

# A tourism inflex: Generation Z travel experiences

Victor Mueke Robinson and Heike A. Schänzel

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it highlights the emergence of Generation Z and the interface of its members with the tourism system. Second, by way of a theoretical model, the paper provides a more holistic approach to understanding Generation Z travel experiences in which the emphasis is shifted from the destination to the traveller. This is in keeping with the trend which lays more emphasis on people rather than landscape.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This is qualitative research founded on an interpretive (constructivist) paradigm. Selecting Generation Z as the subject locates this study under generational theory and assumes *prima facie* a socially constructed reality. The paper is based on research conducted in New Zealand aimed at understanding the travel experiences of inbound Generation Z travellers. Data were collected from 12 semi-structured interviews lasting about 30 min each and from 5 blogs. Nvivo 11 programme was used in analysing data and developing themes. Core categories and related themes were generated forming building blocks of a theoretical model.

**Findings** – Findings revealed interplay of multiple factors in Generation Z's travel experiences at a destination. The factors are global in nature, destination centric and those which are immediate or proximate to the individual. To fully grasp the notion of experience requires the gestalt of the three as well as pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip factors.

**Research limitations/implications** – The impact of significant events upon participants is assumed. A specific analysis of the events and the magnitude of their influence on the individual participants may be necessary.

**Practical implications** – Destination marketers tend to concentrate on psychological aspects to appeal to the traveller. The focus, in this case, is creating an attractive image in the mind of travellers to get them to come to the destination. This research suggests shifting the focus to understanding the evolving traveller.

**Social implications** – Governments and tourism purveyors may require an ever-increasing budget to map out strategies to meet the continuously morphing needs of the future traveller. The constantly evolving global environment necessitates greater flexibility in institutional framework with less bureaucratic bottlenecks.

**Originality/value** – Generation Z is a relatively new entrant into the tourism market which makes this research relevant and timely. The paucity of academic literature on a generation which is contemporaneously in its "highly influenceable" period of life and entering adulthood in an increasingly changing world is further credence for this research. A more holistic theoretical model to understanding Generation Z travel experience is proposed.

**Keywords** Motivation, Digital, Theoretical model, Generation Z, Realm of experience, Travel pattern

**Paper type** Research paper

Victor Mueke Robinson and Heike A. Schänzel are both based at the School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.

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## Introduction

Any successful tourism industry player requires not only the ability to recognise change, but also effectively respond to this change. Generational change is one such occurrence, rendering both opportunities and challenges for tourism destinations. A new generation is entering adulthood amidst shifting global realities and concerns such as climate change, terrorism and technological advancements. Christened Generation Z, this young generation comprises individuals born in the year 1995 and after, making the oldest members 24 years old (Eisner, 2005; Chhetri *et al.*, 2014). Visitor statistics for the year ending April 2018 show that of the 3,790,505 New Zealand inbound visitors, 428,192 were aged 15–24 years which translates to 11 per cent (Statistics

New Zealand, 2018). A key element of a successful tourism industry is the ability to recognise and deal with change across a wide range of key factors and the way they interact (Dwyer *et al.*, 2009). The key external drivers of global change are economic, political, environmental, technological, social and demographic.

Demographic changes can affect tourism directly or indirectly (Grimm *et al.*, 2009). Direct impacts relate to demand (volume and structure) and the labour market (number of workers and their qualification) while the indirect impacts relate to jobs within the tourism industry, and tourism services. Demography is, therefore, a key driver for future tourism demand (Yeoman *et al.*, 2013). Exploring demographic trends allows important change agents, on both the supply side and the demand side of tourism to be highlighted and discussed (Dwyer *et al.*, 2009). The future growth of tourism will depend to some extent on how well the industry understands the social and demographic trends influencing traveller behaviour (Moscardo *et al.*, 2010). Destinations and individual operators that make decisions on the supply side without matching them to changing travellers and traveller needs suffer “strategic drift”, a phenomenon which occurs when strategy gradually deviates from addressing the forces in the external environment with a clear direction (Dwyer *et al.*, 2009).

While numerous market surveys biased towards effective marketing and advertising have been conducted on Generation Z, a dearth of academic literature has been noted. It is only recently that Generation Z literature is beginning to appear in tourism academic journals. The recent special issue on Millennials and Generation Z in *Journal of Tourism Futures* is one such contribution (Corbisiero and Ruspini, 2018). This may be attributed to the fact that the oldest members of this generation have only recently attained legal age of adulthood and can travel independently. In addition, they no longer require parental consent to participate in research. The USA and Western Europe predominate in generation-based studies, thus creating a gap in other regions. Based on research of New Zealand inbound Generation Z travellers, this paper provides a lens through which the generation’s travel experiences can be understood. It is a contribution to the body of knowledge from which future studies can borrow. In addition it provides, by way of a theoretical model, a more holistic approach and deeper insights into Generation Z travel experiences in which emphasis is shifted from the destination to the traveller.

