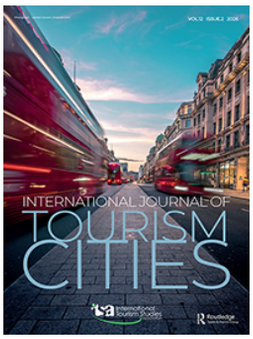

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Destination image dimensions shaping Generation Z's evaluation of tourism cities

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the key attributes that shape Generation Z's perceptions of urban tourism destinations. A literature review was conducted to map destination image–shaping factors, followed by a large-scale survey ($n = 2,427$) targeting Gen Z travellers. Sixteen city attributes identified in the literature were analysed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which resulted in five distinct destination image dimensions: physical readiness and material value, natural environment and safety, authenticity, experience intensity, and international reputation. Additional statistical analyses revealed how these factors vary across traveller profiles. The findings highlight Gen Z's strong emphasis on practical urban attributes such as accessibility, cleanliness, and value for money, while also confirming their interest in authentic experiences and environmental sustainability within tourism city contexts. The results further suggest that Generation Z evaluates tourism cities primarily through functional and experiential dimensions rather than through long-term emotional attachment or loyalty-oriented mechanisms. Interestingly, traditional destination image elements such as revisit intention and emotional attachment were found to be less relevant for this cohort. Three traveller segments were identified (Seasoned Green Seekers, Casual Nature Seekers, and Insightful Voyagers), each with distinct preferences and information behaviours. The study contributes to urban tourism research by demonstrating how destination image dimensions structure the evaluation of tourism cities among younger travellers and by highlighting the growing importance of experiential and symbolic urban attributes in destination evaluation. The results offer valuable insights for urban destination managers, city marketers, and tourism stakeholders seeking to engage this digitally native, value-conscious, and experience-driven generation.

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Destination image; Generation Z; good place attributes; factor analysis; cluster analysis

1. Introduction

Urban tourism has long been considered a significant component of human well-being, social interaction, and identity construction. In recent years, Generation Z (individuals born between 1995 and 2010) has emerged as a key consumer group in the tourism sector. Their distinct values, such as digital nativity, sustainability consciousness, and a strong preference for authentic experiences, challenge conventional marketing approaches and demand nuanced destination development strategies.

These shifts are particularly pronounced in the context of urban tourism. Tourism cities increasingly function as concentrated spaces of experience, lifestyle consumption, and symbolic value, where infrastructure quality, accessibility, safety, cultural vibrancy, and sustainability intersect (Konar et al., 2025). For younger travellers, cities are not only destinations but also temporary stages for identity expression, social interaction, and experience accumulation, making urban environments especially relevant for examining contemporary destination image formation (M. Sharma et al., 2025). At the same time, the strategic marketing and branding of tourism cities increasingly involves a dilemma between technological innovation, experiential quality, and the management of growing visitor pressures, particularly in smart and digitally mediated urban tourism contexts (Coca-Stefaniak, 2019).

Existing literature has addressed destination image extensively, highlighting its multidimensional nature and its relevance to tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and decision-making (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2025). However,

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most destination image models were conceptualised prior to the emergence of Generation Z and may therefore only partially reflect the values and behavioural patterns of younger travellers. Recent studies increasingly suggest that younger tourists evaluate destinations less through long-term loyalty-oriented mechanisms and more through functional, experiential, and symbolic destination attributes. Attributes such as affordability, environmental responsibility, authenticity, and immersive urban experiences appear to play an increasingly important role in how tourism cities are perceived and evaluated by this generation (Pompurová et al., 2025; Ramírez-Hurtado et al., 2024). In urban tourism contexts, these preferences are closely associated with city-specific characteristics such as accessibility, cleanliness, experiential diversity, nightlife, green spaces, and the international visibility of cities.

Recent contributions have further emphasised the specificities of urban tourism and Generation Z's travel behaviours. A qualitative study on Generation Z's preferences and participation in urban tourism experiences highlights the role of social media and innovative technologies in enhancing city destination appeal (Ramadania et al., 2025). Additionally, research examining the tourism experiences of Generation Z identifies shifts in travel motivations, information sources and service preferences that are particularly relevant for city settings (Seyfi et al., 2025). Critically, discussions on Gen Z and sustainable tourism underscore the need to understand environmental and social dimensions of urban tourism development. Furthermore, evidence on demographic influences such as residence and motivational differences points to nuanced patterns in how young travellers engage with urban destinations (Marques et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of research on destination image and Generation Z tourism behaviour, limited attention has been paid to how destination image dimensions are structured specifically in urban tourism contexts and how different groups of Generation Z travellers evaluate tourism cities. In particular, relatively little is known about how functional, experiential, environmental, and symbolic destination attributes interact in shaping younger travellers' perceptions of tourism cities.

This study seeks to bridge this conceptual and empirical gap by identifying and empirically examining the destination image attributes that shape Generation Z's perceptions of urban tourism destinations. Drawing on a PRISMA-based systematic literature review and large-scale quantitative data, the study aims to identify the key destination image dimensions associated with tourism city evaluation and to reveal distinct tourist segments among Generation Z travellers. The findings contribute to the theoretical refinement of destination image research in urban tourism contexts while also offering actionable insights for urban destination managers and tourism city stakeholders seeking to design experiences and communication strategies that resonate with younger generations.

2. Literature review

In tourism research, the perception of a destination is most conceptualised through the construct of destination image. Destination image refers to the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that tourists hold about a place (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gartner, 1994). The literature typically distinguishes between three interrelated components of destination image: the cognitive component (knowledge and beliefs about destination attributes), the affective component (emotional responses towards the destination), and the conative component (behavioural intentions such as visitation or recommendation) (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gartner, 1994). Within this framework, tourists' perceptions of destinations are largely shaped by cognitive evaluations of specific attributes, such as accessibility, infrastructure, safety, cultural attractions, and environmental quality. Identifying these attributes is therefore essential for understanding how potential visitors evaluate urban tourism destinations.

To reveal the most important factors that affect the perception of tourism destinations, a systematic literature review has been conducted, following the PRISMA guideline (Page et al., 2021).

