

Cross-Generational Perception of Tourism Content on Social Media

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Abstract

The number of internet users in Indonesia continues to increase, as indicated by survey results conducted by APJII. Regarding internet usage, there are various reasons why people connect to the internet. Among these reasons, the majority of people use the internet for networking and communication through social media. Today, social media is not only used for networking but has also become a platform for entertainment and for seeking information and references. Several studies have shown that generational differences influence variations in social media usage, including differences in the frequency of use and interaction patterns among generations. Many previous studies have focused only on one or two generations (for example, Generation Y and Generation Z) and have not directly compared Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z in the context of perceptions of tourism. Therefore, this study aims to examine the perceptions of these three generations (Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z) regarding tourism information content on social media. This study was conducted by distributing questionnaires to respondents from three different generations. The final sample consisted of 51 respondents from Generation X, 50 respondents from Generation Y, and 40 respondents from Generation Z. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive analysis by describing the respondents' answers. The results of this study indicate several differences in opinions among the three generations; however, there are also some similarities in responses to several of the statements presented.

Keywords: *cross-generational, tourism content, social media*

INTRODUCTION

Internet use in Indonesia continues to grow, as indicated by survey results from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), available at <https://survei.apjii.or.id/survei/group/12>. In 2025, 80.7% of Indonesia's population was connected to the internet. This figure increased to 81.72% in 2026, representing 235,261,078 internet users out of a total population of 287,886,782. These figures indicate that the

Indonesian population is increasingly relying on the internet as an integral part of everyday life. Among Indonesia's major islands, Java has the highest internet penetration rate, reaching 85.95%. Internet penetration refers to the proportion of a population within a particular area that has accessed and used internet services during a specific period relative to the area's total population.

According to the same APJII survey, networking and communication through social media are the most common reasons for internet use among Indonesians, accounting for 19.9% of users. This finding indicates that social media has become one of the most widely used digital platforms. Social media is no longer used solely for networking and communication; it has also become an important medium for entertainment and for seeking information and references.

The same APJII survey also indicates that health-related content is the most frequently accessed type of information. Access to such content increased from 9.1% in the previous year to 20.2% in the current year. Content related to culture, tourism, and the arts also experienced an increase in access, rising from 9.7% in the previous year to 12.4% in the current year. These figures indicate growing public interest in tourism-related content. Information presented on social media is increasingly used as a source that can influence decisions regarding visits to tourist destinations. In making decisions, consumers generally go through several stages. According to Orabi (2022), the following figure illustrates the stages involved in the process of selecting a tourist destination.

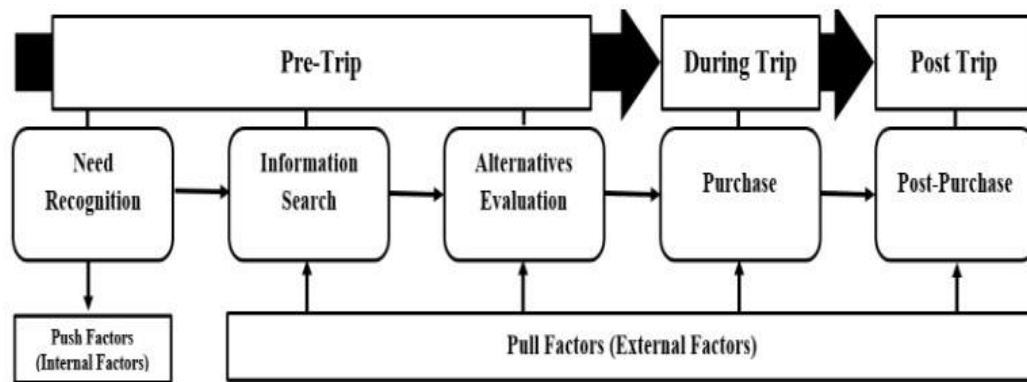


Figure 1. Tourist Destination Decision-Making Process

The stages illustrated in Figure 1 indicate that decision-making is influenced more strongly by external factors than by internal factors.

One important external influence is the digital environment, particularly the information available through online platforms and social media. The APJII survey results also indicate that internet penetration among Generations X, Y, and Z is relatively high (APJII Survey). This can be seen in Figure 2.