Whereas Phillimore and Goodson (2004) have deemed typology studies insufficient on insights into the complexities of tourism interactions at experiential and emotional level, this research prods into the multiple facets and levels of experience thus unearthing the all encompassing psychological, physiological and spiritual levels. Several shifts in focus are presented in this research:

1. from an erstwhile “destination-centric” model to a “traveller-centric” model thus focusing more on the “experiencer” (O’Dell, 2007);
2. from market research and surveys orientation to an academic orientation; and
3. from a unilateral (Managerialist) coverage to a multi-dimensional/cross-disciplinary coverage (Echtner and Jamal, 1997; Hollinshead, 2004).

The study goes back to more of the roots of generational theory in sociology and psychology. The aim of this research is to understand the travel experiences of New Zealand inbound Generation Z by examining their travel patterns, attitudes and travel motives. The possible factors shaping these experiences are identified.

The next section explores the context of life for Generation Z. This is followed by some projections and economic value of the generation. In the literature review the Generation theory is explored and so is the experience. The research methodology is then presented with findings being discussed thereafter. The main contribution of this research, a theoretical model is then explained along with implications and recommendations.

## Generation Z in context

Generation Z is mostly the off-Spring of Generation X and has been raised during changes occasioned by the internet, smartphones, laptops, freely available network and digital media (Tulgan, 2013). Elsewhere they have been called “postmillennial”, “centennials”, “pivotal” or

“digital natives” among other tags (Grail Research, 2011; Southgate, 2017). Noting that the most common name used for this group is Generation Z, Hertz (2016) tags them Generation K after the fictional character “Katniss Everdeen”, the determined heroine of the Hunger Games. This is attributed to their view of the world as one of perpetual struggle, characterised by inequality and harshness. In her 18 months interviews of 2,000 teenagers in the UK and USA, Hertz (2016) notes that this generation feels profoundly anxious and distrustful. This can be attributed to the fact that the generation developed their personalities and life skills in a socio-economic environment marked by chaos, uncertainty, volatility and complexity (Sparks and Honey, 2014). They have come of age in an era of economic decline, increased inequality, job insecurity and social media presence. As argued by Read and Truelove (2018), Generation Z has never known a world without war and terrorism and as such they crave safety and financial security.

Although some other generations, such as the First World War and the Second World War generation cohorts lived through war, no generation before has been exposed to war and terrorism 24/7 through the internet and social media. Similarly, Seemiller and Grace (2016) have identified connectivity, information at the fingertips, creative entrepreneurship, diversity and social justice, fear of disaster and tragedies and economic hardships as some of the common events constituting the context for this generation. A further list is offered by Read and Truelove (2018) to include recession, ISIS, Sandy Hook shooting, marriage equality, the first black president of USA and the rise of populism. Instructively, Generation Z members have developed coping mechanisms. They are considered to be highly educated, creative and innovative and able to multi-task in an increasingly changing environment (Corbisiero and Ruspini, 2018).

### Generation Z and the economic value

In the USA, Generation Z makes up a quarter of the population. The generation contributes US \$44bn to the American economy and influences US\$600bn in family spending (Sparks and Honey, 2014; Ketchum, 2015; Southan, 2017). It is further projected that by 2020 the generation will account for one-third of the USA population and will become the most powerful spenders representing 40 per cent of consumers in the USA, Europe and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China). In tourism and travel, Generation Z is considered an incredibly important cohort (Barnes, 2018). This, Paul Redmond, a generation cohort expert observes, is due to several factors; first is their powerful influence on family holidays as their parents opt to consult them prior to booking trips. Second, is their preference for experiences rather than possessions thus increasing their propensity to travel in search of “fun experiences”. Furthermore, it is observed that they are open-minded, bucket-list oriented and look for off-the-beaten path locations (Expedia, 2017). Consequently, they can be expected to seek out remote places and engage in numerous travels/activities. Southan (2017) has further noted that Generation Z members are budget conscious travellers and usually start off their travel without a set destination in mind.

Born into a digital age and with increasing international travel, this young generation is likely to transform tourism and destinations. Indeed, it has been argued that “Fordian” (mass) tourism may no longer provide destinations with requisite competitiveness in the face of new tourism (Stănculescu *et al.*, 2011). The implication is that destinations relying on mass tourism characterised by an ageing demography will find it increasingly difficult to operate profitably in an environment characterised by an emerging and more contemporary form of tourism comprising youth and youthful travellers. This envisaged demographic change represents an important phenomenon which may pose both opportunities and challenges for the development of tourism and destinations (Bernini and Cracolici, 2015). Generation-based research that identifies different groups of consumers and their specific needs and desires is therefore important (Chhetri *et al.*, 2014). Recent findings, for instance, indicate that the less technologically enabled tourism destinations can benefit by employing contemporary principles and practices to meet the needs of the new generation of tourists who seek rich digital and gamified tourism experiences (Skinner *et al.*, 2018).

