turizm hizmet sağlayıcılarının ana hedef müşterilerden biri olması nedeniyle öncelikli yaklaşımıdır. "Y kuşağı" veya "Jenerasyon Z (Z Kuşağı)" yeni kuşaktır ve turizmin şu anda hedef ve davranışlarıyla nasıl tanımlandığını önemli ölçüde etkilerler. Sonuç olarak bu çalışmanın amacı Ummanlı Z kuşağı turistlerin seyahat lokasyonu seçimini etkileyen ekonomik, kişisel, sosyal ve kültürel unsurları değerlendirmektir. Ayrıca bu çalışmada bu boyutlar arasındaki cinsiyete dayalı farklılıklar da test edilmiştir. Araştırılan grup heterojen olduğundan, bu çalışmada tanımlayıcı araştırma kullanılmış ve her özelliğin adil bir şekilde temsil edildiğinden emin olmak için katmanlı örnekleme uygulanmıştır. Araştırmanın verileri elde etmek için kullandığı ankete 228 katılımcı yanıt vermiştir. Kişisel, ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel kategorilerdeki en önemli faktörler şunlardır: Konum güvenlik ve kişisel emniyet sunar (4.35); destinasyonun ATM'leri ve döviz merkezlerini kullanma ücretleri düşüktür (4.12); destinasyon sosyal medya ve fenomenler tarafından önerildi (4.07); destinasyonda geleneksel ve helal yiyecekler mevcuttur (4.30). Ayrıca, cinsiyete dayalı farklılık sadece sosyal boyutta bulunmuştur. Tur operatörleri ve turistik destinasyonlar, bu faktörleri göz önünde bulundurarak ürünlerini Umman "Z Kuşağı" gezginlerinin istek ve ilgi alanlarına daha iyi yanıt verecek şekilde değiştirebilir ve onların farklı talep ve tercihlerini dikkate alan daha gerçek ve sürükleyici bir seyahat deneyimi sunabilir.

Anahtar Kelime: Z Kuşağı, Ummanlı, Turistik Atraksiyonlar, Destinasyon Seçimi

JEL Sınıflandırması: Z30, Z32, Z38

1. Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z) has the most pseudonyms compared to earlier generations, including Gen Tech, Post-Millennials, Switchers, Online Generation, iGeneration, Facebook Generation, and Constant Clickers (Livingstone, 2018). Besides, "Gen Z" refers to a group of people who were born between the end of the 1990s and the start of the 2000s. In contrast to past generations, this generation has been raised in a technologically advanced society (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014). Gen Z feels at ease transitioning between the online and offline worlds because they think they are complementary to one another (Globe Trender, 2017). Another trait of Gen Z's generation is that they can look up and acquire any information they require electronically and share it using various communication devices. In addition, they have a large network of contacts and are frequent social media users (Goldman Sachs, 2018).

Social media platforms are commonly used by Gen Z to express their opinions and ideas. Further, they frequently exchange videos and images as well. Moreover, Hardey (2011) states that the Internet-based content is not only used by this generation, but they also create it and have power over it. However, according to Hertz (2016), Gen Z is extremely concerned and skeptical due to the fact that the generation was raised in a socioeconomic setting characterized by disorder, unpredictability, turbulence, and complexities, which shaped their attitudes and life skills. They have reached adulthood during a period of social media activity, economic collapse, rising inequality, and employment insecurity (Deloittee, 2019). Nevertheless, according to Read & Truelove (2018), Gen Z aspires for safety and financial security because they have never known a world free of violence and terrorism.

As one of the most important cohorts, research on Gen Z is beginning to be published. This might be explained by the fact that the oldest of this generation have just recently reached adulthood and the ability to travel on their own (Corbisiero & Ruspini, 2018). Additionally, youngsters no longer need parental approval for their travel and participation in various activities. The societal, economic, cultural, technical, geopolitical, and environmental variables of the period in which a generation is born and raised influence every generation. Gen Z has also been impacted by social media, technological innovations, diversity, and a rise in a wide range of family configurations (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). This study specifically seeks to address the following objectives:

- To evaluate the personal and economic factors influencing Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices.