The data indicate that the majority of individuals in all three generations are connected to the internet. Previous studies have shown that generational differences influence patterns of social media use. Hysa, Karasek, and Zdonek (2021) concluded that the frequency of social media use and patterns of online interaction differ across generations. Their study in Poland found that the use of social media to evaluate opinions about tourist destinations—including the cancellation of travel plans based on negative comments—decreases with age. Younger generations, in contrast, tend to use social media more intensively as part of the destination-selection process.



Figure 2. Internet Penetration by Generation

Although previous studies have examined generational differences in tourism-related decision-making, many have focused on only one or two generations, such as Generations Y and Z, rather than directly comparing Generations X, Y, and Z in relation to perceptions of tourism-related information. For example, Orabi (2022) found that Generation X relies more heavily on travel agents when selecting tourist destinations, whereas Generation Y relies more on social media and Generation Z places greater trust in social media influencers as sources of tourism information. Similarly, Mamengko et al. (2024) found that factors such as cultural influence, social influence, personal characteristics, and social media marketing have different effects across generations in the selection of tourist destinations.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the perceptions of Generations X, Y, and Z toward tourism-related informational content on social media. By comparing these three generations, the study is expected to provide a clearer cross-generational understanding of how tourism-related information on social media is perceived. In addition, the findings are expected to offer practical insights for tourism policymakers and digital marketers in developing content strategies and selecting communication channels that are better aligned with the characteristics of their target generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Marketing

Social media currently plays an important role in the development of modern tourism. Tourists no longer rely solely on brochures, travel agents, or conventional advertising; instead, they actively seek inspiration and information through social media. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube enable users to share their experiences, photographs, and reviews directly, which subsequently shapes potential tourists' perceptions of a destination.

Social media plays a crucial role in tourism consumer decision-making. The speed and broad reach of information dissemination, together with the authority of user-generated content, are increasingly important for brand building and information dissemination. In response to these developments, personalized marketing strategies, collaborations with opinion leaders, and user-experience and engagement strategies have been proposed (Xu, 2024). Social Media Marketing Theory focuses on how organizations utilize social media platforms to build relationships with audiences, create brand value, and encourage purchasing behavior. In the tourism context, this theory explains how destinations, hotels, and tour operators use social media to promote their products, engage with potential tourists, and build brand loyalty.

User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-generated content (UGC) has gained considerable momentum in recent years. Research examining tourists' preferences for UGC and its role in travel decision-making, compared with other forms of marketing information produced by destination marketing organizations (DMOs), has revealed a stronger preference among tourists for blogs and vlogs than for traditional DMO-generated marketing content (Jog & Alcasoas, 2023).

UGC significantly shapes both the cognitive and affective components of destination image, influences tourists' behavioral intentions through emotional resonance, and serves as a trusted source of informational and social influence throughout the travel-planning cycle. UGC can enhance marketing effectiveness when responsibly integrated into official campaigns, although its use also raises ethical concerns regarding consent, representation, and content authenticity (Sujatmiko et al., 2025).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media refers to a group of Internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. In the tourism context, UGC is often perceived as more authentic and trustworthy because it is based on actual experiences. Dwivedi et al. (2021) explained that social media contributes to the formation of destination image through social mechanisms such as peer recommendations, online reviews, and influencers. These mechanisms further strengthen the influence of social media on tourists' decision-making processes.

Generational Cohort Theory

Generational Cohort Theory, developed by Mannheim (1952) and popularized by Strauss and Howe (1991), posits that individuals born during the same period and exposed to similar sociohistorical events tend to develop similar values, attitudes, and behaviors. The theory identifies different generational cohorts with distinctive characteristics.

A comparative study of Generations Y and Z found that Centennials (Generation Z) obtain more travel information from social networks and place greater value on online photographs during the travel decision-making process than Generation Y. During the actual travel experience, Centennials rely less on Facebook and more on Instagram than Millennials. The two groups also differ significantly in their travel-experience-sharing behavior.

Furthermore, the number of hours spent on social media each day influences social media use during travel for both generations (Schiopu et al., 2023).

