

RESEARCH PAPER

The Impact Of Social Media On Destination Choice: A Study on Generation Z

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Abstract

It is known that social media, which has become an indispensable part of daily life with the developments in information and communication technologies, is extensively used by Generation Z. Social media, which offers easier and faster access to accurate and reliable information, has an important place in the preference processes of tourism components that cannot be experienced before. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether social media has an impact on Generation Z's preference processes for destinations, one of the most important components of tourism. For this purpose, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected from 402 participants in online environments. Within the scope of the research, it was found that there is a relationship between the destination preference of Generation Z and all elements of social media and that destination image, behavioral intention, and tourism satisfaction elements on social media have a significant impact on destination preference. The information shared by travelers and the impacts of social media on marketing elements have been found to be associated with destination preferences; however, it has been determined that they do not have an effect on preferences. This is associated with the fact that the most important factor in the preference process of Generation Z is their own decisions.

Keywords: Generation Z, Social Media, Destination Choice, Marketing

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INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of social media on the Internet has made it easier for people to communicate globally and to have information on every subject. Social media, which makes it faster and easier for consumers to obtain information about products anywhere in the world (Tosyalı & Sütçü, 2016), offers the advantage of being able to obtain information and make comparisons about the products they demand for their wants and needs from both sellers and users who have already experienced them without time limits (Guan et al., 2022). For businesses, the fact that it provides an opportunity to increase brand awareness by reaching more audiences with less cost compared to traditional marketing as a digital marketing tool (Yao et al., 2019; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016) makes it necessary to follow information and communication technologies as well as operational technologies, especially in a global competitive environment. In other words, it can be stated that ignoring the use of social media will pose some risks in terms of surviving in a competitive environment as it will reach fewer audiences compared to competitors. Therefore, social media, which reveals a new habit in the exchange process between consumers and businesses and paves the way for new approaches in terms of marketing, has caused the tourism sector, which is highly affected by globalization, and social media-based marketing concepts to be mentioned together.

Destinations, which are one of the most important components of the tourism sector (Akin, 2022), have been one of the most discussed concepts in the related literature, together with the concept of social media (Leung et al., 2013). When the research on destinations and social media is examined, it is seen that researchers mainly focus on the impact of social media on destination choice and decision (Di Pietro, Di Virgilio & Pantano, 2012; Sultan, Sharmin & Xue, 2019; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Kasim et al, 2019; Tapanainen, Dao & Nguyen, 2021; Pan, Rasouli & Timmermans, 2021; Angriani Asnawi, 2022; Merabet, 2020; Tham, Mair & Croy, 2020; Dogra, 2020; Tešin et al., 2022; Terttunen, 2017; Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019), its effect on intention to visit the destination (Gaffar et al, 2022; Tobias-Mamina et al., 2020; Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018), effect on purchase intention (Jaya & Prianthara, 2020; Diposumarto, Purwanto & Ramdan, 2015), effect on destination image (Ghazali & Cai, 2013; Kim et al, 2017; Stepaniuk, 2015; Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018) and destination branding (Dedeoğlu et al, 2020; Stojanovic, Andreu & Curras-Perez, 2018; Lim, Chung & Weaver, 2012; Stojanovic, Andreu & Curras-Perez, 2022; Tran & Rudolf, 2022). The impact of social media on destination choice is the research topic of this study.

According to data on social media use, there are 4.76 billion social media users in the world, which equals 59.4 percent of the total global population. On the other hand, according to the distribution of social media users by age range, users between the ages of 13 and 29, including Generation Z, make up 43% of the total (Meltwater, 2023). Considering that individuals born between 1997 and 2012 are commonly characterized as Generation Z, although they are graded differently in different sources (Pratminingsih, 2021; Marin & White, 2023), it can be said that the quantitative value of the social media use of Generation Z, which constitutes the target audience of this study, is quite high.

Considering that Generation Z individuals are both current and future tourists, revealing their destination preferences as well as the impact of social media on these preferences is of great importance for researchers who want to provide effective findings and suggestions for practitioners and other research, as well as stakeholders and management organizations of destinations that want to survive in a global competitive environment. In this direction, in the related literature, the effect of social media on purchase preference (Altun, Cizrelioğulları & Babayiğit, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2018), the effect of social media on destination promotion and loyalty (Zaib Abbasi et al., 2022), the effect of trust in social media influencers on pre-purchase behavior (Güneş, Ekmekçi & Taş, 2022), the effect on travel intention (Khoa et al., 2021), and the effect on travel behavior (Liu et al., 2023). However, in addition to the information given above, the limited number of studies on the impact of social media on the destination choice of Generation Z reveals the importance of this research. In line with this importance, this study aims to determine the impact of social media on the destination preferences of Generation Z within the research question "Does social media have an impact on the destination preferences of Generation Z?".