- To examine the social and cultural factors influencing Omani Gen Z tourists' destination decisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Younger generations are more likely to set trends and be early adopters of new fashions, as well as to be comfortable with new technology, optimistic, non-linear thinkers, and innovative problem solvers (Tapscott, 2009). This generation is viewed as an important demographic in the sector since it is gradually assuming a central position and will soon be the adults holding senior responsibilities and turning into tourism and travel's major customers (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). Because they are already self-sufficient and spend their own money, Gen Z customers represent a prospective market for tourism and travel industry, as well as potential decision-makers in the future and a market of influencers who both directly and indirectly influence their families' decisions (Tiago & Tiago, 2013). There are a variety of factors that can influence Gen Z tourists' destination choices; some of the most significant factors include personal, economic, social, and cultural. These factors influence tourists' destination choices and provide a framework for understanding the decision-making process that tourists go through when choosing a destination (Barnes, 2018).

2.2. Personal Factors

One of the tourism industry's fastest-growing demographics belongs to the Gen Z generation. Bloomberg News (2016) claims that millennials desire to understand and engage with emotions. They are a sentimental generation that prefers to spend money on experiences rather than material possessions. Besides, Goldman Sachs (2018) stated that Gen Zs look for health and wellness items, exercise, eat better, quit smoking and drinking, and use the Internet to research healthier choices. As consumers, Gen Z is continually looking for new things because they want to experience new things in their lives. Moreover, Demeter & Brătucu (2014) indicated that Gen-Z take great pleasure in their leisure time as well as place a high value on completing tasks on schedule.

Studies have found that gamification technologies and software for augmented and virtual reality can favour Gen Z travel behaviour (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). Besides, Livingstone (2018) also revealed that to attract Gen Zs to tourism, businesses should use virtual and augmented reality applications, as well as incorporate more technical elements into their advertising campaigns. Further, according to Beall (2017), post-millennials have larger aspirations than

millennials and are typically more autonomous, less concentrated, excellent problem solvers, and entrepreneurial. However, demographic trends are the most common component in the tourism industry since it is thought that age is the most significant element (Jönsson & Dwayne, 2008). Corvi et al. (2007) stated that Gen Z tourists may have different safety concerns and may be more likely to choose destinations that they perceive as safe and secure. Further, Gen-G tourists who are fluent in multiple languages may be more likely to choose destinations where they can comfortably communicate and interact with locals. However, according to Beall (2017), Gen Z tourists may be influenced by their past travel experiences and be more likely to return to destinations they have enjoyed in the past.

2.3. Economic Factors

According to Barton et al. (2013), because Gen Z has less financial independence, it is reasonable to assume that visiting luxury locations will not be their first choice. Most of them cannot afford extended trips, and just a small percentage travel in business class when deals are available. Besides, Trend Watch (2017) revealed that when it comes to travel options, Gen Z primarily favours low-cost airlines, and one-quarter of travellers aged 18–34 reported using a train on their most recent trip. Moreover, Alexander & Natarajan (2017) stated that, the cost of travel and the affordability of a location are the most important factors for Gen Z travelers. Furthermore, they are also concerned about currency conversion costs, and the use of cards with modest fees has a significant impact on Gen-G travel to tourist destinations. In addition, PWC (2020) stated that they weigh the costs of several alternatives because they have tighter budgets and less pricing flexibility.

According to Expedia (2017), it is clear that people are beginning to value experiences more highly than possessions. 57% of American Gen Zs consistently save money just for travel, but among Millennials, where 68% do the same, the tendency is more pronounced. In addition, Epicure (2017) Compared to other generations, millennials are more affected by special deals, accessibility to transportation, and ecologically friendly travel when choosing a place to stay. Expedia (2017) stated that Gen-G does not prioritise star ratings of hotels, brand recognition, or location near a beach or body of water. Because they are on a tight budget and are very conscious of their expenditures, Gen Z will compare multiple possibilities before making a vacation reservation (Southan, 2017). Deloitte, 2019 for Gen-Gs, the value of a country's currency compared to the tourist's home currency can greatly influence the cost of travel and affect the affordability of a destination. Moreover, the currency exchange charges and usage of debit and credit cards with

nominal fees greatly influence Gen-G travel to destinations. Moreover, Beldona et al. (2009) the cost of airfare can greatly impact the affordability of a destination, and Gen Z tourists may be more likely to choose destinations that offer low-cost airfare options. Furthermore, according to Broadbent et al. (2017) the cost of accommodation can greatly impact the affordability of a destination, and Gen Z tourists may be more likely to choose destinations that offer a range of affordable accommodation options. Similarly, Southan (2017) argued that the cost of food and beverages can greatly impact the affordability of a destination, and Gen Z tourists may be more likely to choose destinations that offer affordable dining options.