Another study found that 35.52% of 141 respondents had scheduled a tour after watching a TikTok video. TikTok was found to influence the decisions of Generation Z and Millennials, particularly in relation to scheduling tours and selecting travel destinations, through the use of voice, storytelling, and detailed content (Alejo et al., 2025). Generational differences create diverse patterns of behavior in the consumption of tourism-related information. The following summarizes the characteristics of three generational cohorts based on findings from previous studies:

- **Generation X (1965–1980)** is generally more cautious and continues to rely on traditional information sources, such as travel agents and official government websites (Orabi, 2022).
- **Generation Y (1981–1996)** is generally considered technologically adaptive and tends to rely on social media to seek travel inspiration and reviews (Nur'afifah & Prihantoro, 2021).
- **Generation Z (1997–2012)** is a digital-native generation that is highly active on visual platforms such as TikTok and Instagram and frequently relies on influencers as key references before selecting a destination (Mamengko et al., 2024).

Cross-generational research by Wang et al. (2022) indicates that cultural, social, and personal characteristics reinforce the influence of social media on tourism-related decision-making, although the intensity of these influences varies across generations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a comparative quantitative research design to examine differences in perceptions of tourism-related content across three generational groups: Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z. To further characterize these perceptions, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to identify the patterns of responses within each generation.

The study population consisted of individuals from Generation X (born 1965–1980), Generation Y/Millennials (born 1981–1996), and Generation Z (born 1997–2012). These generations were selected because they are generally considered capable of undertaking independent travel. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) active users of social media, (2) individuals who had previously undertaken leisure travel, and (3) individuals who had been exposed to tourism-related content on social media.

The required sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula. The calculation indicated a minimum sample of 96 respondents from each generational group, resulting in a target sample of 288 respondents. However, due to a lower-than-expected response rate, only 141 respondents completed the questionnaire and were included in the analysis. The study relied on primary data collected through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was shared with eligible participants, who were asked to select the response options that best represented their opinions and experiences.

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed to summarize and interpret the questionnaire responses. The analysis provided an overview of the perceptions of each generational group regarding tourism-related content encountered on the social media platforms they regularly use.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the various social media platforms available, respondents were asked to identify the platforms they use. The distribution of their responses is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Social Media Platforms Used

Social Media	Count
Instagram	34
Instagram, Tiktok	20
Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook	18
Facebook	16
Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter	14
Tiktok	13
Instagram, Facebook	9
Instagram, Facebook, Twitter	4
Instagram, Tiktok, Threads	3
TikTok, Facebook	2
Instagram, Tiktok, WA	1
WA	1
Instagram, Threads	1
Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook, Whatsapp	1
Twitter	1
Instagram, Twitter	1
Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter	1
Instagram, TikTok, Twitter	1

Source: Processed data, 2026

The results indicate that Instagram was the most widely used social media platform among the respondents. Nevertheless, many respondents also reported using multiple social media platforms. This finding suggests that respondents tend to use different social media platforms for different purposes, reflecting the distinct characteristics and functions of each platform. Despite the use of multiple platforms, Instagram remained the dominant social media platform among the respondents.

Respondents from the three generational groups were asked about the frequency with which they access social media applications in a typical week. Their responses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Weekly Frequency of Social Media Use

Generation	Frequency	Count
Z	1-3 times	2
	4-6 times	3
	Everyday	35
Y	1-3 times	4
	4-6 times	4
	Everyday	42
X	1-3 times	3
	4-6 times	7
	Everyday	41

Source: Processed data, 2026

The findings indicate that social media has become an integral part of respondents' daily lives. A total of 118 respondents (83.7%) reported accessing social media every day. In contrast, the remaining respondents reported accessing social media only four to six times per week, while a small proportion indicated that they used social media only occasionally. The findings show that daily social media use was the predominant pattern across all three generational groups, with the majority of respondents reporting that they accessed social media every day.

The survey included several categories of tourism. Table 3 summarizes the types of tourism most frequently visited by the respondents.