In addition, the findings obtained aim to present knowledge that will have a widespread impact on the relevant literature.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social Media Concept

Social media are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to create a public or semi-public profile within a limited system, express a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and navigate their own list of connections and the connections made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In other words, social media is defined as online platforms where individuals share content such as videos, photos, pictures, texts, ideas, insights, humor, opinions, gossip, and news (Drury, 2008). When the definitions of social media are examined, it is seen that it offers individuals opportunities such as obtaining information about different subjects, virtual browsing, commenting, making comparisons, and getting to know new people.

The use of the opportunities offered by social media may vary according to the purposes for which individuals use social media. Social media, which are mainly used for social interaction, information seeking, time passing, entertainment, relaxation, communicative benefit, convenience benefit, expressing opinions, sharing information, and learning about others (Whiting & Williams, 2013), are classified as a) collaborative projects (wiki applications), b) blogs, content communities (platforms where content such as photos, videos, slides, and books are shared), c) social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Regardless of the aforementioned classifications, the benefits that social media use provides to individuals are addressed in five value categories: functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and contingent value (Hallikainen, 2015):

Table 1. Value Category

Value Category	Definition
Functional Value	Perceived benefit obtained In the case of social media, the capacity of social media platforms to provide functionality or tools to achieve one's goals
Social Value	Perceived utility of associating with specific social groups In the case of social media, social value is derived from engaging with social groups using social media platforms. Maintaining one's social image using social media platforms
Emotional Value	Perceived benefit related to evoking emotions In the case of social media, emotions evoked by the use of social media platforms, such as enjoyment
Epistemic Value	Perceived utility is related to arousing curiosity, providing novelty, or satisfying the desire for information In the case of social media, the capacity of social media platforms to generate curiosity, innovation, or information
Conditional Value	Perceived utility of a particular situation In the case of social media, the value associated with the use of social media on a specific occasion, such as one's birthday

Source: Hallikainen, 2015.

Regardless of the classifications of social media and the purposes of individual use, it is evident that almost all social media applications have a commercial aspect. This is characterized as the impact of social media on individuals' purchasing behavior (Varghese & Agrawal, 2021). The functional and epistemic values of social media can be evaluated in this context. In other words, the functionality of social media in terms of achieving the goals of consumers and businesses emerges as a commercial activity for almost all social media tools and users. On the other hand, the epistemic values that social media posts create in individuals shape the benefits perceived by individuals by affecting decisions such as destination preference (Doğan, Pekiner & Karaca, 2018).

The Effect of Social Media on Destination Preference

Destinations, like all products that reach consumers, include a package of tourism facilities and services consisting of a series of multidimensional attributes within the attractions that shape the preferences of individuals or are shaped according to their preferences (Hu & Ritchie, 1993). According to another definition, a destination is a geographical area that hosts touristic products and attractions to meet the needs of tourists and is supported by touristic facilities and services that tourists visit intensively (Karamustafa et al., 2015). According to these definitions, it is seen that destinations basically focus on influencing individuals' preferences with attractions that will meet their needs. In other words, the more the destination meets the needs of the individual, the more attractive it is and the more it is preferred (Vengesai, 2003).

Individuals desire to travel for a number of intrinsic reasons that can be positioned as needs, and they choose the destination they want to go to in line with their needs. This situation is referred to as a push-pull factor in the literature (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). While push factors, also referred to as intrinsic motivators, include escape, rest, health and wellness, adventure, and social interaction, pull factors, referred to as extrinsic motivators, include tangible resources such as beaches, recreation facilities, and cultural attractions, as well as perceptions and expectations such as novelty, benefit expectation, and marketing image (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Apart from push and pull factors, individuals may be motivated and influenced by factors such as knowledge and adventure, economic concerns, personal safety, destination knowledge, travel arrangements, destination characteristics, family and friends, fun and relaxation, religious and cultural considerations, and travel bragging (Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012).

In unpredictable sectors such as tourism, individuals want to predict whether the goods or services offered will meet their needs. In terms of destinations, individuals try to make decisions in line with the information and feedback they receive from their environment, as well as their previous experiences, which have been found to have a close relationship with future destination preferences (Oppermann, 1999; Frank, 1962). Therefore, word-of-mouth marketing via social media has become one of the most fundamental tools for individuals and has been adopted by hospitality businesses (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2018). Accordingly, in addition to the content created by social media users, travelers' posts, information on social media, and variables such as behavioral intention, destination image, and tourism satisfaction on social media have become determinants of individuals' destination preferences (Cox et al., 2009; Agyapong & Yuan, 2022). In other words, social media has started to be accepted as an important source of feedback because of the opportunities it offers in terms of obtaining fast and accurate information.