2.4. Social Factors

The millennial generation is the first to have lived with constant access to technology. They are hence "digital natives" (Goldman Sachs, 2018). Because of this, the young Millennial generation is constantly connected to the internet, where information is always accessible (Francis, 2018). Most of them use websites, apps, and social media platforms to increase their expertise (Haddouche, 2018). Besides, Gen Z is multicultural, global, and diversified, with a wide range of experiences and viewpoints (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). Gen Z is the youngest generation ever; they were born during a period of intense social progress (Lenhart, 2015). Gen Z cannot imagine living without the internet since they are used to modern technology and multimedia sources that constantly bombard them with information. This generation, which is arguably the most creative, prioritises uniqueness and "reality" and questions the status quo (Hammed & Christine, 2018).

According to a survey conducted by PWC in 2020 personal recommendations from friends and family can greatly influence destination choices for Gen Z tourists (PWC, 2020). However, Haddouche & Salomone (2018) also point out that, when travelling with family, teenagers have little influence on the choice of destination and have only a general idea of the places they visit. Besides, Hammed & Christine (2018) claimed that both in-person and online word-of-mouth are especially potent influencers for younger visitors. A study by Expedia (2017) confirmed that Gen Z tourists are heavily influenced by the social media and online reviews, they tend to trust online reviews and may be more likely to choose destinations that have a positive online reputation. Expedia Media Solutions (2017) found that 60% of all travellers intended to post daily on social media. This is more likely to be done by younger travelers. 84% of millennials and post-millennials post about their travels on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, Expeida and other travel vlogs. Furthermore, 27% of Millennials in the United States have posted a potential

trip on social media to solicit feedback before booking. Further, at the time of a purchase, a sizable amount of UGC (User Generated Content), such as reviews, comments, and ideas, is created in the tourist industry (Statista, 2020).

Additionally, when there are more possibilities for activities and experiences at the destination, Gen Z is happier with their trip. In actuality, they look for them before making the travel arrangements. According to a study on the travel plans of Europeans performed in February 2021, over 46% of responders between the ages of 18 and 24 planned to travel domestically or within Europe with the option of activities and unique experiences (Statista, 2021). Moreover, according to Pinto (2015), Gen Zers are more likely to be influenced by information that is participatory, more realistic, and more natural than the conventional method of promoting a location by featuring images of beauties on a beachfront. Their traits affect their travel preferences, making the aforementioned purchasing behaviour peculiar to tourism.

2.5. Cultural Factors

One of the main interests of Gen Z is participating in volunteer activities, giving back to the community, and discovering the cultures of their area as well as the cultures of the places that they visit (Cho et al., 2018). Additionally, they are curious and desire to learn as much as they can about other countries, cultures, places, and so on (Benckendorff et al. 2010). They desire to travel the world and learn new things. Compared to earlier generations, they are more optimistic and open-minded. Paradoxically, according to Lee & Lee (2009) millennials and post-millennials still adhere to traditional family values while still being incredibly accepting and open. Although they value hard work, they also desire a balanced lifestyle that includes plenty of downtime (Pinto, 2015). Different demands, interests, and aspirations when it comes to dining options, places to stay, tourist destinations, and shopping are a result of generational differences in lifestyle and attitudes.

Jönsson & Dwayne (2008) stated that compared to tourists from Gen-Y, travellers from Gen-Z are more social and more willing to interact with locals to learn about their customs and cultures. They even frequently dress in regional attire, consume regional cuisine, and attend regional events like concerts and festivals. Moreover, Gen Zers have been described as open-minded, list-oriented, and curious about off-the-beaten-path destinations when it comes to travel (Expedia Media Solutions, 2017). They rely on a variety of sources to get trustworthy information while arranging a trip, and they are more adept than earlier generations at conducting information searches and comparisons to locate travel options (Pinto, 2015). Additionally, they look for distant locations,

participate actively in a variety of activities, interact with locals, and discover local customs and cultures (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019).

Further, according to Levitt (2019) Gen-Z tourists may be more likely to choose destinations that align with their religious beliefs, such as those that offer religious sites or have a significant religious heritage. Also, they may be attracted to destinations that offer a unique cultural experience and are rich in customs and traditions. Morevoer, Marzuki (2012) stated that Gen-Z tourists may be more likely to choose destinations that offer a wide range of traditional and local cuisine options, as it gives them an opportunity to try new foods and learn about different cultures. Finally, Gen Z tourists may be more likely to choose destinations where they feel comfortable communicating and interacting with locals and may be more likely to choose destinations where they speak the language.