Figure 1 summarises the steps of the systematic literature review (SLR). During the screening process, 34 papers were selected to review the full content. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of papers *with general insights* (gP1–gP24) analysed during the SLR. Both literature reviews and empirical analyses were considered. In terms of region, papers are analysed from the USA, Europe, Asia and Australia. The reviewed studies indicate that destination image formation in tourism cities is influenced by a combination of functional, environmental, experiential, and symbolic destination attributes. Based on recurring themes identified across the literature, the analysed destination attributes were grouped

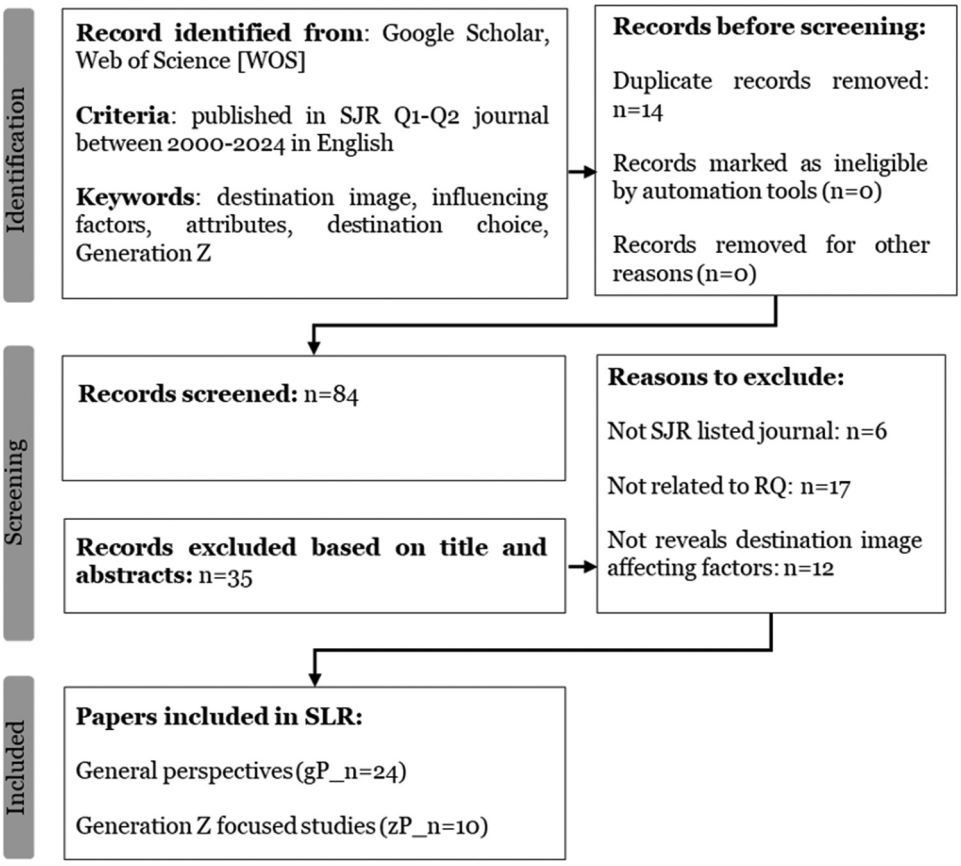

Figure 1. Three steps of the SLR based on PRISMA guidelines – *modified by the authors*. Papers with general insights on destination image are coded as: gP_number; while papers focusing on Gen Z perspectives are coded as: zP_number. Source: Authors' own editing following the PRISMA guideline (Page et al., 2021).

into four broader thematic categories (Sections 1.1–1.4). These thematic groups do not represent fixed destination image dimensions but rather conceptual clusters that frequently appear in destination image research and provide a structured framework for interpreting the findings of the systematic literature review.

2.1. Readiness for tourism

A substantial stream of destination image research emphasises the importance of functional and infrastructural destination attributes in shaping tourists' cognitive evaluations of tourism cities. In urban tourism contexts, these attributes are particularly relevant because cities are often evaluated through their accessibility, mobility systems, safety, and service readiness. Scholars highlight (Ramadhani et al., 2024; Tosun et al., 2015) that infrastructure readiness and *ease of accessibility* are major determinants of destination image. In this context, ease of accessibility refers to the availability and quality of transport connections, urban mobility, and the ease with which tourists can reach and navigate within a destination. Destinations that are *easy to navigate* are more positively perceived by tourists. Fyall and Garrod (2020) also confirm that *well-developed infrastructure* provides a competitive edge. They emphasise that technological readiness (e.g., digital information sources, tourism websites, apps) improves information dissemination and enhances satisfaction. Zhang et al. (2023) examined user-generated content (UGC) and found that social media visuals can significantly boost a destination's attractiveness and create a distinct 'brand personality.'

Security is a key concern for tourists (Naoi, 2003). Beyond physical safety, hygiene factors (Dalle Nogare & Scuderi, 2024; Fotiadis et al., 2021) are crucial – especially post-Covid. Scholars (Carvalho, 2022; Ćulić et al., 2021) note that tourists feel stronger emotional attachment ('it would be nice to live here') when safety

Table 1. Summary of papers included in SLR.

No.	Reference	Focus on	Method	Region
gP1	Ali et al. (2021)	the role of destination image between the destination attractiveness and tourism attachment	Survey ($n = 300$)	Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE)
gP2	Carvalho (2022)	the relationship between risk perception, past visitation and the intention to visit a tourist destination	Survey ($n = 714$)	Portugal
gP3	Chen and Chen (2010)	the impact of experience quality on perceived value, satisfaction, and tourists' future behavioral intentions in heritage tourism	Survey ($n = 447$)	Tainan, Taiwan
gP4	Chu et al. (2022)	studies on four key areas: the structure of destination image, its measurement and branding, influencing factors, and its impact on tourists' behavior	Systematic Literature Review	*Not specified geographical scope.*
gP5	Ćulić et al. (2021)	the influence of destination attractiveness factors (such as amenities, infrastructure, hospitality, and safety) on destination image and revisit intentions	Survey ($n = 2030$)	South Korea
gP6	Dalle Nogare and Scuderi (2024)	the role of security and health safety during tourism-related travels in the light of Covid-19 pandemic	Survey ($n = N/D$)	Trentino, Italy
gP7	Dickinger and Lalicic (2016)	on the emotional bond between tourist and tourist destination ('brand personality')	Survey ($n = 599$), Content analysis (online reviews = 1104)	Vienna, Austria
gP8	Ekinci and Hosany (2006)	on brand personality in terms of tourist destinations	Survey ($n = 250$)	United Kingdom (UK)
gP9	Fyall and Garrod (2020)	the importance of holistic destination management considering the well-being of tourists and residents, urban planning (infrastructural background), and the use of technology	Systematic Literature Review	*Not specified geographical scope.*
gP10	Hajjaj et al. (2024)	the impact analysis of investments in infrastructure and hospitality	Qualitative longitudinal research approach	Qatar
gP11	Henkel et al. (2006)	the value of cultural sightseeing, beaches, and food when considering spaces as a tourist destination	Survey ($n = 422$)	Thailand
gP12	Hosseini et al. (2023)	the impacts of memorable tourism experiences, emotional bond in destination image-shaping	Systematic Literature Review	Focus: China, USA, Australis
gP13	Kim et al. (2019)	on attributes like local attractions that influence tourist satisfaction, behavior and destination image	Content analysis of online reviews	*Not specified geographical scope.*
gP14	Kirillova and Lehto (2015)	on the aesthetic distance – how different the destination feels compared to tourists' home environments – shaping satisfaction and the perception of beauty	Survey ($n = 441$)	Grand Canyon, Catskill Mountains (USA), Ooty (India), Cayman Islands. Chicago, New Orleans (USA) London (UK), and Shanghai (China)
gP15	Lichrou et al. (2008)	the role of culture, history, and symbolic meanings in constructing tourist experiences	Conceptual analysis	*Not specified geographical scope.*
gP16	Moyle et al. (2013)	the economic, environmental, and sociocultural impacts of tourism from the visitors' perspective	Survey ($n = 518$)	Bruny Island (Tasmania), Magnetic Island (Queensland), Australia
gP17	Naoi (2003)	key image shaping factors include a sense of safety, authenticity, and unique characteristics	Survey ($n = 139$)	Tokyo, Japan
gP18	Pearce and Schänzel (2013)	the need for destination management to maintain the destination's image	Focus groups (subjects $n = 61$)	New Zealand
gP19	Ramadhani et al. (2024)	on natural attractions as the most positively perceived aspect, while infrastructure received the least positive feedback, indicating a disparity in tourist satisfaction	Multiclass Text Analysis, Network Analysis, Sentiment Analysis	Bali, Indonesia
gP20	Scuotto et al. (2024)	how destination personality and environmental knowledge management (EKM) influence tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions	Survey ($n = 2222$)	China
gP21	Snepenger et al. (2007)	attractions, dining venues, and transportation hubs and related tourism preferences	Survey ($n = 311$)	Bozeman, Montana, USA