In tourism, which is an information-intensive sector, technological systems are needed more to disseminate more information, and at this point, the role of social media emerges (Kim et al., 2017). The role of social media emerges at the point where information on social media is seen as an important source of information in all tourism-related processes, especially in destinations (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020). In fact, it is stated that information on social media has fundamentally changed the travel planning and purchasing processes (Tham et al. 2020). Although information on social media is created by users such as businesses, consumers, and travelers, it is known that the information produced by travelers is used to provide accurate information about destinations and guide the decision process (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). For example, Abad & Borbon (2021) found in their research that the

information provided by travelers has a significant impact on individuals' travel decisions in terms of cognitive and sensory values, and the accuracy of the relevant decisions ensures that the right decision is made based on destination preferences. Therefore, it can be said that especially the information on social media produced by travelers is an important tool in guiding individuals' behavioral intentions on social media, ensuring a positive destination image on social media, and increasing tourism satisfaction on social media.

Information shared on social media is one of the most important sources of information that can be used in travel planning (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Social media is recognized as an important marketing tool (Jaya & Prianthara, 2020) that has a direct impact on the creation of destination images (Stepaniuk, 2015). The finding that individuals tend to adopt the destination image created by social media users, regardless of whether they have prior knowledge about the destination or not (Pan et al., 2021) supports this fact. In addition to the effects of social media on marketing, it is also known that the content produced by travelers, in addition to its contribution to the destination image on social media, influences the behavioral intentions of individuals and directs their preferences (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020). Therefore, when evaluated as a whole, it is seen that social media is an important tool in creating a positive impression of the destination and creating a positive impact on individuals' purchase intentions and destination preferences (Ninan, Roy & Cheriyan, 2020; Tobias-Mamina et al., 2020). When evaluated as a process that follows each other, the destination image created by the information on social media and its impact on touristic preferences lead individuals to the right decisions, and the experiences gained through the right decisions lead to tourism satisfaction.

The above-mentioned developments regarding social media are also reflected in the related literature. Llodra-Riera et al. (2015) found that individuals are influenced by information sources when choosing a destination, and among these information sources are the information on social media provided by travelers and influencers. Similarly, Pop et al. (2022) found that individuals' tourism satisfaction on social media, which is formed by their previous experiences as well as the destination image created by social media, has a positive impact on travel and destination preference processes. Masuda, Han, and Lee (2022) found that celebrities or influencers, which are components of social media, have a significant impact on individuals' destination decision processes and behavioral intentions. These findings suggest that social media and communication through social media (word-of-mouth marketing) have a significant impact on individuals' travel planning and travel decisions (Xiang, Magnini & Fesenmaier, 2015; Agyapong & Yuan, 2022). In other words, social media provides some information about a tourist destination (transportation facilities, travel routes, accommodation and food and beverage facilities, problems and risks, safety issues, culture, and heritage) and functions as a word-of-mouth communication tool, thus influencing people's travel decisions (Paul, Roy & Mia, 2019).

The Effect of Social Media on Generation Z's Destination Preference

The generation defined as Generation Z uses social media more intensively with the spread of the internet and the development of technology. Another important purpose of Generation Z (Euajarusphan, 2021), which uses social media for purposes such as communicating with acquaintances, accessing secure information, being happy by sharing, and having a mass communication tool, is to facilitate their decisions in the process of purchasing goods or services. Generation Z (Şeker, Erdem & Unur, 2022), which is known to be more influenced by social media compared to other age groups, has smartphones and internet access, which both facilitate the selection of goods or services and allow them to be more meticulous and selective compared to other generations (Karim, 2019). Therefore, it is known that Generation Z prefers online shopping over the internet because of the influence of social media (Dabija & Lung, 2019).

The impact of social media on the purchasing preferences of Generation Z has been the subject of research due to their intensive use of social media and being called the tourists of the future, as well as the increase in commercial mobility caused by the impact of social media. For example, Djafarova and Foots (2022), in their research on the purchasing preferences of Generation Z, which they express as

conscious consumers, found that they perceive social media phenomena and recommendations of friends and relatives on social media as a facilitating factor in their purchasing preferences, taking into account environmental effects. Ninan et al. (2020) found that the impact of social media on Generation Z is greater than traditional marketing and that social media has a positive impact on purchase intention, brand awareness, product perception, brand loyalty, and customer-business interaction. Similarly, Kahawandala, Peter, and Niwunhella (2020) found that information technologies, peer and social influence, as well as social media, have a significant impact on the purchase decisions of Generation Z. Therefore, in line with these findings, it is possible to say that the purchasing behavior of Generation Z is highly influenced by social media.

In line with the information provided in the conceptual framework of the research, it has become important to examine the destination preferences of Generation Z as future tourists and active users of social media on the basis of destinations, which are important components of the tourism sector, where the reality of social media is more important due to its previously unexperienced structure. This information formed the basis for the hypotheses of the study, and hypotheses were developed regarding the effect of social media on the destination preferences of Generation Z. The hypotheses were formed within a fiction to reveal the relationship between social media and the destination preference of Generation Z together with its sub-dimensions, and then to determine whether the dimensions affect each other. The main hypotheses of the study question the relationship and impact of social media elements on Generation Z's destination preferences. The social media elements in the hypothesis include behavioral intention shaped by social media, information shared by travelers, other information available on social media, destination image formed on social media, and overall satisfaction with the tourism sector on social media. Apart from the main hypothesis, sub-hypotheses were developed for the five related hypotheses:

H1: There is a relationship between social media elements and Generation Z's destination preference.