3. Methodology

The study employed a quantitative approach as it quantifies the problem by producing statistical data that can be transformed into usable statistics (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Besides, according to Babbie (2010), quantifiable data can convey details and reveal relationships in research. A quantitative approach can also produce a lot of data, which is subsequently compiled and statistically examined. According to Fox & Bayat (2007), the goal of descriptive research is to highlight present challenges or problems through the process of gathering data that enables them to characterize the situation more fully than was feasible without employing this method. Sekaran & Bougie (2016) noted that, in contrast to experimental research, no factors are controlled or altered in descriptive research. The study consequently used a descriptive design.

The target audience consisted of young Omanis living in Muscat. For the study, the probability sampling method, i.e., stratified random sampling technique, was used as this almost eliminates bias (Creswell, 2009). According to Rowley (2014), stratified sampling ensures that subgroups within a population are proportionally represented in the sample. Rowley continues, "Stratified sampling is useful if the characteristics of the population being studied are diverse (male/female, teen/adult), and each characteristic should be properly represented." Additionally, Creswell (2009) found that stratification produces higher precision and lower estimation error than simply random sampling. The greater the stratigraphic differences, the greater the precision gain. Moreover, the study's data was gathered through a survey using a questionnaire. The survey method, according to Sekaran & Bougie (2016), can collect different types of information from a large sample size

while remaining cost-effective and time efficient. Furthermore, the survey method serves as the foundation for deciding on the overall population sample. The use of a survey questionnaire is widely accepted in business and management because it guarantees the privacy and security of respondents' backgrounds (Ethridge, 2004). The questionnaire was created by the authors themselves; however, Pricope Vancia et al.'s (2023) study, "Examining the Disruptive Potential of Generation Z Tourists in the Travel Industry in the Digital Age," served as the basis for the questionnaire's development. The study received responses from 228 people.

Analysis of data is the act of acquiring data and arranging it to offer research study a perceptive conclusion. The frequency distribution, percentage, rank, and weighted mean were used to examine the data. The frequency distribution is a statistical method used to determine both the distribution of respondents and the frequency of those respondents that match a certain defined characteristic, such as age, gender, profession, education, and earnings. The percentage of respondents and the proportion of respondents who fit a particular profile were both determined using the percentage. The rank was applied to research the variables affecting Omani Gen Z's travel motivations. Finally, gender difference among aforementioned aspects was tested using independent samples t-test.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Frequency tables present the percentages for gender, age, job, education, and income level. As shown in Table 1, more than half of the respondents were female (59.2%), and the remaining (40.8%) were male.

Table 1. Frequencies for gender.

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	93	40,8	40,8	40,8
	Female	135	59,2	59,2	100,0
	Total	228	100,0	100,0	

As shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents (46.1%) are from 24 to 26 years old; the second-highest group, 38.2%, is from 18 to 20 years old; and the remaining 15.8% are from 21 to 23 years old.

Table 2. Frequencies for age.

Age		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-20 years	87	38,2	38,2	38,2
	21-23	36	15,8	15,8	53,9
	24-26	105	46,1	46,1	100,0
	Total	228	100,0	100,0	

According to Table 3, fewer than half of the respondents (35.1%) were industry practitioners, while the rest (64.9%) were students. It suggests that the majority of responses are from students. It is logical given that this research is about Zen Zs, and since they are 26 years of age or younger, the majority of them are students.

Table 3. Frequencies for job.

Job		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	148	64,9	64,9	64,9
	Employee	54	23,7	23,7	88,6
	Business owner	26	11,4	11,4	100,0
	Total	228	100,0	100,0	

Table 4 shows that 50.9 percent of respondents held a diploma, 49.1 percent held a graduate degree, and just 2.2 percent held a postgraduate degree.

Table 4. Frequencies for education.

Education		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Diploma	116	50,9	50,9	50,9
	Graduate	107	46,9	46,9	97,8
	Postgraduate and over	5	2,2	2,2	100,0
	Total	228	100,0	100,0	

According to Table 5, 41.7 percent had a monthly income of less than 700 Omani riyals (RO). The majority of respondents' families, 28.9 percent, earn between RO 701 and 1400 every month. About 18% have a monthly salary ranging from RO 1401 to 2000. Finally, 11.4% of respondents have a family monthly income of RO 1,000 or more.