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

No.	Reference	Focus on	Method	Region
gP22	Teles et al. (2024)	visitors' reviews on TripAdvisor to understand their perceptions	Content analysis	Nazaré, Portugal
gP23	Tosun et al. (2015)	the relationships between destination service quality, destination affective image, and revisit intention	Survey ($n = 539$)	Alanya, Turkey
gP24	Zhang et al. (2023)	user-generated photographs that significantly contribute to the development of a destination's image	Self-report, interviews, Text and photo analysis ($n = 39117$)	Beijing, China

Source: Authors' own editing.

is assured, which also fosters return intentions. Cleanliness and well-maintained surroundings also contribute greatly to a destination's appeal (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015; Ramadhani et al., 2024).

Tosun et al. (2015) found that language skills and *openness of locals* and staff enhance positive destination perceptions, boosting revisit intentions and overall image. Kim et al. (2019) similarly emphasise that local hospitality shapes loyalty and emotional response. Other scholars (Lichrou et al., 2008; Snepenger et al., 2007) highlight the role of hospitable locals in creating inclusive environments that raise tourist satisfaction. Overall, the literature suggests that functional readiness represents a core cognitive component of destination image formation, particularly in tourism city environments where accessibility, safety, mobility, and infrastructural quality strongly influence tourists' evaluations.

2.2. Economic and cultural value

Another major theme in destination image research concerns the perceived economic and cultural value of tourism destinations. Previous studies suggest that tourists evaluate destinations not only through functional quality but also through the perceived balance between economic affordability and cultural distinctiveness. One of the most frequently appeared aspects is the economic value of the destination in terms of tourism-related services. High-quality services play an essential role in shaping tourist's perceptions. Chen and Chen (2010) found that tourists seeking high-quality experiences at a reasonable price, and their satisfaction is influenced by how they feel about the activities offered by a tourism service provider. Related to this, scholars (Kim et al., 2019; Pearce & Schänzel, 2013) emphasise the strong relevance of providing *good value for money* which increases the *chances of revisits*. *Unique atmosphere* is also a key actor that influences tourists' perceptions (Chu et al., 2022; Hajjaj et al., 2024). Lichrou et al. (2008) and Naoi (2003) argue that unusual local traditions play a significant role in positive atmosphere perceptions. Scuotto et al. (2024) stress that the friendly, exciting or sophisticated destination personality positively affect tourists' satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

2.3. Popularity and emotional bond

Destination image research also highlights the role of symbolic visibility, experiential intensity, and emotional responses in shaping tourists' evaluations of destinations. Particularly in urban tourism contexts, cities increasingly compete through global visibility and symbolic attractiveness. Based on several findings, *high number of tourists* also improves the appealing nature of a destination, contributing to the higher level of comfortability of visitors (Ali et al., 2021; Pearce & Schänzel, 2013). Dickinger and Lalicic (2016) noted that *international popularity* is also a critical factor in destination image. Choi and Choi (2019) added to this that experiential aspects of tourism (unique, personalised experiences) improve satisfaction through the decreasing attractivity of mass tourism services. Henkel et al. (2006) highlighted that a *vibrant nightlife* scene enhances the overall destination image, especially among international tourists. In relation to this, the global reputation of a destination significantly increases its prestige and acceptance (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Several studies (Hosseini et al., 2023; Teles et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023) stress that positive experiences during tourism-related activities significantly enhance the overall destination perception and consumer loyalty. Related to this, Snepenger et al. (2007) highlighted that *interactions with locals* enhance

tourism experience and contributes to a stronger *emotional bond* between tourists and the destination. Research proved that culturally rich surroundings have a significant impact on the emotional bond between the traveller and the destination. Li et al. (2024) confirmed that emotional attachment to a destination improves recommendation rates.

2.4. Sustainability and uniqueness

Environmental sustainability and spatial uniqueness have become increasingly important dimensions of destination image research, particularly in relation to younger and environmentally conscious traveller segments. Tourism cities are increasingly expected to combine environmental quality with distinctive urban identity and aesthetic appeal. Aesthetic surrounding is also a key factor that improves tourist destination image (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015). It includes pleasing environmental features like well-maintained, *large number of green spaces*, or built superior aesthetic qualities (e.g., heritage sites, medieval city centres, etc.) and contribute together to a *unique atmosphere* and thus long-lasting positive impressions. Moyle et al. (2013) discuss environmental values and conservation efforts in tourism perceptions. Research suggests that the strong demonstration (e.g., through marketing activities) of preserving natural sources highly improves destination image. Ramadhani et al. (2024) found that natural tourism attractions receive the most positive feedback from tourists (based on a case study of Bali). However, infrastructural issues decrease their positive impacts on destination image. Fyall and Garrod (2020) highlighted in their research that environmental sustainability (e.g., efforts against climate change) shapes destination perceptions.

2.5. Generation Z travellers – evidence from the literature

Recent tourism research increasingly suggests that Generation Z evaluates destinations differently from previous generations due to its stronger digital orientation, environmental awareness, and preference for authentic and experience-based consumption. These characteristics make Generation Z particularly relevant for contemporary urban tourism research. Table 2 summarises the most important characteristics of papers *with Gen Z focus* analysed during the SLR (zP1-10). Majority of papers are from Asia and Europe. Only empirical research is considered in this phase.

Generation Z's travel decisions are highly influenced by a combination of cultural (I. Sharma et al., 2024; Tănase et al., 2023) social-media-based (Fong et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023), technological (Zhu et al., 2025)

Table 2. Summary of papers included in SLR.