H1a: There is a relationship between the information shared by travelers and the destination preferences of Generation Z.

H1b: There is a relationship between the destination image on social media and the destination preference of Generation Z.

H1c: There is a relationship between behavioral intention on social media and Generation Z's destination preference.

H1d: There is a relationship between the effects of social media on marketing and the destination preference of Generation Z.

H1e: There is a relationship between tourism satisfaction on social media and Generation Z's destination preference.

H2: Social media elements have an effect on Generation Z's destination preference.

H2a: Information shared by travelers has an effect on the destination preference of Generation Z.

H2b: Destination image on social media has an effect on Generation Z's destination preference.

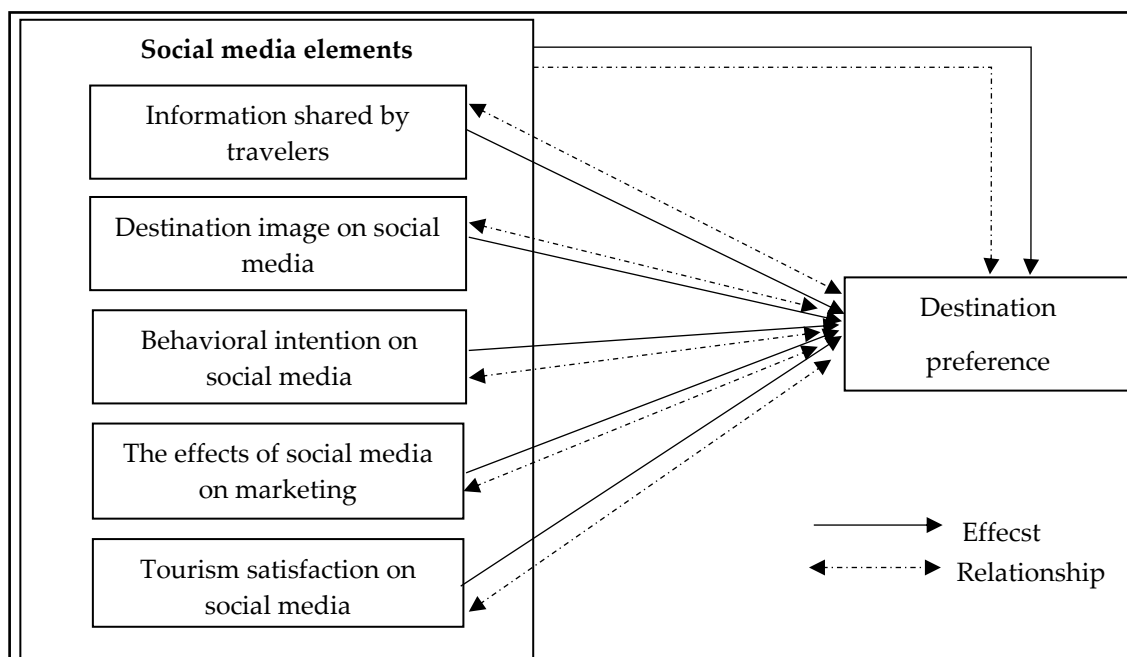
H2c: Behavioral intention on social media has an effect on Generation Z's destination preference.

H2d: The effects of social media on marketing have an effect on Generation Z's destination preference.

H2e: Tourism satisfaction on social media has an effect on Generation Z's destination preference.

The model of the research, which is formed according to the hypotheses developed in line with the research purpose, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Model



METHODOLOGY

In this study, which is designed to determine the effect of social media on the destination preference of Generation Z, the relational survey model, which is also referred to as impact, is used to reveal and determine the degree of co-variation between two or more variables (Karasar, 2005; İslamoğlu & Alnaçık, 2016). In addition, within the scope of the study, the purposeful sampling method, which involves the selection of individuals who are suitable for the problematic of the research and who are directly related to the subject based on the researcher's own observations, was used (Altunışık et al., 2012; Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). Accordingly, the data for the study were collected online between June and September 2023 from individuals who were suitable for the purpose.