The importance of this generation and the wider youth market lies in the fact that it represents the market of the future (Vukic *et al.*, 2015). From an academic perspective, it is to be expected that as the generation matures and takes centre stage as adults more research will be conducted and published.

## Generation theory

Generation cohorts have been widely explored. Despite the extensive research, there are differing opinions as to the historical location of any particular generation and what they are to be referred to as. There, however, exists some consensus on what generations are like as explained in Mannheim's concepts of generation actuality and generation unit (Donnison, 2007). Extant generation cohort studies have focussed on mapping consumption patterns so as to develop effective marketing strategies (Rentz *et al.*, 1983; Holbrook and Schindler, 1989; Schuman and Scott, 1989; Schewe and Noble, 2000; Schewe and Meredith, 2004). This, it would seem, deviates from the theory's "ancestral roots" in sociology and psychology. This research incorporates socio-cognitive thought.

Recent years have seen an increase in generational analysis in the tourism literature (Beldona *et al.*, 2009; Huh and Park, 2010; Li *et al.*, 2013; Pennington-Gray *et al.*, 2003). Studies on lifelong travel patterns have concluded that a greater use of cohort analysis is needed to examine changes in travel behaviour (Oppermann, 1995). Gardiner *et al.* (2014) indicate that future travel behaviour will differ between the generations. Therefore, there is an implied necessity for continuous studies and research on each generation in order to effectively respond to the needs and demands of each of them. This research on Generation Z is a contribution to this demand.

## Experience in tourism

In English, the word experience refers both to lived experiences as well as to the knowledge and expertise gained over time as a result of lived experiences (Duerden *et al.*, 2015). A distinction is made between experience as a noun and experience as a verb. A further distinction is made between two German words for experience; "Erlebnis" and "Erfahrung" (Larsen, 2007; Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). Larsen notes that both these words are applicable to tourism in that tourists participate in events while travelling and also accumulate memories from the trips. Elsewhere, Schmitt (1999) defines experience as the triggered stimulations to the senses, the heart and the mind occurring because of encountering, undergoing or living through situations.

Beyond the definitional lacuna, however, experience is a widely studied phenomenon across disciplines. In tourism, the concept of experience is considered important for a destination's competitiveness (Jensen *et al.*, 2015). Tourist experience studies vary in approach and perspectives with concentration being on a social science approach and a management/marketing approach (MacCannell, 1973; Lee and Crompton, 1992; Quan and Wang, 2004; Volos, 2009). Experience has been viewed as an interaction between destinations as the "theatres" and tourists as the "actors" (Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003). The tourism industry is considered a player in generating, staging and consuming of experiences through manipulation of place and presentation of culture (O'Dell, 2007; Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). However, it has also been suggested that places do not attract people, nor do they push people away (Larsen, 2007). Consequently, the author opines, that studies should concentrate on individuals engaged in or about to engage in tourism. The argument shifts the locus of experience and experiencing to the tourist/traveller. Indeed, in his observation, Uriely (2005) notes a shift from tourism's displayed objects being the determinants of experience to the tourist's subjective negotiation of meaning being the determinant.

This research regards Larsen and Uriely's suggestions that the individual is the arena of experience. Experience is realised by the individual and can, therefore, be viewed as subjective. In this regard, experience is a reality bound within the person and not an externality. Similarly, this research holds that travel is more about the person and his/her experiences rather than about places and things (King, 2002; Morgan, 2010). Consequently, and as suggested by King (2002) the focus of destination marketing organisations should increasingly shift from promoting physical features of the destination to being more traveller centric. Equally important is that while some literature narrows experience to occurrences at the destination, this research incorporates the gestalt of pre-trip, during trip and after trip in the discourse on experiences. The research underscores the necessity of a multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary analysis of experience in tourism.