No.	Reference	Focus on	Method	Region
zP1	Chang et al. (2024)	how Gen Z tourists' emotions are influenced by destination social responsibility (DSR)	Survey ($n = 336$)	Malaysia
zP2	Fong et al. (2024)	impacts of the social media platforms (TikTok) on destination choice	Survey ($n = 201$)	Malaysia
zP3	Liu et al. (2023)	impacts of social media marketing on Gen Z's travel preferences and willingness to pay for destinations	Survey ($n = 516$)	Zhejiang and Shanghai, China
zP4	Morrone et al. (2024)	how cleanliness, digitalization, and sustainability affect overall satisfaction during traveling	Survey ($n = 221$)	Italy
zP5	Nowacki et al. (2023)	impact analysis of green destination image on Gen Z's intention to visit	Survey ($n = 415$)	Poland, India
zP6	Pompurová et al. (2024)	impact analysis of variables like natural resources, historical architecture, and local cuisine on destination image	Survey (n1 = 1046, n2 = 802)	Slovakia, Czechia
zP7	Prayag et al. (2022)	proving that Gen Z tourists show stronger pro-environmental attitudes compared to other generational cohorts but often engage in fewer sustainability practices.	Survey ($n = 615$)	New Zealand
zP8	I. Sharma et al. (2024)	how creative tourist experiences (CTE) influence Gen Z tourists' intentions to recommend creative destinations	Survey ($n = 413$)	India
zP9	Tănase et al. (2023)	the preferences of Gen Z students in terms of rural tourism, local gastronomy and heritage tourism	Survey ($n = 280$)	Bucharest, Romania
zP10	Zhu et al. (2025)	VR/AR solutions in tourism-related consumption and destination choice	Survey ($n = 509$)	N/D

Source: Authors' own editing.

and environmental (Chang et al., 2024; Nowacki et al., 2023; Pompurová et al., 2024; Prayag et al., 2022) factors. *Cleanliness*, *digitalization* (e.g., digital readiness of tourism service providers, digital information sources) are important factors for the segment when selecting accommodation or other tourism services (Morrone et al., 2024). Scholars (Fong et al., 2024) also addressed that social media platform (e.g., due to the high credibility of social media influencers) might have a significant impact on destination image-shaping. Gen Z travellers prefer destinations with a stronger *green image and visible sustainable practices* (Chang et al., 2024). Gen Z is more likely to engage in eco-conscious activities (e.g., buying local food) compared to other generations (Prayag et al., 2022). Nowacki et al. (2023) also noted that a green destination image significantly affects visit intentions and might increase willingness to pay during their stay. A Gen Z tourist values off-the-beaten-track destinations that offer *uniqueness*, cultural and local attractions (e.g., tangible elements – heritage tourism; intangible – customs and gastronomy) (Tănase et al., 2023). In addition, authentic tourist experiences can lead to positive recommendation intentions, as suggested by I. Sharma et al. (2024). Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that Generation Z's destination evaluations are shaped by a combination of technological readiness, environmental sustainability, authenticity, and experiential diversity. However, previous studies have mainly focused on isolated destination attributes, while limited attention has been paid to how these attributes jointly structure destination image perceptions in tourism city contexts.

2.6. Research gap

Previous destination image studies have identified several attributes that influence how tourists evaluate destinations, including accessibility, infrastructure, safety, authenticity, sustainability, and experiential diversity (Table 3). However, the existing literature remains fragmented in several important respects. Prior studies have typically examined individual destination attributes separately, while limited attention has been paid to how these attributes are structured into broader destination image dimensions. Despite the growing importance of Generation Z in urban tourism markets, relatively few studies have explored how younger travellers jointly evaluate functional, experiential, environmental, and symbolic destination attributes. Furthermore, the majority of previous studies have focused on general tourism contexts rather than specifically examining tourism city environments characterised by high experiential density, symbolic visibility, and urban lifestyle consumption. Based on the SLR, the perception of a tourist destination appears to be shaped by a combination of infrastructural readiness, economic and cultural value, destination vitality, environmental quality, and symbolic atmosphere. These dimensions may jointly contribute to tourists' evaluations of 'good places' in urban tourism contexts.

Accordingly, several important research gaps can be identified in the existing literature:

Table 3. Summary of variables identified in the general insights and their role in GenZ-related papers.

Code	Image-shaping variable	GenZ	Reference
V1	Ease of accessibility		
V2	Good value for money tourism services (VFM)		
V3	Well-developed infrastructure		
V4	Availability of digital information sources (e.g., website, application)	X	Morrone et al. (2024)
V5	High security		
V6	Heavily visited by tourists		
V7	Cleanliness	X	Morrone et al. (2024)
V8	Unique atmosphere	X	Tănase et al. (2023), I. Sharma et al. (2024)
V9	Large number of green spaces (e.g., parks, forests, arboretum)	X	Chang et al. (2024), Prayag et al. (2022)
V10	Local hospitality		
V11	Easy to get around		
V12	Ability to inspire thoughts of "how nice it would be to live here" (emotional bond)		
V13	Variety of experiences	X	Tănase et al. (2023)
V14	Vibrant nightlife		
V15	Internationally popular		
V16	Ability to encourage revisits		

Source: Authors' own editing.

- Limited attention has been paid to how different destination attributes interact and jointly structure destination image perceptions in urban tourism contexts.
- The relative importance of functional, experiential, environmental, and symbolic destination attributes remains insufficiently explored among Generation Z travellers.
- Although previous studies have highlighted selected Gen Z-related factors such as sustainability, technology, and authenticity, limited empirical evidence exists regarding whether these represent the dominant dimensions of destination image formation among younger urban tourists.
- Existing destination image research has also paid relatively limited attention to the role of experiential intensity, international reputation, and symbolic urban visibility in shaping Generation Z's evaluations of tourism cities.

Building on these gaps, the aim of this study is to identify and empirically examine the destination image dimensions that shape Generation Z's perceptions of urban tourism destinations. More specifically, the study investigates how destination attributes are structured into broader evaluative dimensions and how different groups of Generation Z travellers perceive tourism cities.

In particular, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: *Which destination attributes are most relevant in shaping Generation Z's perceptions of urban tourism destinations?*

RQ2: *How can these attributes be grouped into broader dimensions of destination image through exploratory factor analysis?*

RQ3: *What distinct clusters of Generation Z tourists can be identified based on their evaluation of these attributes?*

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Based on the findings of the systematic literature review, a set of destination attributes was identified that may influence tourists' perceptions of urban tourism destinations. These attributes primarily represent the cognitive component of destination image, which reflects tourists' beliefs and evaluations regarding specific characteristics of a destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The attributes included in the survey were therefore derived directly from the literature review and were used to explore how Generation Z evaluates urban tourism destinations. To explore these destination image dimensions in urban tourism contexts, an online survey was conducted among Hungarian respondents belonging to Generation Z ($n = 2589$). This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. According to national regulations and institutional guidelines, formal ethical approval was not required for this type of anonymous, non-invasive survey-based research involving adult participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, the anonymous nature of data collection, and their right to withdraw at any time. Consent was obtained electronically before completing the questionnaire. A pilot fieldwork was also carried out ($n = 30$) to identify possible errors (e.g., logical inconsistencies, typos) to improve reliability. The questionnaire consists of 9 structured and 4 open questions. The statistical analysis has been performed using IBM SPSS version 25 (Licence provided by the university). This paper focuses on the following insights:

(1) *Experience with tourism destinations*: Having a positively perceived tourism destination on the mental map was used as a screening condition for participation in the research. The screening condition resulted in a reduction in the number of subjects participating in the study ($n = 2427$).

Table 4. Destination attributes included in the analysis ('*good place*' attributes).