The population of the study consists of individuals residing in Türkiye, born between 1997 and 2012, and called Generation Z. The criterion for the study was that the participants were 18 years of age or older. The criterion of the study is that the participants should be 18 years of age or older. Therefore, the population of the study was limited to individuals between the ages of 18 and 26. It is known that it is sufficient to reach a sample size of 384 regardless of the population and sample size in order to achieve the purpose of research (Karasar 2005; Yazıcı 2018). On the other hand, it is seen that the number of samples sufficient to perform factor analysis on the scale with the data obtained in scientific research is considered sufficient to be 5–10 times the number of items in the scale in the relevant literature (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2002; Tavşancıl, 2002; Shultz & Whitney, 2005; Byrne, 2016). Within the scope of this study, data were received from 416 participants, and data were obtained from 402 participants by removing 14 questionnaire forms that were not suitable for the population and purpose of the study. Therefore, 12.18 times the number of 33 items in the scale was obtained, and it was accepted that a sufficient sample size was reached for the analysis within the scope of the study.

The questionnaire form, which was used to collect the data for the study and adapted by the researchers from Agyapong and Yuan (2022), was prepared as a 5-point Likert scale to measure the participants' level of agreement with the statements and consisted of three sections. The first section provides information about the research and consists of an acceptance question for voluntary participation. The second section consists of 33 items to measure the impact of social media on Generation Z's destination

choice. The scale items consist of five items each on information shared by travelers, destination image on social media, and tourism satisfaction on social media, seven items each on behavioral intention on social media and the effects of social media on marketing, and four items on destination preference. The last section, the third section, includes questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants and their social media use.

In order to ensure the content validity of the scale and to check the comprehensibility of the scale items, a pilot study was conducted with nine people, including four students, two academicians, and three civil servants, who were included in the age group of the study. To test the construct validity of the scale, a normality distribution test and PLS-SEM model factor analysis were conducted. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated to determine the reliability of the scale, and the scale ($\alpha=0.982$) and its sub-dimensions, such as information shared by travelers ($\alpha=0.911$), behavioral intention on social media ($\alpha=0.905$), destination image on social media ($\alpha=0.913$), the reliability coefficients of the effects of social media on marketing ($\alpha=0.957$), tourism satisfaction on social media ($\alpha=0.946$), and destination preference ($\alpha=0.880$), were found to be at the expected level, and the basic condition for the validity of the scale was met (Karasar, 2005).

FINDINGS

In line with the purpose of the study, descriptive statistics were used to calculate the frequency distributions of the participants' demographic characteristics and social media use. In addition, the data were tested for normal distribution, and PLS-SEM model factor analysis was performed. Finally, analyses were conducted to test the study hypotheses. The frequency distributions of the demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency distributions of demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic Characteristics	Groups	f	%
Age	18-20	117	29,1
	21-23	183	45,5
	24-26	102	25,4
Gender	Male	161	40
	Famale	241	60
Education status	Primary and secondary education	26	6,4
	Associate degree	49	12,2
	Bachelor's degree	311	77,4
	Postgraduate	16	4
Average monthly income	No income	126	31,4
	1-2.000 ₺	125	31,1
	2.001-4.000 ₺	25	6,2
	4.001-6.000 ₺	19	4,7
	6.001 ₺ and above	107	26,6
Total		402	100

In line with the purpose of the research, since the age groups defined as Generation Z in the literature have been reached, it is seen that the majority of the participants, which include individuals between the ages of 18 and 26, are female (60%) between the ages of 21 and 23 (45.5%), have undergraduate education (77.4%), and have no income (31.4%). When these results are evaluated, it is seen that the target group is suitable for the purpose of the research in terms of age. On the other hand, in terms of education and average monthly income, it is seen that the findings obtained overlap since the age groups defined as Generation Z are generally students and are expected to have no or low income accordingly.

Distributions for the variables that are important for the purpose of the study and reveal important findings regarding the participants' social media use were calculated. The findings obtained are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency distributions of participants' social media use

Social Media Usage		Groups	f	%
Frequency of social media use		Less than 2 hours	93	23,1
		3-4 hours	195	48,5
		5 hours and above	114	28,4
		Total	402	100

	Social networking service	Frequency of Repetition	The most used social network service in destination choice	Social networking service	Frequency of Repetition
	The most used social networking service	Facebook		39	Facebook
	Instagram	348	Instagram	335	
	YouTube	241	YouTube	217	
	X	38	X	64	
	TikTok	42	TikTok	26	
	Other	27	Other	24	

In line with the research purpose, it is important to reach participants who use social media intensively. The data on the frequency of social media use shows that the appropriate target group was reached. It is seen that the majority of the participants use social media for 3–4 hours (48.5%) and 5 hours or more (28.4%). In addition, the most used social networking services are Instagram (348 repetition frequency) and YouTube (241 repetition frequency). Therefore, it is an expected result that Instagram (335 repetition frequency) and YouTube (217 repetition frequency) are the social networking services that the participants use the most in their destination preferences.