## Methodology/methods

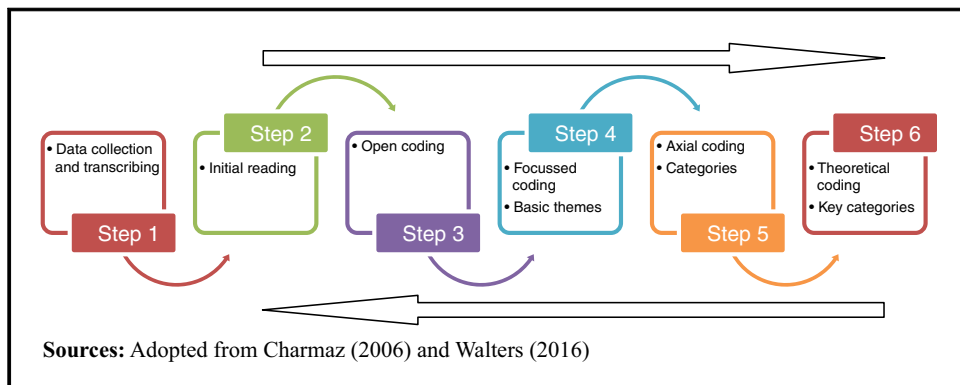
An interpretivist paradigm underpins this study. This fits with the more sociological and subjective approach taken. Two methods were used to gather data; 12 interviews, and 5 blogs. These methods and approaches were considered reality-aware and context-appropriate (Hollinshead, 2004) in that Generation Z has grown up in a digital environment, thus making use of online platforms to communicate a norm. Increasingly, social media and blogging have become avenues to post and share experiences and life happenings. Therefore, these platforms are a source of potentially rich data. In addition, the methods complement each other. The blogs helped in overcoming limitations of time, space and individuals' biases; factors which are endemic to face-to-face interviews. Interviews ameliorated the absence of personal cues in blogs.

Recruitment of face-to-face participants was through publicly displayed posters bearing the researcher's contact details. These were displayed in accommodation facilities where young people frequent as well as by the researcher on the streets. In addition, the referral method – snowballing was applied. For blogs, the process involved the use of search engines such as Google and Explorer. By using key search words such as tourism blogs/bloggers, travel blogs, youth travel blogs and generation Z bloggers/blogs, several blogs were identified from numerous options. Two criteria suggested by Hookway (2008) – diary style blogs and availability of search function according to location were utilised to shortlist the blogs. Eventually, five blogs were selected.

Elimination process followed to ensure that selected blogs entries were by persons within the correct age bracket and who visited New Zealand. Some bloggers were forthright with their age while for some key "give-away" information was used. An example is a participant who posted that she bought a 1997 car and added "it is older than me but runs very good". Only participants born after 1995 and above 18 years of age were selected. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were saved in Microsoft word format and later uploaded to NVivo 11 programme for coding and analysis. For blogs, data were directly copied from the online entries and pasted on a word document. The documents were formatted to an acceptable standard and uploaded to Nvivo 11 programme for coding and analysis. Six steps were used in this process as shown in Figure 1.

The steps involved data collection, transcribing, back and forth reading of the transcribed and copied data. Codes (referred to as nodes in Nvivo 11) were assigned and later developed into initial themes within which codes were now clustered (referred to as parent and child nodes, respectively, in Nvivo 11). The codes were then assigned more meaningful categories. Step 6 explored the categories to form core categories which are the building blocks of theory (Goulding, 1998). The process yielded nine categories. These were re-assigned to form six core categories. While four of the categories (travel patterns, destination profile, reasons for travel and identity) are common in available literature, two are unique to this research; context and realm of experience. The six core categories and their corresponding themes represent a lens through which travel experiences of Generation Z can be understood.

**Figure 1** Coding process



## Findings and discussion

Of all the participants 13 were female, while 4 were male (see Table I). In total, seven nationalities are represented. Seven participants are from Germany, two from the USA, two from the Netherlands, two from France, two from Luxembourg, one from Iceland and one from England.

Table II presents the six categories and their related themes. Column three provides a more meaningful interpretation associated with each category/themes. It is the synthesis of the interpretations that forms the basis of the theoretical model and thus, an overall of understanding of Generation Z travel experiences.

### *Travel patterns*

The themes related to the core category, travel patterns, are accommodation, activities, places visited, transport and travel profile. These are interpreted as services/destination interfaces and travel career. Destinations are an arena of multiple interactions to a tourist. The tourists/travellers interface with the destination through engaging with the spaces, places, cultures, facilities and systems at the destination (Wearing and Foley, 2017). These contribute to the experiences of the participants. A poor interaction with the above services may lead to an overall negative experience at the destination (Morgan *et al.*, 2010). Several factors were found to influence the choice of service. These included affordability and budgets, convenience and accessibility to these services, the flexibility of the travel plans but also serendipity. Participant 13 blogged – “After the fair we went to the harbour where someone proposed us a tour on his sailing boat.