Code	Destination attribute
V1	Ease of accessibility
V2	Good value for money tourism services (VFM)
V3	Well-developed infrastructure
V4	Availability of digital information sources (e.g., website, application)
V5	High security
V6	Heavily visited by tourists
V7	Cleanliness
V8	Unique atmosphere
V9	Large number of green spaces (e.g., parks, forests, arboretum)
V10	Local hospitality
V11	Easy to get around
V12	Ability to inspire thoughts of 'how nice it would be to live here' (emotional bond)
V13	Variety of experiences
V14	Vibrant nightlife
V15	Internationally popular
V16	Ability to encourage revisits

Source: Authors' own editing, based on SLR and the empirical research design.

(2) Attributes that might affect destination image and choice: a total of 16 destination attributes were identified based on the systematic literature review and included in the questionnaire to examine their relevance in shaping Generation Z tourists' perceptions (see Table 4).
(3) *Travel frequency*: it was measured on a Likert scale (1-5 where 5 is the highest freq.).
(4) *Preferred information sources*: 10 variables (family and relatives, previous travel experience, social media, internet advertisements, service provider newsletters, television, radio advertisements, print media advertising, billboards, posters, travel reviews, information from residents) were tested to reveal the significance of information sources/references in destination image creation.
(5) *Socio-demographic variables*: basic characteristics were measured (e.g., gender, age, education, place of residence) to analyse significant differences.

3.2. Data analysis

Table 4 presents the 16 destination attributes (coded as V1–V16) selected for the analysis based on the findings of the systematic literature review.

These attributes were derived from the systematic literature review and represent key cognitive components of destination image frequently discussed in tourism research (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The aim of the analysis is therefore not to test individual hypotheses, but to explore how these attributes are structured into broader latent dimensions shaping Generation Z tourists' perceptions of urban tourism destinations. During the analysis, a multi-step statistical analysis was conducted: a five-step factor analysis (data suitability, factor extraction, factor rotation, reliability tests and factor interpretation – *details in* Section 2.3) was followed by additional statistical analysis (details in Section 2.4) including Linear Regression Analysis (LRA), ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis tests and a K-means Cluster analysis.

3.3. Factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was applied to identify latent dimensions underlying the selected destination attributes. This method is widely used in tourism research to examine the structure of destination image by grouping related cognitive attributes into broader conceptual dimensions (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Because the study aims to explore the underlying structure of destination image attributes in an urban tourism context rather than confirm a previously established measurement model, exploratory factor analysis was considered the most appropriate analytical approach.

3.3.1. Step1: data suitability

First, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO[1]) test (correlation matrix) was employed to measure the suitability of data (Pallant, 2020). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity[2] validates the null hypothesis (variables are orthogonal, i.e., are unrelated and therefore unsuitable for the analysis (structure detection) (Ho, 2006). For the analysis,

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) has been performed to identify relationships between destination image-shaping variables ($n = 16$). EFA aims to identify relationships between variables and cluster similar ones into the same factor (Hair et al., 2006). EFA has been conducted with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reveal patterns in the dataset (Pallant, 2020).

3.3.2. Step2: data extraction

It was made to determine the least number of factors (Factor extraction) that can be used to best represent the correlations among variables. During PCA, Kaiser's Criterion (Eigenvalue Criterion[3]) and Scree Test[4] was used to determine the no. of initial unrotated factors to be extracted (Shrestha, 2021).

3.3.3. Step3: factor rotation

Factors might be difficult to interpret due to significant cross loadings. To avoid this, factor rotation should be checked (Hair et al., 2006). During the analysis, the varimax method of orthogonal factor rotation was used as suggested by Kaiser (1964) to minimise the no. of variables with high loadings on each factor.

3.3.4. Step4: reliability tests

The internal consistency is confirmed by calculating Cronbach's alpha to test the instrument accuracy and reliability (Shrestha, 2020). The adequate threshold value for Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.7. The Convergent Validity is established when Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is ≥0.5 (Hair et al., 2006) and Composite Reliability (CR) ≥0.7 (Shrestha, 2021).

3.3.5. Step5: factor interpretation

Factor interpretation: Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis, the extracted factors were interpreted as broader dimensions of destination image by grouping related destination attributes.

3.4. Additional statistics

- *t-test and Linear Regression Analysis (LRA)*: To a better understanding of factor natures, t-test has been employed to reveal differences based on subject's sociodemographic variables. To explore the relationship between travel frequency and factor ratings, a Linear Regression Analysis was conducted for each of the identified factors. Travel frequency was used as the independent variable, while the factor scores were treated as the dependent variables.
- *ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and Kruskal-Wallis tests*: calculations were performed to determine the role of information sources preferred by subjects in the destination image.
- *Cluster analysis*: In addition to the factor analysis, a cluster analysis has also been conducted to reveal different groups (clusters) of respondents based on how they relate to these factors. The cluster analysis aims to segment respondents into homogeneous groups according to their factor scores (Elliott, 2007), providing insights into distinct tourist profiles. For this, K-means clustering was employed.

4. Results

4.1. Factor analysis

4.1.1. Step 1: data suitability

The correlation matrix confirms there are sufficient correlations among variables. Determinant Score (DS = 0.0063 > 0.00001) indicates that there is an absence of multicollinearity. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value (KMO = 0.826 > 0.6) indicates that sampling is adequate for EFA. Bartlett's test of Sphericity is highly significant at $p < 0.001$ which shows that the correlation matrix has significant correlations among at least some of the variables. Test value is 637.65 and an associated degree of significance is less than 0.0001, which proves that the variables are not orthogonal. The significant value < 0.05 indicates that dataset is suitable for factor analysis. Overall, these indicators confirm that the dataset is appropriate for identifying latent structures among the destination attributes examined in the study.

4.1.2. Step 2: factor extraction

Table 5 demonstrates the Eigenvalues and Total Variances Explained resulted by PCA. Before extraction, 16 components are identified within the data set. After extraction and rotation, there are five components within the data set for the eigenvalue >1. The five factors are extracted, accounting for a combined 65% of the total variance. It is suggested that the proportion of the total variance explained by the retained factors should be at least 50%. The results therefore indicate a strong underlying factor structure among the examined destination attributes, suggesting that several attributes cluster together into broader dimensions of destination image. The result shows that 65% common variance shared by the 16 variables can be accounted for by five factors. This is reflected in the KMO value of 0.826, which is considered good and indicates that factor analysis is appropriate for these variables. This initial solution suggests that the final solution will extract no more than five factors. The first component has explained 23.90% of the Total Variance with Eigenvalue 3.83. The second component has explained 10.14% variance with Eigenvalue 1.62. The third component has explained 8.70% variance with Eigenvalue 1.39. The fourth component has explained 6.43% variance with Eigenvalue 1.03, and the fifth component has explained 5.95% variance with Eigenvalue 0.95. Together, the five extracted factors explain a substantial proportion of the total variance, indicating that the selected destination attributes can be meaningfully interpreted as broader dimensions shaping tourists' perceptions of urban destinations.

4.1.3. Step 3: factor rotation

The extraction method based on PCA was followed by an orthogonal rotation, specifically varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation. The rotation simplifies the structure of the factors, making the interpretation clearer (Ho, 2006). Table 6 presents the factor loadings and communalities after extraction. The factor loadings indicate the strength of the relationship between variables. Variables with high loadings (>0.40) are considered strongly representative of a particular factor. The communalities reflect the amount of common variance explained by the factors, providing insight into how much of the variance in each variable is shared. The rotated solution reveals five interpretable factors that represent distinct dimensions of destination image. Each factor groups together attributes that jointly describe how Generation Z evaluates different aspects of urban tourism destinations.