Table 3. Most Frequently Visited Types of Tourism

Types of Tourism	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism	5	9	6
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Shopping Tourism	8	6	4
Culinary Tourism	3	6	9
Nature Tourism	3	4	5
Culinary Tourism, Shopping Tourism	5	2	2
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	1	5	2
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Religious Tourism	0	0	5
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism	0	0	4
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Religious Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	2	1
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Shopping Tourism	2	0	1

Types of Tourism	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Shopping Tourism	3	0	0
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	2	1
Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism	0	0	2
Nature Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	1	1
Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism	0	1	1
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	2	0	0
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Shopping Tourism	1	1	0
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Shopping Tourism	1	1	0
Culinary Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	1	1	0
Culinary Tourism, Religious Tourism	0	1	1
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism	1	1	0
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	1	1	0
Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism	0	1	0
Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Educational Tourism	0	1	0
Nature Tourism, Religious Tourism, Educational Tourism	0	1	0
Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Educational Tourism	1	0	0
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	0	1
Culinary Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	0	1
Culinary Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	0	1
Culinary Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Religious Tourism	0	1	0
Culinary Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Religious Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	0	1
Culinary Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	1	0
Culinary Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Educational Tourism	0	0	1
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	1	0	0
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Religious Tourism, Educational Tourism	0	0	1
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Religious Tourism, Shopping Tourism	0	1	0
Culinary Tourism, Nature Tourism, Educational Tourism, Shopping Tourism	1	0	0

Source: Processed data, 2026

The findings reveal notable differences among the three generational groups in terms of the types of tourism they visit most frequently. Respondents from Generation X showed the

strongest preference for culinary tourism. This preference may be associated with their life stage, as individuals in this generation may be more inclined to choose tourism activities that are less physically demanding than other forms of tourism. In contrast, respondents from Generation Y most frequently preferred a combination of culinary tourism and nature tourism. As many individuals in this generation are in the family life stage, these types of tourism may better accommodate family-oriented leisure activities, particularly for those traveling with young children. Generation Z respondents, the youngest group in this study, most frequently preferred a combination of culinary tourism, nature tourism, and shopping tourism. This finding may reflect the tendency of younger travelers to seek diverse and novel travel experiences. Consequently, destinations that combine culinary attractions, natural attractions, and shopping opportunities may be particularly appealing to this generational group, especially when they offer new or emerging tourism experiences.

The sources of information used to identify tourism destinations also differed across the three generational groups. The distribution of respondents' answers is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Sources of Tourism Destination Information

Source	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X
Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, etc), Friends and Family	24	21	26
Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, etc)	16	24	16
Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, etc), Friends and Family, Travel Fairs	0	4	5
Friends and Family	0	0	2
Only Visit Destinations Within Their Local Area	0	0	1
Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, etc), Pameran	0	0	1
Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, etc), Friends and Family, Gmaps Review	0	1	0

Source: Processed data, 2026

Generation Z respondents primarily relied on social media and recommendations from friends and family when searching for tourism destinations. A similar pattern was observed among

Generation X respondents, who also considered both social media and recommendations from friends and family as their main sources of travel information. These findings suggest that respondents from both generations tend to combine online information with interpersonal recommendations when making travel decisions. In contrast, the majority of Generation Y respondents identified social media as their primary source of information for tourism destinations. This finding indicates that Generation Y respondents relied more heavily on social media than the other two generational groups when searching for travel destination information.

To examine respondents' attention to tourism-related content, participants were asked to identify the elements they were least likely to overlook when encountering tourism information on social media. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Aspects of Tourism-Related Content Most Likely to Capture Respondents' Attention

Reason	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X
Engaging Content and Visuals, Destination Location (Local, National, or International)	22	19	21
Engaging Content and Visuals	12	12	8
Engaging Content and Visuals, Destination Location (Local, National, or International), Content Presenter	3	9	7
Destination Location (Local, National, or International)	2	4	11
Content Presenter	0	3	1
Destination Location (Local, National, or International), Content Presenter	0	1	1
Engaging Content and Visuals, Destination Location (Local, National, or International), Positive Visitor Reviews	0	1	0
Engaging Content and Visuals, Content Presenter	0	0	1

Source: Processed data, 2026

A similar pattern was observed across all three generational groups (Generations X, Y, and Z). Respondents consistently indicated that engaging visual content and information about

the location of tourism destinations were the two aspects most likely to capture their attention when tourism-related content appeared on their social media feeds.

Table 6 presents the frequency with which respondents from the three generational groups visited tourism destinations based on recommendations or information encountered on social media.