Before the research analyses, the normality distribution of the data was tested. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients were calculated to test whether the data were normally distributed, and it was observed that the coefficients (skewness = -1.347 / 0.154; kurtosis = -0.877 / 0.610) were between acceptable values (Chemingui & Ben Lallouna, 2013). Accordingly, it was accepted that the data showed a normal distribution. On the other hand, PLS-SEM model factor analysis was conducted to determine the validity of the scale and its suitability for the analysis, and the results are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Factor Analysis Results

Factors	Statements	Factor Load	CR	AVE
Information shared by travelers	The information provided by travelers guides me to visit new destinations.	0,829	,98 2	,797
	Information provided by travelers is more reliable than information shared by travel businesses on their websites.	0,720		
	I always ask people about their experiences before choosing a tourist destination.	0,792		
	I believe it is important to seek the opinion of others before choosing a tourist destination.	0,798		
	I recommend getting information from different sources before making any decision about the destination.	0,848		
Destination image on social media	Destination image has a strong influence on a person's choice of destination.	0,822	,97 3	,819
	Destinations with recognition are always more visited.	0,824		
	Images of destinations shared on social media influence me to go there.	0,862		
	Videos shared on social media influence me to choose a destination.	0,859		
	Social media provides accurate information about new tourism destinations.	0,731		
Behavioral intention on social media	Information shared on social media has a strong influence on my decision-making intentions.	0,757	,99 2	,765
	I trust the brands advertised by the social media influencers I follow.	0,542		
	I have a positive opinion towards tourism businesses advertised by social media influencers.	0,623		
	My personal experience has a strong influence on my tourism destination decisions.	0,832		
	The way tourism businesses handle complaints affects my decision-making process.	0,844		
	The attitudes of tourism enterprises towards service provision affect my decision-making process.	0,868		
	The existence of positive opinions about a brand affects my decision-making process.	0,892		
The effects of social media on marketing	Social media has led to a significant change in tourist behavior, marketing activities, and travel information sharing.	0,852	,99 1	,857
	Social media has changed the process of creating touristic products.	0,832		
	Social media has made it easier for tourists to share their views and experiences, providing different perspectives on destinations.	0,873		
	Social media enriches the touristic experience of people visiting a destination for the first time by enabling them to share experiences of different destinations.	0,887		
	Social media, in effect, acts as an enhanced customer service tool.	0,852		
	Social media provides information about new tourism destinations.	0,880		
	Social media facilitates access to destinations.	0,828		

Tourism satisfaction on social media	I was generally satisfied with the services provided by the tourism enterprises I had previously received services from.	0,790		
	My previous satisfaction is important for me to prefer the service offered by a tourism business again.	0,849		
	My previous level of satisfaction is very important to me in my purchasing decisions.	0,854	,985	,839
	Reliable information shared by the tourism organization increases my satisfaction.	0,840		
	The quality of the service provided by the tourism establishment increases my satisfaction.	0,862		
Destination preference	If I were to choose a tourism business, I would prefer the one recommended by social media influencers.	0,596		
	If I'm going to visit a destination, I decide first by looking at its visuals.	0,816	,939	,697
	My willingness to visit a destination depends on its awareness.	0,671		
	My willingness to visit a destination depends on the images of that destination shared on social media.	0,707		

The results of the factor analysis show that the loading values of the scale items are > 0.50 , which is considered sufficient (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018), so it can be said that the scale items correctly define the relevant factors (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu & Büyüköztürk, 2010). The CR (composite reliability) values, which reveal that the scale has a reliable structure, were found to be at the expected level ($CR > 0.70$) (Valentini & Damasio, 2016). In line with the requirement that the AVE value should be > 0.50 (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017), it was determined that all factors had acceptable values, and discriminant validity was achieved. Finally, it was seen that the expectation of $CR > AVE$ (Hair et al., 2010), which is required for the fit validity of the scale, was met in all factors. These findings show that the scale is suitable for the purpose of the study in terms of convergent validity, and other analyses can be performed.

In line with the purpose and model of the study, in order to determine the impact of social media elements on destination preference, the relationship between the factors was first tested with correlation analysis, and then regression analysis was used to determine the effects between the relationships. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis on the level of relationship between the factors are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation between factors

Factors	Information shared by travelers	Destination image on social media	Behavioral intention on social media	The effects of social media on marketing	Tourism satisfaction on social media	Destination preference
Information shared by travelers	1					
Destination image on social media	,862**	1				
Behavioral intention on social media	,863**	,890**	1			
The effects of social media on marketing	,852**	,900**	,887**	1		
Tourism satisfaction on social media	,855**	,854**	,825**	,876**	1	
Destination preference	,704**	,758**	,819**	,743**	,639**	1

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

In addition to the information given in Table 5, the relationship between social media elements, including information shared by travelers, destination image on social media, behavioral intention on social media, marketing effects of social media, tourism satisfaction on social media, and destination preference, was tested, and a positive relationship was found (0.830). The correlation coefficients represent relationship levels of 0.00-0.19 (very weak), 0.20-0.39 (weak), 0.40-0.59 (moderate), 0.60-0.79 (strong), and 0.80-1.00 (very strong) (Campbell & Swinscow, 2011; Ryan & Bruno, 2017). Accordingly, there is a very strong relationship between social media elements and destination preferences. On the other hand, a very strong positive relationship was found between destination preference and almost all factors. There is a strong positive relationship between destination preference and the factors of information shared by travelers, destination image on social media, the effects of social media on marketing, and tourism satisfaction on social media. Therefore, the main hypothesis H1 and its sub-hypotheses are accepted.