Factor1 can be labelled as '*Physical readiness and material value*', containing attributes as Ease of accessibility (FL = 0.73), VFM (FL = 0.68) and Well-developed infrastructure (FL = 0.71). Factor1 explains 23.90% of the Total Variance with an Eigenvalue of 3.83. This dimension reflects the functional readiness of a destination from the visitor's perspective. Accessibility, infrastructure quality, and value for money collectively represent the practical conditions that enable tourism experiences. Similar functional attributes

Table 5. Results of PCA.

	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings		
Component	Total	% of variance	Cum. %	Total	% of variance	Cum. %
1	**3.83**	23.90%	23.90%	3.83	23.90%	23.90%
2	**1.62**	10.14%	34.04%	1.62	10.14%	34.04%
3	**1.39**	8.70%	42.74%	1.39	8.70%	42.74%
4	**1.03**	6.43%	49.17%	1.03	6.43%	49.17%
5	**0.95**	5.95.%	55.12%	0.95	5.95.%	55.12%
6	0.88	5.52%	60.64%	3.83	23.90%	23.90%
7	0.82	5.14%	65.78%			
8	0.75	4.69%	70.47%			
9	0.70	4.40%	47.87%			
10	0.66	4.10%	78.97%			
11	0.61	3.81%	82.78%			
12	0.58	3.63%	86.41%			
13	0.54	3.35%	89.76%			
14	0.50	3.12%	92.88%			
15	0.48	2.98%	95.86%			
16	0.44	2.77%	98.63%			

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA).
Cum. means cumulative.
Source: Authors' own editing.

Table 6. Factor Loadings and Communalities.

Factors		Variable code	Diagonal anti-image correlation	Communality after extraction[a]	Mean	SD	Factor loading (FL)
Items	**Factor 1: Physical readiness and material value**						
1	Ease of accessibility	V1	0.65	0.73	4.20	0.80	0.73
2	Good value for money tourism services (VFM)	V2	0.60	0.68	4.10	0.75	0.68
3	Well-developed infrastructure	V3	0.64	0.71	4.30	0.77	0.71
Items	**Factor 2: Natural environment and physical safety**						
1	Cleanliness	V7	0.63	0.72	4.50	0.82	0.72
2	Large number of green spaces (e.g., parks, forests, arboretum)	V9	0.61	0.69	4.40	0.78	0.69
3	High security	V5	0.62	0.67	4.20	0.76	0.67
Items	**Factor 3: Authenticity**						
1	Unique atmosphere	V8	0.68	0.78	4.30	0.85	0.78
2	Local hospitality	V10	0.64	0.70	4.40	0.82	0.70
Items	**Factor 4: Experience intensity**						
1	Vibrant nightlife	V14	0.67	0.74	4.00	0.79	0.74
2	Variety of experiences	V13	0.62	0.65	4.10	0.77	0.65
Items	**Factor 5: International reputation**						
1	Internationally popular	V15	0.70	0.77	4.30	0.80	0.77

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA) Rotation.
Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Source: Authors' own editing.
[a]The communalities reflect the proportion of variance in each variable explained by the factors (e.g., the communality of Ease of accessibility is 0.65, meaning that 65% of the variance in this variable is shared with the retained factors).

have frequently been identified as key components of the cognitive dimension of destination image in previous tourism studies (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

Factor2 is labelled '*Natural environment and physical safety*' which includes variables like Cleanliness (FL = 0.72), Large number of green spaces (FL = 0.69) and High security (FL = 0.67). Factor2 explains 10.4% of the Total Variance with an Eigenvalue of 1.62. This factor highlights the importance of environmental quality and perceived safety in shaping tourists' evaluations of destinations. These attributes contribute to the perceived comfort and well-being of visitors and therefore represent an important element of destination attractiveness.

Factor3 can be described as '*Authenticity*' with variables like Unique atmosphere (FL = 0.78) and Local hospitality (FL = 0.70). Factor3 explains 8.70% of the Total Variance with an Eigenvalue of 1.39. The attributes grouped within this factor capture the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of destination image. Authentic atmosphere and interactions with hospitable locals can strengthen emotional attachment to destinations and enhance the perceived uniqueness of tourism experiences.

Factor4 is titled as '*Experience intensity*' which consists of Vibrant nightlife (FL = 0.74) and Variety of experiences (FL = 0.65). This dimension reflects the experiential richness and activity intensity of urban destinations. A wide range of tourism activities combined with vibrant nightlife can increase the perceived attractiveness of destinations, particularly among younger travellers seeking diverse and dynamic experiences. Factor4 explains 6.43% of the Total Variance with an Eigenvalue of 1.03. This dimension reflects the experiential richness of urban destinations. A wide range of tourism activities combined with a vibrant nightlife can increase the perceived attractiveness of destinations, particularly among younger travellers seeking diverse and dynamic experiences.

Factor5 is defined as '*International reputation*' representing the variable Internationally popular (FL = 0.77). Factor5 explains 5.95% of the Total Variance with an Eigenvalue of 0.95. Although this factor contains a single variable, it represents an important symbolic dimension of destination image, reflecting the perceived prestige and global recognition of a destination. Previous studies have also emphasised that international reputation can significantly influence tourists' destination choices.

4.1.4. Step 4: reliability tests

Table 7 represents a good reliability of the analysis. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the factors with total scale reliability is >0.7. It shows that the variables exhibit a correlation with their component grouping

Table 7. Reliability tests (AVE, CR).

Constructs *Thresholds*	Reliability (Cronbach's alfa) *α > 0.7*	CR *CR > 0.7*	AVE *AVE > 0.5*
Factor 1: *Physical readiness and material value*	0.979	0.866	0.508
Factor 2: *Natural environment and physical safety*	0.978	0.871	0.509
Factor 3: *Authenticity*	0.964	0.875	0.574
Factor 4: *Experience intensity*	0.942	0.796	0.488
Factor5: International reputation	N/D (only one variable)	N/D (only one variable)	N/D (only one variable)

Source: Authors' own editing.

and thus they are internally consistent. The AVE values are 0.508, 0.509, 0.574, 0.488, respectively. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE ≥ 0.5 confirms the convergent validity and all the AVE values are greater than 0.5, except for Factor 4, which is slightly below the threshold. Nevertheless, the AVE value of Factor 4 remains close to the recommended threshold and therefore still provides acceptable evidence of convergent validity. The Composite Reliability value for components is 0.866, 0.871, 0.875, 0.796, respectively. In the case of Factor 5, despite containing only one variable and having an eigenvalue close to the conventional threshold, the factor was retained because international reputation emerged as a conceptually meaningful and theoretically relevant symbolic dimension of destination image.

The factor analysis therefore revealed five interpretable dimensions of destination image that describe how Generation Z evaluates urban tourism destinations. These factors were subsequently used in additional statistical analyses to explore their relationships with travel behaviour and information sources.