**Table I** Demographic profile of New Zealand inbound Generation Z participants

Participant	DOB	Gender	Country	Length of stay	Accommodation	Transport	Budget (NZ\$)	Reason for travel
1	1999	F	Germany	3 months	Hostel and flatting	Bus and walking	8,500	Internship, Exploration, to see the landscape and to discover self
2	1999	F	Germany	3 months	Host family and camping	Train and walking	12,000	Internship and exploration
3	1996	F	The Netherlands	3 months	Hostel and camping	Hitchhiking and hired car	3,500	Break, new discoveries, scenery and culture
4	1996	F	France	6 weeks	Camping	Hired car	3,500	Break, get away and exploration
5	1999	F	Germany	6 months	Car and camping	Own car	6,900	Nature, norm
6	1998	M	Germany	6 months	Car and camping	Own car	6,900	Nature and break
7	1999	M	Germany	6 months	Dorm and in their car	Own car		Visit far-flung destination, get away from Winter, nature
8	1997	M	Germany	12 months	Hostel, van and friend's family	Own van	13,700	Touring around
9	1996	F	England	8 months	Family and hostel	Bus, train, boat and own car	3,700	Visit family, freedom, experience NZ
10	1998	M	USA	6 months	Hostel and flatting	Taxi and skateboarding	3,300	Independence, visit far place, personal development, watched hobbit and wanted to see this landscape
11	1999	F	Germany	2 months	Farm housing	Hitchhiking	9,500	Break, Independence, visit far land
12	1995	F	France	1 month	Farm housing, shared car	Hitchhiking and Uber	6,900	Visit far land, see landscape
13 (Blog)	1998	F	Luxembourg	9 months	Hostel, camping and host families	Own car	Unspecified	Tour and explore
14 (Blog)	1998	F	Luxembourg	6 months	Hostel, camping and host families	Own car	Unspecified	Tour and explore
15 (Blog)	1997	F	Iceland	8 weeks	Host family	Unspecified	Unspecified	Tour and explore
16 (Blog)	1995	F	The Netherlands	3 months	Hostel, hotel, camps	Own car – shared	Unspecified	Tour and explore
17 (Blog)	1999	F	USA	13 days	Hotels	Flight, walking	6,500	Tour, excursions, group travel

**Table II** Core categories, related themes and interpretation of Generation Z travel experiences

Core categories	Related themes	Interpretation
Travel pattern	Accommodation	Services (Destination interfaces)
	Activities Places visited Transport Travel career/profile	
Reasons for travel	Adventure and novelty	Intrinsic
	Attractions Escapism Norm Internship	Extrinsic
Context	Global factors Socio-political factors ICT	Macro-level factors Glocal (Destination) level factors Linkage
Identity	Definition and self Generational differences Future	Persona (Generation Z individual)
Destination profile	Destination image Attractions and facilities Expectations and appraisal	Destination influences
Realm of experience	Sensory/senses Emotional/mind Spiritual/meaning	Physiological Psychological Spiritual
Influencing factors	Global factors Destination factors Immediate factors	Global forces/influences Destination forces/influences Immediate forces/influences

We couldn't resist". Participant 3 said of her travels that – “the plan is to have no plan”. Majority of the participants planned to take up temporary work to supplement their travel budget Participant 12 blogged – “I worked there 2-3 hours a day for accommodation”.

On travel career, it was observed that most of the participants had toured other countries or were en-route to other destinations. Generation Z are keen on multi-destination travel. However, travel was not without constraints and setbacks at times. These may well be described by categories provided by Dellaert *et al.* (1998) and Hägerstrand (1970) as thus:

1. authority constraints which are imposed by law or institutions as noted by Participant 8 – “I think the rules here are too strict because I am not used to strict alcohol rules and also prices for alcohol”;
2. coupling constraints which relate to family, friends and colleagues; and
3. capability constraints which are caused by availability of travel options and/or resources such as money.

### Context

In this research, participants were drawn from seven different nationalities. The implications of this from a generation cohort perspective are varied. First, it could be argued that each participant would exhibit unique characteristics, values and behaviours because of the unique circumstances within their own country. This, it can be said will differ from a participant from a different nation where he or she experiences a different set of circumstances. Participant 7 notes – “In Germany lots of people go to New Zealand”. Participant 3 said – “New Zealand is a new country, in Europe we are like more old country so we had time to develop”. In these examples it can be said that the participants' views and behaviours are influenced by their context of life. The context within which travel behaviour of any group occurs is important to understanding the behaviour (Wilson *et al.*, 2008). These contexts include historical, temporal, institutional, social, global and cultural. Similarly, Jennings (2010) notes that evaluation of tourism experiences requires a consideration of local, glocal, national and global environment.