Regression analysis was conducted to test the other main hypothesis of the study, H2, and its sub-hypotheses, and the findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Regression Analysis on the Effect of Social Media Elements on Destination Preference

R	R2	Adjusted R2	F	Significance Level
,830	,688	,685	175,003	,000
	Standardized Beta		T	
Destination preference	,830		1,385	,000

Dependent Variable: Destination preference Independent Variable: Social media elements

Beta: ,830 Significance: ,000

According to the regression analysis, which has a coefficient of determination $R^2 = ,688$ and a rate of explanation of social media elements on destination preference of 68.8%, it is determined that social media elements have a positive effect on destination preference by creating a statistically antecedent effect ($\beta = ,830$; $p = ,000$). In addition, the dimensions of destination image on social media ($\beta = ,207$; $p = ,007$), behavioral intention on social media ($\beta = ,712$; $p = ,000$), and tourism satisfaction on social media ($\beta = ,264$; $p = ,000$) were found to positively affect destination preference. On the other hand, information shared by travelers ($\beta = ,014$; $p = ,826$) and the effects of social media on marketing ($\beta = ,145$; $p = ,065$) have no effect on destination preference. According to these findings, the results regarding the research hypotheses are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of Hypothesis Tests

H	Description	Conclusion
H ₁	There is a relationship between social media elements and the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{1a}	There is a relationship between the information shared by travelers and the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{1b}	There is a relationship between destination image on social media and destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{1c}	There is a relationship between behavioral intention on social media and the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{1d}	There is a relationship between the effects of social media on marketing and the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{1e}	There is a relationship between tourism satisfaction on social media and destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H ₂	Social media elements have an impact on the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{2a}	Information shared by travelers has an impact on the destination preference of Generation Z.	Rejection
H _{2b}	Destination image on social media has an effect on the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{2c}	Behavioral intention on social media has an effect on the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance
H _{2d}	The effects of social media on marketing have an impact on the destination preference of Generation Z.	Rejection
H _{2e}	Tourism satisfaction on social media has an effect on the destination preference of Generation Z.	Acceptance

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Due to the intensive use of social media, it is known that businesses carry out their marketing activities in internet-based environments in a planned manner. On the other hand, it is obvious that Generation Z is among the most intensive users of social media, and social media is one of the most important marketing tools for tourism components due to its unpredictable structure. In line with this information, this study aims to determine whether social media elements have an impact on the preference processes of Generation Z regarding destinations. In this direction, descriptive statistics as well as correlation and regression analyses were conducted to determine the role of social media in destination preference based on the data on the factors affecting destination preference obtained from individuals between the ages of 18 and 26, born between 1997 and 2005, in order to reach participants aged 18 and over as a criterion of the research.

Within the scope of the research, it was aimed at determining the time spent by Generation Z on social media and the social media platforms they use the most. In line with the data obtained, it was determined that Generation Z spends an average of 3–4 hours a day on social media, uses Instagram and YouTube platforms the most, and mostly uses these two platforms in their destination preferences. In line with the purpose of the research, in addition to reaching individuals who use social media, the fact that the majority of the participants (76.9%) have a social media usage frequency of three hours or more indicates that the target audience in line with the purpose of the research has been reached, and accordingly, it is seen that some social media platforms are utilized in destination preferences. The data on Instagram and YouTube platforms, which were found to be the most used social media platforms and utilized in destination preferences, reveal that e-marketing practices should be carried out on these platforms in all tourism components, especially in destinations.

According to the correlation analysis conducted to test the first of the main hypotheses in line with the purpose and model of the study, it was determined that there is a very strong positive relationship between destination preference and social media elements. In other words, there is a very strong relationship between the information about the destination on social media and the destination preference of Generation Z. On the other hand, it has been determined that there is a positive relationship between destination preference and the factors of information shared by travelers, destination image on social media, the effects of social media on marketing, and tourism satisfaction on social media. When the level of the relationship is examined, it is seen that there is a very strong relationship between destination preference and behavioral intention on social media, while there is a strong relationship between destination preference on social media and information shared by travelers, destination image on social media, marketing effects of social media, and tourism satisfaction on social media. Accordingly, it is possible to talk about the existence of a positive relationship between destination preference and social media as an important indicator for destinations.