Table 6. Frequency of Visits to Tourism Destinations

Frequency	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X
1–3 Visits to Tourism Destinations Based on Social Media Recommendations	14	25	31
More Than Four Visits to Tourism Destinations Based on Social Media Recommendations	17	11	14
All Visits to Tourism Destinations Based on Social Media Recommendations	9	12	5
No Visits to Tourism Destinations Based on Social Media Recommendations	0	2	1

Source: Processed data, 2026

Among Generation Z respondents, 17 individuals reported visiting tourism destinations more than four times based on recommendations encountered on social media. This finding suggests that social media plays a relatively important role in influencing travel decisions among respondents in this generational group. In contrast, the majority of respondents from both Generation Y and Generation X reported visiting tourism destinations only one to three times based on social media recommendations. This pattern indicates that respondents from these two generations were less likely than Generation Z to translate tourism-related content on social media into actual visits to tourism destinations. Furthermore, as shown in Table 6, none of the Generation Z respondents reported that they had never visited a tourism destination based on social media recommendations. This finding further suggests that social media may have a stronger influence on tourism destination visitation among Generation Z respondents than among respondents from Generations X and Y.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that both similarities and differences exist in the perceptions and responses of respondents across the three generational groups. These findings are consistent with Social Media Marketing Theory, Generational Cohort Theory, and User-Generated Content (UGC) Theory.

Social Media Marketing Theory posits that social media serves as an effective marketing platform that enables organizations and destination marketers to establish two-way communication with consumers through information sharing, visual content, and interactive engagement. These interactions enhance audience engagement and influence consumer decision-making. According to this theory, the effectiveness of social media marketing depends on the ability of content to attract attention, provide relevant information, and foster meaningful relationships with audiences through engaging and shareable content. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents from Generations X, Y, and Z access social media on a daily basis. This high level of social media usage indicates that social media has become an effective marketing channel for reaching diverse generational segments.

The findings can also be explained by Generational Cohort Theory, originally proposed by Mannheim (1928) and later popularized by Strauss and Howe (1991). The theory argues that individuals born within the same historical period experience similar social, economic, cultural, and technological conditions during their formative years, resulting in distinctive values, preferences, attitudes, and behavioral patterns. Consequently, each generational cohort develops different ways of accessing, interpreting, and utilizing information, including information obtained through social media. These generational differences help explain why social media usage patterns and responses to tourism-related content vary across Generations X, Y, and Z.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with User-Generated Content (UGC) Theory, which suggests that content created and shared by social media users serves as an important source of information that shapes tourists' perceptions, destination image, and travel decision-making. The finding that respondents from all three generations access social media on a daily basis indicates that social media has become a common source of tourism information across generations. The high frequency of social media use increases users' exposure to content generated by other users, enabling UGC to influence tourists from the early stages of destination awareness through destination evaluation, regardless of generational differences.

The study further reveals that visually appealing tourism content and information regarding destination accessibility are the most attractive forms of content for respondents across all three generations. This finding supports the role of UGC in presenting authentic travel experiences through visual content while providing practical information that facilitates tourists' decision-making processes (Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Xu, 2024). Such content not only captures users' attention but also contributes to the formation of a positive destination image, ultimately encouraging potential tourists to visit the destination.

Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that the influence of UGC is not uniform across generational groups. This result is consistent with Schiopu et al. (2023), who found that Generation Z relies more heavily on social media and visual content than Generation Y during the travel decision-making process. Therefore, although UGC serves as an important information source for all generations, its influence and the types of content that are most effective differ according to the characteristics of each generational cohort.

The results provide practical implications for destination marketers. Marketing strategies targeting multiple generational segments should be tailored to characteristics,

preferences, and information needs of each generation and should avoid implementing a one-size-fits-all UGC strategy across all tourist segments. For example, creative, interactive, and short-form video content is likely to be more effective in attracting Generation Z, whereas more comprehensive information regarding destination accessibility, facilities, safety, and comfort may better meet the preferences of Generation X and a portion of Generation Y. By developing content that aligns with the interests and information needs of different generational groups, destination marketers can enhance audience engagement and encourage potential tourists to visit specific destinations.

One limitation of this study is the lower-than-expected response rate. The initial research design targeted 96 respondents from each generational group (Generations X, Y, and Z), resulting in an intended sample of 288 respondents. However, only 141 respondents completed the questionnaire by the end of the data collection period. This reduced sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings and should be addressed in future studies by implementing strategies to improve participant recruitment and response rates.

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