4.2. Additional statistics

Table 8 summarises the results of the t-test and the LRA. The results indicate several statistically significant differences in how the identified destination image dimensions are perceived across respondents.

The ANOVA results (Table 9) indicate that different destination image dimensions are associated with different information sources. Personal sources such as family members and previous travel experience influence the perception of functional destination attributes, while digital sources such as social media and online reviews play a stronger role in shaping experiential aspects of destination image among Generation Z travellers. These findings suggest that Generation Z relies on a hybrid information environment when evaluating tourism cities, combining interpersonal recommendations with digitally mediated tourism content. The results also indicate that different dimensions of destination image may be shaped through different communication channels.

Following these, a K-means cluster analysis has been conducted to reveal further characteristics of factors along with subjects' attributes and preferred information sources. A positive value indicates a preference or importance placed on that factor, whereas a negative value indicates

Table 8. Additional factor characteristics: differences based on gender and travel frequency.

Factor	t-test results and sig. level	Interpretation	Regression coe. (β) and sig. level	Interpretation
	Gender differences		Travel frequency	
Factor 1 – Physical readiness and material value	$t = 11.792$ ($p < 0.001$)	*Male respondent* rated this factor significantly higher than Female subjects.	$\beta = -0.315$ ($p < 0.05$)	*Negative trend*: Factor1 is less important among frequent travelers.
Factor 2 – Natural environment and physical safety	$t = 5.543$ ($p < 0.001$)	*Male respondents* rated this factor significantly higher than Female subjects.	$\beta = -0.002$ ($p = 0.913$)	*No significant differences.*
Factor 3 – Authenticity	$t = 2.062$ ($p < 0.001$)	*Male respondents* rated this factor somewhat higher than Female subjects.	$\beta = 0.044$ ($p < 0.05$)	*Positive trend*: Factor3 is more pronounced among frequent travelers.
Factor 4 – Experience intensity	$t = 2.571$ ($p < 0.001$)	*Male respondent* rated this factor higher, although the difference was smaller, it was still significant.	$\beta = 0.131$ ($p < 0.05$)	*Positive trend*: Factor4 is more pronounced among frequent travelers.
Factor 5 – International reputation	$t = -0.109$ ($p < 0.001$)	*No significant difference* was found based on gender.	$\beta = 0.047$ ($p < 0.05$)	*Slight positive trend*: Factor5 is more pronounced among frequent travelers.

Source: Authors' own editing.

Table 9. Additional factor characteristics (the role of different information sources along with the factors constructed).

Factor	Information source	F-statistics and significance level
Factor 1 – **Physical readiness and material value**	Family and relatives	$F = 18.76$, $p < 0.05$
	Previous travel experience	$F = 31.40$, $p < 0.05$
	Billboards	$F = 19.46$, $p < 0.05$
	Travel reviews	$F = 23.42$, $p < 0.05$
Factor 2 – **Natural environment and physical safety**	Online advertisements	$F = 17.27$; $p < 0.05$
Factor 3 – **Authenticity**	Information from residents	$F = 6.29$, $p < 0.05$
Factor 4 – **Experience intensity**	Social media	$F = 35.63$, $p < 0.05$
Factor 5 – **International reputation**	Newsletters	$F = 17.33$, $p < 0.05$

Source: Authors' own editing.

a lack of emphasis. The cluster centres represent the average factor scores for each group to interpret the primary characteristics of each cluster. Table 10 presents the characteristics of the three clusters identified through K-means clustering. Each cluster is described based on demographic attributes, factor importance ratings, and information source preferences. The table highlights key distinctions among the clusters regarding their preferences for destination attributes and sources of information.

Overall, the cluster analysis demonstrates that Generation Z travellers are not a homogeneous segment but differ substantially in terms of how they evaluate destination image dimensions and which information sources influence their tourism perceptions.

5. Discussion

5.1. Implications for urban tourism research

This study applied a PRISMA-based systematic literature review ($n = 34$) and a large-scale survey ($n = 2427$) to identify the destination attributes that shape Generation Z's perceptions. The results provide empirical evidence on how *cognitive destination attributes* are structured into broader destination image dimensions in an urban tourism context. *Practical attributes* such as accessibility, cleanliness, value for money, and vibrant nightlife emerged as key drivers of destination image. These findings reinforce earlier destination

Table 10. Cluster analysis – summary.

Aspect	Cluster1	Cluster2	Cluster3
Residence	Mainly **rural**	Mix of urban and rural	Mainly **urban**
Education	Mostly high school or undergraduate degrees	Various educational levels	Higher proportion with degrees
Participation in tourism-related education	*Low participation*	*Low participation*	**Higher participation**
Factor importances			
Factor 1 – **Physical readiness and material value**	Low importance (β = −0.836)	Average importance (β = 0.208)	**High importance** (β = 0.845)
Factor 2 – **Natural environment and physical safety**	**High importance (β = 0.284)**	**High importance (β = 0.623)**	Low importance (β = −0.783)
Factor 3 – **Authenticity**	Neutral (β = −0.050)	Neutral (β = −0.071)	Positive (β = 0.158)
Factor 4 – **Experience intensity**	Neutral (β = −0.032)	Neutral (β = −0.055)	**High importance (β = 0.314)**
Factor 5 – **International reputation**	Neutral (β = −0.001)	Neutral (β = −0.064)	Positive (β = 0.083)
Information sources			
Family and relatives	Moderate influence	Low influence	Moderate influence
Previous travel experience	**High influence**	Moderate influence	Moderate influence
Social media	**High influence**	Low influence	Moderate influence
Online advertisements	Moderate influence	Moderate influence	**High influence**
Newsletters	Moderate influence	Moderate influence	**High influence**
TV advertisements	Moderate influence	Moderate influence	Low influence
Printed media	Low influence	Moderate influence	Moderate influence
Billboards	**High influence**	Moderate influence	Moderate influence
Travel reviews	Moderate influence	Low influence	**High influence**
Information from residents	Low influence	Moderate influence	**High influence**
Name of the clusters	**Seasoned Green Seekers**	**Casual Nature Seekers**	**Insightful Voyagers**

Source: Authors' own editing.

image studies which emphasise the importance of functional attributes in shaping tourists' cognitive evaluations of destinations (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

Exploratory factor analysis revealed five destination image-shaping dimensions. The most influential was *physical readiness and material value* (23.9% of variance), emphasising Gen Z's focus on affordability and well-developed infrastructure. This result suggests that urban *destinations are primarily evaluated through their functional readiness*, highlighting the continued relevance of infrastructure and service quality in destination competitiveness. The *natural environment and safety* factor (10.1%) reflected the importance of cleanliness, green spaces, and personal security. This finding aligns with recent tourism research emphasising the role of environmental quality and perceived safety in destination attractiveness, particularly among younger travellers. *Authenticity* (8.7%) was shaped by local atmosphere and hospitality, aligning with Gen Z's desire for meaningful cultural experiences. Authenticity has increasingly been highlighted in tourism literature as a core element of experiential tourism and place-based identity construction. *Experience intensity* (6.4%) highlighted the appeal of nightlife and diverse activities. This dimension contributes to urban tourism research by emphasising experiential density as a key factor in how cities are evaluated as tourism destinations. Finally, *international reputation* (5.9%) underscored their interest in globally recognised, trend-worthy destinations. This dimension reflects the symbolic and reputational aspects of destination image, which are *particularly relevant in globally competitive tourism city environments*.