A study of Millennials by Bernardi (2018) supports this view. In the study, differences relating to country of origin were observed. The Chinese were found to be the largest spenders, while

Singaporeans and Indonesians were more budget conscious, seeking budget flights and accommodation. This would put to question the cross-cultural and cross-border generation cohort validity of shared behavioural and attitudinal patterns; each nation would have its own generation cohort. However, observations by Corbisiero and Ruspini (2018) repudiate this. They opine that, due to ubiquitous connectivity, this generation has more in common with their international peers than any previous generation.

### *Reasons for travel*

While it is possible to locate Generation Z's multiple reasons for travel within different models in literature, an intrinsic-extrinsic classification is preferred for this research. Among the intrinsic factors are, seeking for adventure and novelty. The extrinsic factors included attractions, escapism and engaging in travel because it is the popular culture (norm). While it could be argued that escapism is also intrinsic in nature, it is generated by external circumstances such as undesirable events in country of residence or workplace. Participant 10 from the USA said – "I was kind of running away from the negative changes that are happening and I didn't really want to be associated with that I guess". An alternative classification would be on a hedonic-utilitarian continuum. Hedonic reasons have to do with emotional and experiential aspects while utilitarian are benefits driven (Asraar, 2015). Generation Z behaviour and choices were not only consistent with the search of travel experiences, but also with the quest for value for the resources invested in the travel.

Travel for Generation Z is also a time of conviviality, socialisation and empowerment (Haddouche and Salomone, 2018). In travelling, new friendships were forged, interactions with locals and fellow travellers craved and deeper meanings to personal life and self-development sought. Participant 9 – "I've met people now in my hostel, now we are going in March for a road trip". Furthermore, travel was attributed to the popular concept known as fear-of-missing-out. This is a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski *et al.*, 2013). A survey by Smith (2018) corroborates this, reporting that 82 per cent of Generation Z regretted losing out on chances to travel.

Two participants were travelling on internship. However, these participants were intent on using internship as the means to get to New Zealand and do some travelling. While the participants expressed a desire to tour more places in New Zealand, the time limit on their internship prevented them from undertaking longer trips. The diversity of flora and fauna motivated one of the travellers whose interests are botany to visit and immerse in the country's nature. Research shows that the 15–24 year old age groups are more likely to travel for educational purposes when compared to older age groups (Collins and Tisdell, 2002; Huh and Park, 2010). Related to this is partnership and transnational connections between organisations which saw the two afore mentioned participants travel to New Zealand as interns through partnership of an organisation in Germany with a New Zealand-based organisation.

### *Destination profile*

This relates to perceptions about New Zealand as a destination, the attractions and facilities and the resultant expectations. Expectations are further linked to the appraisal of the destination by the traveller, which relates to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Eventually, this will influence the sort of experience that the traveller has. However, a destination is not just a geographical unit but is also subject to people's judgement and evaluation (Chen and Šegota, 2015). Implied are not only the evident physical features but, also the abstract and subjective psychological elements as perceived by the tourist. Elsewhere, this dichotomy is observed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) who opine that destinations have functional (tangible) and psychological (abstract) characteristics.

Several media were responsible for communicating and enhancing New Zealand's image as perceived by Generation Z. These included film and the movies, social media, referrals as well as agencies and organisations. Participant 1 – "the reason I actually came here is because I was watching the Hobbit. It was such amazing landscape that I felt that this should be the place I



should come first". In categorising destination image Avraham and Ketter's (2008) model proves to be helpful and is applied as follows:

1. cognitive which constitutes what Generation Z knew about the destination;
2. affective which relates to Generation Z's feelings about the destination;
3. evaluative which describes how the destination was appraised – Participant 3 – "I think the rules here are too strict because I am not used to strict alcohol rules"; and
4. behavioural which is tied to decisive actions to undertake an activity or to visit a place.

The regular frequency of terrorist attacks has seen increased measures by governments to curb the menace. This has significantly changed the mind-set of international tourists. Some of the participants believed destinations have become safer because of terror attacks. Reasons presented included the resultant increase in surveillance and security procedures. Still others believed that shrinking back from travelling would mean a triumph of terrorism. It would therefore appear that, Generation Z has become accustomed to and adapted to the volatile global environment in which they have grown up in.

On environmental issues a participant thought it contradictory that New Zealand is portrayed as this pristine green environment but there appeared to be a crisis with plastic bags: Participant 8 – "I always thought New Zealand is so natural, and they take care of their environment but, the biggest problem is the plastic bags at the super market, it's so crazy". This participant also considered it paradoxical that there were issues with harsh sun rays, but that protective sunscreen was expensive or at least higher than at her home country.