Table 5. Frequencies for income.

Income		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 700	95	41,7	41,7	41,7
	701-1400	66	28,9	28,9	70,6
	1401-2000	41	18,0	18,0	88,6
	2001 and over	26	11,4	11,4	100,0
	Total	228	100,0	100,0	

Table 6 displays the respondents' travel behaviour. In 2022, 65.4% of participants visited a tourist location, while 34.6% said they did not visit any place. People may be hesitant to go out because COVID-19 restrictions are still in effect in many areas of the world for the first half of the year. 27.6% of respondents visited a place once a year, with the biggest number, 36.8%, visiting more than twice. This demonstrates that the vast majority of them travel as tourists every year. However, 17.1% stated they would travel once every two years, while the remaining 18.4% said they were unsure how often they would visit a tourist place. This is logical, given that youngsters do not have the ability to select when to visit a site as teens. The great majority (68.4%) of individuals visited a tourist destination with their family. Given that they are still teens, this seems reasonable. However, this might be useful information for destination managers and hotel owners in the area. Furthermore, the second-highest percentage of respondents, 23.7%, said they would want to visit a place with friends, while the remaining 7.9 percent would prefer to travel alone. This suggests that 31.6 percent of respondents would want to vacation alone or with friends; this knowledge might help hotels develop packages accordingly. Again, the majority of the participants (62.7%) found out about tourism destinations via social media. The percentages are not surprising, as many studies have concluded that social media is the primary source of information for teens. This, too, is an important finding for tourism destination managers and the industry as a whole. Moreover, 22.8% get information about tourist places through friends, and the remaining 14.5% get it from their families.

Table 6. Travel behaviours of the respondents.

Personal factors impact the destination choices of Omani Gen Z visitors, as seen in Table 7.

Travel behaviour	Sample composition	Frequency	Percentage
Have you visited any tourist destination in 2022	Yes	149	65.4
	No	79	34.6
How frequently do you visit a destination?	Once a year	63	27,6
	More than 2 times in a year	84	36,8
	Once in every 2 years	39	17,1
	Not sure	42	18,4
Generally, with whom do you visit a tourist destination	Alone	18	7,9
	With the family	156	68,4
	With friends	54	23,7
Where did you find out about tourism destinations?	Social media	143	62,7
	Friends	52	22,8
	Family	33	14,5

The place has good security and personal safety; the highest mean score is 4.35. It means that the most essential elements for Zen Zs when choosing a trip are security and personal safety at the destination. It is obvious that safety and security are top objectives in anyone's life. Besides, "destination: clean and green" (4.08) has the second-highest mean score, and "a wealth of information about the destination is available on the internet" (4.04) has the third-highest mean score. Other personal aspects affecting Gen Zs, other than safety, are whether the location is clean and green and whether there is a lot of information about the place available on the internet. Because Zen Zs are technologically savvy, they like more information on the Internet so that they may browse and become acquainted with the place. Besides, the city or country near my city or country is noted as having the lowest mean score (2.72). In addition, "preferring to choose a known location" is the second personal factor with the lowest mean score (2.98).

Table 7. Personal factors influence Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices.

Personal Factors	Mean	SD	Ranking
PER1: There is security and personal safety at the location.	**4.35**	**1.08**	**1**
PER11: The destination is clean and green	4.08	0.94	2
PER10: Plenty of information about the destination is available on the internet.	4.04	1.00	3
PER6: Many amenities and facilities are available at the destination (rest rooms, clean water, shops to buy snacks and drinks).	3.97	0.98	4
PER3: Availability of a pollution free environment.	3.75	1.12	5
PER2: An Opportunity to meet new people at the destination.	3.38	1.02	6
PER9: I know the language spoken at the destination.	3.30	1.31	7
PER4: Seeking a quiet place to relax.	3.15	1.29	8
PER8: I visited the destination before and liked it, so I want to visit again.	3.02	1.25	9
PER5: Prefer to select a known destination.	2.98	1.16	10
PER7: The destination is close to my city or country.	2.72	1.25	11
Total	**3.52**	**1.12**	**11**