Regarding the second of the main hypotheses of the study, regression analysis was performed, and accordingly, it was observed that social media elements had a positive effect on destination preference by creating an antecedent effect. In other words, it has been determined that the existing elements related to the destination on social media have a significant impact on the destination preferences of Generation Z. Therefore, in order to appeal to more audiences, destinations should focus more on social media-based e-marketing practices, which will provide a significant advantage in terms of preferability. In addition, according to the analysis, destination image, behavioral intention, and tourism satisfaction factors in social media have a positive effect on destination preference. Accordingly, since social media posts as well as marketing and perception management activities have an impact on destination image formation, destinations should carry out accurate and effective posts, collaborations, and activities that will contribute to the formation of a positive destination image on social media. Therefore, ensuring a positive destination image, among other practices, will be a pioneering step in terms of creating a positive behavioral intention towards destinations on social media as well as ensuring positive tourism satisfaction. Considering the impact of these three factors on the destination preference of Generation

Z, social media tools are very important for destinations to increase their potential visitor base, reach more real visitors, and thus gain an advantage in the global competitive environment.

Although the information shared by travelers and the effects of social media on marketing have a relationship with destination visits, they do not have an effect on destination preference. Therefore, it can be said that Generation Z creates behavioral intentions by taking advantage of the information shared by travelers as well as the information provided by social media on destination marketing in destination decision processes, but the most important factor in the preference process is their own decisions. In other words, although the information shared by travelers and the effects of social media on marketing do not have a direct effect on destination preference, it can be said that it can affect destination preference since there is a strong relationship between destination image on social media, behavioral intention, and tourism satisfaction.

Based on these results, it is possible to offer some suggestions for destinations. In this context:

- Active use of social media platforms to gain an advantage in the global competitive environment,
- Emphasizing service quality through social media due to the intensive use of social media,
- Ensuring social media-based and reliable purchasing transactions,
- Emphasizing personalized applications in social media applications,
- Providing services that will create an attraction factor for Generation Z as potential visitors,
- Emphasizing reliable information and promotional content supported by visuals about the destination to support the destination image on social media platforms, especially Instagram and YouTube platforms, which are predicted to affect the destination preference of potential visitors,
- Advertising through social media influencers to increase interest in the destination and create behavioral intentions,
- Encouraging real visitors to provide feedback on social media platforms to ensure tourism satisfaction on social media,
- Analyzing the comments on social media and taking into account the positive or negative comments made about the destination, increasing the quality of service in this direction, and making it sustainable,
- It is recommended that an e-marketing team consisting of trained and specialized personnel on social media be formed, or that training be provided for personnel where necessary.

For future research, it is recommended to investigate the impact of Instagram and YouTube, which are the most frequently used social media platforms according to the findings of this study, on the destination preferences of potential visitors. On the other hand, it is recommended to examine the tendencies of destinations or tourism businesses towards the use of these platforms. In line with the finding that the most important factor in the preference process of Generation Z is their own decisions, it is recommended that research be conducted to examine the impact of influencers or tourism satisfaction on social media. It is also recommended to comparatively investigate the impact of social media on destination preference with different methods involving more participants and to compare the change over time.

Declaration

The contribution of all authors of the article to the process is equal. Authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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**ERCIYES ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER ETİK KURULU
PROJE ONAY FORMU**

Projenin Adı	“Sosyal Medyanın Destinasyon Tercihine Etkisi: Z Kuşağı Üzerine Bir Araştırma”	
Projenin Niteliği	Bireysel Araştırma	
Proje Araştırmacıları	Mehmet Halit AKIN Büşra ŞENER	(Sorumlu Araştırmacı) (Diğer Araştırmacı)
Sorumlu Araştırmacının Haberleşme Bilgileri	Erciyes Üniversitesi Turizm Fakültesi E-posta adresi: halitakin@erciyes.edu.tr	

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Etik Kurulumuza başvuran *Mehmet Halit AKIN ve Büşra ŞENER’in*, “*Sosyal Medyanın Destinasyon Tercihine Etkisi: Z Kuşağı Üzerine Bir Araştırma*” adlı çalışması değerlendirilerek aşağıdaki sonuca ulaşılmıştır.

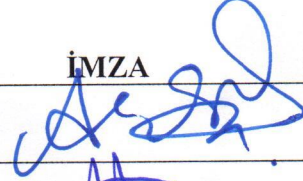
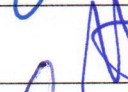
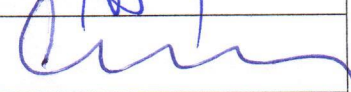



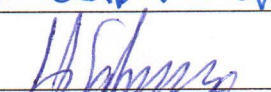

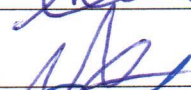


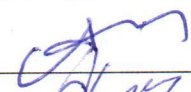
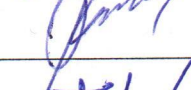
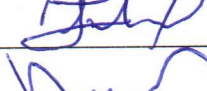
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30/05/2023

Projenin etik açıdan geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir.

Proje etik açıdan uygun bulunmamıştır.

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