A further area of focus is the socio-political issues in the destination (New Zealand). Commenting on society, a participant reported what they perceived as discrimination against indigenous people. There was a feeling that the Maori were treated unfairly. Participant 2 – "We spoke to a lot of Maori and local people and I think, I don't know whether it's right to say but, there was quite a lot of discrimination which we found shocking". Separately, some participants who engaged in part time jobs felt exploited by their employers. Another participant felt extorted by mechanics and car dealers. The use of English as an official language contributed to a seamless and fulfilling experience to some as it eliminated possible language barriers: Participant 7 – "Because it is an English country and a lot of people speak English so it's a good place to come". However, this might be viewed differently by participants drawn from non-English speaking regions. Immigration policy permitting work is critical to the long period of stay. Participants needed work to supplement their travel budget or subsidise on spending such as accommodation and activities.

Seasonality and weather patterns were factored before and during travel. To some the timing of the trip was to coincide with Summer season in the destination. Participant 9 – "Winter is starting in Germany. This is the reason I came here". Locally, some participants altered their schedules to fit to the weather patterns of the time. Whereas the majority favoured Summer, there were some who, because of their passion for skiing thought Winter months would be good time to plan a visit to Queenstown. A study in Romania showed that seasonality was a determinant of the type of adventure and sport tourism practiced by the youth (Demeter and Brătucu, 2014). New Zealand statistical data show a preference for the warmer Autumn and Summer months by international travellers. In the year 2017, international arrivals during the Autumn–Summer months were 57.8 per cent while Spring–Winter months were 42.2 per cent (Smiler, 2018). In this regard, global, socio-political and environmental factors appear to alter or modify the travellers' behaviours and contribute to their overall experience.

Because Generation Z is characterised as being digitally adept, social and mobile, ICT is a critical component and a linkage to services or to the outer world. The widespread use of mobile apps, such as Campmate, and the reliance on social media was a common feature among the participants. Participant 1 – "Instagram is a big feature because I have seen so many beautiful pictures of New Zealand holy crap and I want to visit these places and take these exact photos". There was reliance on social media to make travel decisions. These technological advancements facilitate ease of access to information, facilities and places. Therefore, Generation Z behavioural patterns in a destination and their experiences may be impacted or influenced by ICT advancements.

## *Identity*

It is observed that travel offered the opportunity to plan one's life. Being far away from the accustomed way of life, New Zealand provided the requisite environment for self-reflection: Participant 3 – "I think in those moments you really get to know yourself". Photos and experiences shared online by the participants is a way of building personal identity and part of experience (Bernardi, 2018).

## *Realm of experience*

Generation Z experiences in New Zealand were explained in varied and multiple ways. Participant 16 blogged – "One of the activities made one of my dreams come true; it was snorkelling with dolphins. It was one of the best experiences I've had". Participant 14 blogged – "For the first night I stopped in a free camping near Timaru. It was really creepy". Some described the landscape/sceneries as "amazing and breath taking views". However, these varied experiences fit within three realms:

1. physiological realm (sensory experience – relating to body);
2. psychological realm (cognitive, affective and conative experiences – relating to the soul); and
3. spiritual realm – spirit (spiritual experiences – relating to spirit).

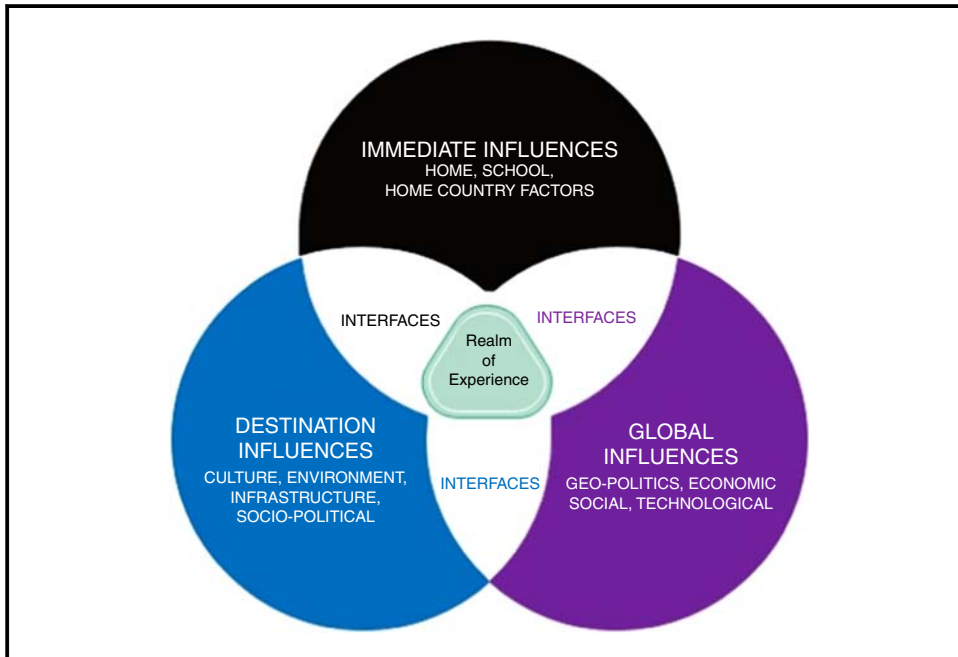
Seemingly, this agrees with Walls' (2013) definition of tourist experience as a blend of many individual elements coming together and may involve the tourist emotionally, physically and intellectually. Indeed, everything tourists go through at a destination can be experience, whether behavioural or perceptual, cognitive or emotional, expressed or implied (Oh *et al.*, 2007). Noteworthy though is that, the reasons and patterns of travel exhibited by Generation Z do not appear to be fundamentally different to previous generations when they were of the same age. In this regard, this research evinces extant literature on youth/backpacker/gap year or even other recent generations such as Generation Y travellers (Adler, 1985; Benckendorff *et al.*, 2010; Luo *et al.*, 2015; Richards, 2015). While the reasons and/or patterns may be similar, contemporary factors can impact on a generation's experiences. The advances in technology (internet, social media and smartphones), for example, have fostered internet-based travel services, thus, altering traveller expectations, and resultant travel experiences.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