Table 8 shows that low costs for utilising ATMs and currency exchange centres at the location (4.12) had the highest mean score of economic factors influencing Omani Gen Z travellers' destination decisions. It suggests that respondents are looking forward to visiting locations with reduced costs for utilising ATMs and currency exchange shops. As Zen Zs are usually on a limited budget, conserving money wherever feasible is their major goal. Besides, there are three economic factors that impact Omani Gen Z visitors' destination choices in the second, third, and fourth places. Food and beverages are reasonably priced (4.04), hotel accommodations are reasonably priced (3.96), and shopping at the location is less expensive than in my own country (3.86). It indicates that after the credit cost, Zen Z's priority is to find reasonably priced food and beverages, accommodations, and shopping. Moreover, Handicrafts, souvenirs, and other ornamental products are reasonably priced; the lowest mean score noted is 2.82. The findings are unsurprising, given that Zen Zs are less likely to purchase handicrafts, souvenirs, and other decorative items since their primary focus is on experiencing the place, eating a variety of meals, attending festivals, and, most importantly, sparing money whenever feasible.

Table 8. Economic factors influence Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices.

Economic Factors	Mean	SD	Ranking
ECO9: Low fees for using ATMs and currency exchange centres at the destination	**4.12**	**1.02**	**1**
ECO5: The food and beverages are moderately priced.	4.04	1.06	2
ECO3: The cost of accommodation / hotels is reasonable.	3.96	1.02	3
ECO7: Shopping at the destination is less expensive than it is in my home country.	3.86	1.21	4
ECO1: Discounted deals and low-cost tour packages are available to the destination.	3.81	1.02	5
ECO8: Admission to parks, zoos, and other attractions is economical.	3.69	1.21	6
ECO4: Within the destination, transportation is low-cost.	3.65	1.07	7
ECO2: Airfares are less expensive for the destination.	3.61	1.11	8
ECO6: Handicrafts, souvenirs, and other decorative are affordable.	2.82	1.33	9
Total	**3.73**	**1.11**	**9**

Table 9 highlights, the social factors impacting the destination choice of Omani Gen Z visitors. The destination was recommended by social media and influencers (4.07), leading to the highest mean score. It suggests that social media and influencers recommended the destination. The findings are consistent with the findings of several researchers. For many young people, social media is the most authoritative source of information, and they place a high value on it. Moreover, there are various shopping possibilities (4.06); the locals are warm and hospitable (4.03); and a wide variety of local delicacies are available (3.81) and are identified as the second, third, and fourth highest mean ratings. It indicates that, following the lead of social media influencers, Gen Zs seek additional shopping choices, a warm welcome from the locals, and the opportunity to taste a range of local delicacies in a destination. Finally, the destination was recommended by friends and family (3.44) and noted as having the lowest mean score.

Table 9. Social factors influence Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices.

Social Factors	Mean	SD	Ranking
SOC11: The destination was suggested by social media and influencers.	**4.07**	**1.11**	**1**
SOC4: Many shopping places are available at the destination.	4.06	1.03	2
SOC8: The locals at the destination are friendly and welcoming.	4.03	0.93	3
SOC6: A wide range of local foods are available.	3.81	1.17	4
SOC7: A variety of accommodations are available (guest houses, resorts, and hotel apartments).	3.95	1.12	5
SOC1: Tourist information centres are available at the destination.	3.73	1.11	6
SOC2: Interaction with local people is possible at the destination.	3.71	0.99	7
SOC3: Adventure tourist activities are available in the destination (Hiking, Rock climbing, Rafting).	3.67	1.18	8
SOC5: Leisure and Recreation activities are available (Sailing, Horse riding, Swimming).	3.64	1.30	9

SOC9: Environmental conditions at the destination are suitable for me (nice weather, low temperature, not raining).	3.62	1.28	10
SOC10: The destination was recommended by friends and family.	3.44	1.33	11
Total	**3.79**	**1.14**	**11**

Table 10 demonstrates the cultural factors that influence the destination choices of Omani Gen Z tourists; traditional and Halal foods are available in the destination (4.30), with the highest mean score. The findings are self-evident because halal food is important for Muslims because it is considered permissible under Islamic dietary laws, it is a religious duty, it is seen as a way to show gratitude for the blessings of food, and it is a way to stay connected with their culture and faith. Moreover, the second highest mean score is that mosques and prayer rooms are available at the destination (4.16); third, souks and old markets are accessible for shopping (4.12); and fourth, the destination offers the opportunity to attend local festivals and events (3.52). Further, in terms of cultural considerations, the respondents' other priorities at the destination, after halal cuisine, are mosques and prayer rooms, souks and ancient marketplaces for shopping, and the ability to attend local festivals and events. Lastly, the lowest mean score captured was at the destination, where world-renowned and UNESCO-listed attractions are present (3.12), and the destination is closely connected to my religion (2.91).