A more holistic definition or discourse on the tourist experience requires contextualisation. This requires incorporation of different strands or thoughts, and different disciplines. In this regard, three factors are considered as shaping Generation Z experiences as shown in the theoretical model (see Figure 2):

1. Immediate influences (forces) – including family, friends, events in the home country. Participant 13 offered – "We took a bath in the outdoor bathtubs of the villa. It was like a childhood memory. As children we always used to take a bath together. Still another observed, we grew up buying fish in a supermarket in plastic but here someone comes with fresh fish caught an hour ago".
2. Destination influences (forces) – including socio-political, cultural, physical features/ attributes. A participant talking about a local couple she met said – we ate together and shared our food. I really enjoyed listening to all their stories. Participant 3 noted – "I also did glow worms which is definitely an experience that I will remember probably for the rest of my life". On her part Participant 4 said – "We listened to locals' advice".
3. Global influences (forces) – including events with global ramifications, climate change, terrorism, financial volatility, geo-politics and technological advancements as noted by Participant 1 – "For me going to New Zealand it was like stepping out of the craziness happening in Europe". Participant 5 mentioned – "I'm from Germany, the east, so my parents did not get a chance to travel at all because of the separation [...] I think they could only go to Ukraine and maybe Russia [...] They didn't have the chance to travel like we are doing now".

**Figure 2** A theoretical model of Generation Z travel experiences



The individual arrives at the destination with embedded subjective elements as a result of interfacing with immediate influences and global influences. Additional elements are embedded in the individual through interfacing with the tourism system at the destination. The amalgamation of these elements contributes to the traveller's experience at the destination. The destination can further be described as an "agitator" or "instigator" of the experience. To effectively understand the individual's experience requires an appreciation of the context of life from which he/she has come. This entails awareness of both historical and contemporary influences in the life of that individual or group of individuals. While it is a logistical and practical impossibility to fully profile each individual travelling to a destination, an understanding of the multiple channels that contribute to the individual's ethos would lend additional credence to understanding and managing tourist experiences.

Generation Z is progressively taking the centre stage. Members of this generation will soon be the adults occupying leadership positions and become the financiers of tourism and travel. Investment into more research informed by an impending future is recommended. While tourism infrastructure development is important, significant focus needs to be placed on understanding the tourist of the future. Governments and tourism purveyors may require an ever-increasing budget to map out strategies to meet the continuously morphing needs of the future traveller. In addition, strategies are required to address the evolving global consumer trends, especially bearing in mind the global influences (forces). Incorporating current technologies at every level should be at the forefront of government and industry future planning. This may include deployment of internet connectivity in remote areas which lack strong links. Greater flexibility in institutional frameworks, with less bureaucratic bottlenecks is further suggested. Destination marketers tend to concentrate on psychological aspects to appeal to the traveller. The goal, in this case, is creating an attractive image in the mind of travellers to get them to come to the destination. Emphasis is more about the destination. This research suggests shifting the focus to understanding the evolving traveller's needs and preferences.

A key limitation of the research is that the impact of significant events upon participants is assumed. A specific analysis of the events and the magnitude of their influence on the individual participants may be necessary. Research is recommended for not only the different ephemeral factors, but also longitudinal studies of generations.

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## Corresponding author

Heike A. Schänzel can be contacted at: [heike.schanzel@aut.ac.nz](mailto:heike.schanzel@aut.ac.nz)

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