Table 10. Cultural factors influence Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices.

Cultural Factors	*Mean*	*SD*	*Ranking*
CUL10: Traditional & Halal foods are available in the destination.	**4.30**	**0.99**	**1**
CUL6: Mosques and prayer rooms are available at the destination.	4.16	1.14	2
CUL9: Souks and old markets are accessible for shopping.	4.12	1.06	3
CUL3: The destination offers the opportunity to attend local festivals and events.	3.52	1.12	4
CUL2: Familiarity with the destination culture; it is rich and vibrant.	3.49	1.16	5
CUL8: Arts exhibitions, dance, and music shows are available.	3.44	1.36	6
CUL4: Many historical buildings and monuments are present at the destination.	3.29	1.21	7
CUL5: The destination includes castles, forts, and historic houses.	3.13	1.33	8
CUL7: At the destination, world-renowned and UNESCO-listed attractions are present.	3.12	1.20	9
CUL1: The destination is closely connected to my religion.	2.91	1.28	10
Total	**3.54**	**1.18**	**10**

Finally, according to the independent sample *t*-test in table 11, there was difference among male and female groups in perceived social aspect (0.044, $p < 0.05$). This outcome indicates that female employees show more negative perceptions towards social aspect compared to males. The test

results show that there was no gender-based difference in personal, economic, and cultural aspects, thus they were not reported here.

Table 11. Independent sample *t*-test result.

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
social	female	135	3,8343	,35486	-2,027	216	,044
	Male	93	3,7458	,30078			

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

As this current work aimed to examine the factors influencing Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices, the following objectives were proposed and evaluated based on the results.

Objective one was to evaluate the personal and economic factors influencing Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices: According to the data presented in Table 7, the top priority for Gen Z travelers with the highest mean score is security and safety at tourist destinations (4.35). This is aligned with the findings of Read & Truelove (2018), Corvi et al. (2007) both of whom found that Gen Z visitors chose a place based on their perception of safety and security. Besides, based on the results in Table 7, Gen Z tourists are likely to select a destination if plenty of information about the destination is available on the internet (4.04). The findings and the literature match, as many authors have stated that Gen-Zs are always looking for more information. For example, studies conducted by Goldman Sachs (2018), Haddouche (2018), Pinto (2015), and Francis (2018) confirm that Gen Z researches a destination thoroughly before booking. The fact that I have been to the location previously and enjoyed it makes me want to go again, according to respondents, which is another personal factor that is motivating. Beall (2017) supports this notion by asserting that Gen Z travelers may be influenced by their prior travel encounters and may be more inclined to visit places they have previously appreciated.

According to Alexander & Natarajan (2017), the cost of travel and the accessibility of a destination are the two aspects that the Gen Z travelers value most. Besides, they are particularly worried about the costs associated with currency conversion, and the usage of bank cards with reasonable rates is an important consideration for Gen Z travllers (PWC, 2020). The findings are consistent with the literature, as according to the study's findings, ATMs and currency exchange centres at the destination have minimal costs (4.12). This appears to be the most crucial economic

aspect influencing Gen Z tourists when choosing a destination (Table 8). The fact that food and beverages are reasonably priced, as well as the cost of rooms and hotels, are also important factors in Gen Z travellers destination choices. Various studies, including those by Barton (2013), Beldona et al. (2009), Broadbent et al. (2017) and Southan (2017), all agree that Gen Z has tighter budgets and less price flexibility than earlier generations. Besides, discounts, promotions, bargains, and other price reductions are constantly on their minds; Gen Zs seize them when they are available.

Objective two was to examine the social and cultural factors influencing Omani Gen Z tourists' destination decisions: The fact that the place was suggested by social media and influencers (4.07) is the most potent social factor influencing Omani Gen Z's tourist destination decision (Table 9). It denotes that Gen Zs choose a tourism location based on recommendations from social media or influencers. Many researchers and groups, including PWC (2020), Hammed & Christine (2018), Expedia (2017), Expedia Media Solutions (2017), and Statista (2020) have found that social media, online reviews, and influencers substantially affect Gen Z travellers. Moreover, according to Table 9, other major social factors that impact Gen Z travellers' destination choices include a large number of shopping options, nice and welcoming people, and a diverse selection of local delicacies. These findings are in line with Robinson & Schänzel (2019) and Jönsson & Dwayne (2008), as the authors stated that many elements, including innovation and diversity, authenticity, intercultural contacts, pricing, value, and certainty, eating healthy, familiarity, and food choices, as well as sensory and situational enjoyment, have an impact on how Gen Z behaves while on vacation.

Based on Table 10, the destination provides both traditional and Halal food (4.30), which is cited as the most significant cultural component influencing Gen Z's destination preference. According to Marzuki (2012) Gen-Z travellers are more inclined to prefer places that provide a diverse choice of traditional and local culinary alternatives, since this allows them to experience new dishes and learn about various cultures. Furthermore, Levitt (2019) noted that Gen Z visitors may have distinct tastes and are more inclined to pick places that correspond to their diet, religious views, and linguistic preferences. Furthermore, according to Table 10, other important cultural factors that impact Omani Gen Z tourists' destination choices include the presence of mosques and prayer rooms, the accessibility of souks and ancient marketplaces for shopping, and opportunities to attend local festivals and events. According to Cho et al. (2018), Benckendorff et al. (2010) research, Gen Zs like to visit destinations of cultural and historical value, as well as venues that organise social activities and festivals such as music festivals, sporting events, and cultural celebrations.

5.2 Conclusion and Implications

Gen Z is crucial for travel companies and tourism locations because they are more adventurous and open to new cultures and experiences, and they are more inclined to travel worldwide. Furthermore, because they are "digital natives," they are more inclined to study and arrange their vacations online. Omani Gen Z travellers may be more cost-conscious than other generations, preferring areas that provide good value for money. Additionally, they may prioritise safe and secure places and may be more inclined to avoid destinations believed to have high levels of crime or terrorism. They may also be impacted by previous travel experiences and be more willing to return to locations they have previously enjoyed. Similarly, Omani Gen Z visitors may be interested in places with strong cultural and historical significance, such as religious or historical monuments. Furthermore, while selecting destinations, they are significantly impacted by social media, online evaluations, and suggestions from their influencers, and they are more inclined to choose destinations with a favourable online reputation. Understanding the factors that influence Gen Z tourists' destination choices allows tour operators to tailor their offerings to better meet the needs and interests of this demographic, providing a more authentic and immersive travel experience that addresses their various needs and preferences. In addition, these factors can help tourist destinations and service providers better understand the motivations, needs, and preferences of tourists and develop strategies that will appeal to these specific groups of travellers.

Social media influencers are important in tourist destination promotion because they have a large following of engaged and interested individuals who trust their recommendations. By partnering with influencers and having them share their experiences at a destination, tourism boards and businesses can reach a wider audience and generate interest in their offerings. Destination management companies, tourism planners, and other tourism stakeholders should take note of this and promote the destinations on social media, particularly through influencers. Additionally, influencers often have a strong connection with their followers and can create a sense of authenticity and the personal connection to a destination that traditional advertising may not be able to achieve. Social media platforms can also have a significant impact on Gen Z's vacation decisions. As an illustration, influential locations are significant sources of inspiration. By understanding the preferences and behaviours of Gen Z, tour companies can tailor their offerings to better meet the needs and interests of this demographic and position themselves to capitalize on the growing trend of international travel among young people. When promoting the destination to

Gen Z, this issue needs to be given more attention. Food preferences, lifestyle, inventiveness, and diversity serve as powerful motivators for Gen Z travellers.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

This research, like any other, has limits, and there are opportunities for more research and various approaches to this issue. Because this study focuses on the touristic preferences of specific Muscat citizens, future research might look into the same issue in other cities and towns in Oman. A future study might also look at the similarities and differences in behaviour in other GCC countries or compare two countries or nationalities in particular to examine the cultural factor in this environment. Another limitation noted was that, while the methodology used provided a comprehensive insight into Gen Z's behaviour, it was limited owing to the limited number of respondents. Additional participants should be included in future investigations. Qualitative research may also be done to provide a more in-depth knowledge of the factors influencing Omani Gen Z visitors' destination choices. Furthermore, future research should focus on comparison studies between Gen Z and other generations to better understand what factors influence their destination decisions. Finally, future research should incorporate additional factors that were left out of this study, including political, technical, environmental, and legal factors, in order to have a full picture of the factors affecting Omani Gen Z visitors' destination choices.

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