Regarding information sources, *social media* was the most influential, followed by travel reviews and even traditional tools like billboards suggesting a hybrid decision-making process. These findings confirm the strong role of digital platforms in destination image formation among Generation Z while also highlighting that traditional communication channels still contribute to tourism information search.

A cluster analysis identified *three Gen Z traveler types*: Seasoned Green Seekers, Casual Nature Seekers, and Insightful Voyagers. This segmentation *highlights substantial heterogeneity* within Generation Z travellers and supports recent calls for more nuanced generational models in tourism research.

From an *urban tourism research perspective*, these findings indicate a *shift away from loyalty-oriented destination image models toward a more situational and experience-based understanding of how tourism cities are evaluated by younger generations*. Rather than long-term emotional attachment, urban destinations appear to function as temporary experiential platforms where visitors seek diverse experiences, social interaction, and symbolic consumption.

The emergence of experience intensity and international reputation as distinct destination image dimensions is *particularly relevant for urban tourism theory*. Attributes such as nightlife, experiential diversity, and global visibility are often treated as secondary in destination image research; however, the present findings suggest that they represent central elements of urban tourism attractiveness for Generation Z. Furthermore, the identified cluster structure highlights substantial heterogeneity within Generation Z. The results therefore suggest that future urban tourism research should move beyond treating Generation Z as a homogeneous segment and instead explore how different experiential, environmental, and reputational attributes shape the preferences of specific subgroups within this generation.

5.2. Implications for practice in the management of tourism cities

In practical terms, the findings have value for destination marketers and tourism managers. For example, marketing strategies targeting this generation should emphasise affordability, convenience, and authentic experiences while leveraging both social media and user-generated content. The strong importance of physical readiness and material value indicates that urban tourism competitiveness among *Generation Z is strongly influenced by practical factors* such as accessibility, infrastructure quality, and value-for-money services. Investments in transport connectivity, pedestrian-friendly mobility systems, and transparent pricing strategies may therefore directly influence how cities are evaluated by young travellers. Additionally, destinations should prioritise cleanliness, safety, and environmentally friendly practices to align with Gen Z's values. The identification of the 'experience intensity' dimension suggests that cities may strengthen their *tourism attractiveness by supporting experiential diversity*, including nightlife, cultural events, temporary installations, and creative urban activities that enrich the experiential landscape of the city.

Moreover, the limited role of emotional attachment and revisit intention suggests that urban tourism marketing strategies may need to move beyond traditional loyalty-based approaches. Instead of focusing solely on long-term destination loyalty, *city tourism strategies may benefit from promoting episodic and shareable experiences* that generate immediate engagement and digital visibility.

Furthermore, employing K-means cluster analysis allowed us to identify three distinct segments within Generation Z travellers. *From a city management perspective*, these segments offer a practical basis for differentiated strategies. The segment '*Seasoned Green Seekers*' may respond most strongly to sustainability-oriented urban tourism strategies, including green spaces, environmentally responsible tourism infrastructure, and eco-conscious destination branding. The group '*Casual Nature Seekers*' may prefer accessible, comfortable, and safe tourism experiences with moderate levels of experiential complexity. '*Insightful Voyagers'*appear to be motivated primarily by urban vibrancy, cultural diversity, and internationally recognised tourism experiences, making them particularly responsive to global city narratives and experience-driven tourism marketing. Aligning marketing communication, experience design, and information channels with these segment-specific preferences can significantly improve the effectiveness of tourism city strategies targeting Generation Z.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how Generation Z evaluates urban tourism destinations by identifying the attributes that shape their perceptions of tourism cities. The results reveal five destination image dimensions that structure how younger travellers evaluate urban destinations. These dimensions (physical readiness and material value, natural environment and physical safety, authenticity, experience intensity, and international reputation) demonstrate that Generation Z evaluates tourism cities through a combination of practical, experiential, and symbolic attributes. The study also provides direct answers to the research questions formulated at the end of the literature review. *Regarding RQ1*, the study demonstrates that Generation Z primarily evaluates tourism cities through practical and experiential destination attributes, particularly accessibility, infrastructure quality, cleanliness, value for money, authenticity, and experiential diversity. *Regarding RQ2*, exploratory factor analysis revealed that these attributes can be grouped into five broader destination image dimensions: physical readiness and material value, natural environment and physical safety, authenticity, experience intensity, and international reputation. *Regarding RQ3*, the cluster analysis identified three distinct segments of Generation Z tourists (Seasoned Green Seekers, Casual Nature Seekers, and Insightful Voyagers), confirming that Generation Z travellers represent a heterogeneous tourism market with differing destination preferences and information behaviours.

Overall, the study emphasises that Generation Z travellers evaluate tourism cities through a combination of functional, experiential, and reputational attributes, and that meaningful segmentation within this cohort is essential for both tourism research and urban destination management. By integrating destination image theory with empirical evidence from Generation Z travellers, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary urban destinations are perceived and evaluated in an increasingly experience-oriented tourism environment. The findings further suggest that urban tourism competitiveness among younger generations increasingly depends not only on infrastructure and service quality, but also on experiential diversity, symbolic destination value, and digitally mediated visibility. These insights may support urban destination managers and tourism researchers in better understanding how emerging generations evaluate tourism cities in an increasingly experience-driven tourism landscape.

7. Limitations and future research ideas

While the study provides valuable insights into Generation Z's destination image perceptions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focuses specifically on Generation Z travellers. While this generational focus reflects the research objective of the study, future research could extend the analysis to comparative generational contexts to examine how destination image perceptions differ across age cohorts. In addition, the study does not differentiate between types of tourism cities or account for regional and cultural variations within Generation Z. Future studies could therefore apply comparative cross-city or cross-cultural research designs to explore how destination image attributes vary across different urban

tourism environments. Furthermore, as the present study relied on exploratory factor analysis, future research could apply confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate the identified factor structure in different empirical contexts. Finally, the limited relevance of emotional attachment and revisit intention observed in this study warrants further investigation. Future research could examine whether this finding reflects a broader generational shift in urban tourism behaviour or whether it is associated with specific characteristics of city tourism contexts. Longitudinal or mixed-method research designs may provide deeper insights into how destination perceptions evolve over time among younger travellers.

Notes

1. KMO value thresholds: less than 0.5 – not suitable for factor analysis, 0.6–0.69 – mediocre, 0.7–0.79 – acceptable, 0.8–0.89 – adequate for factor analysis.
2. If the value is less than 0.5, the database is not suitable for EFA.
3. If an Eigenvalue us greater than one is significant and indicates more common variable than unique variance is explained by the factor.
4. Addition to Eigenvalue calculation: Eigenvalues are plotted as dots within a graph. Factor extractions are finished where there is a levelling of the plot. Scree Test therefore aims to identify the optimum number of factors.

Author contributions

Márk Miskolczi: Data analysis, drafting of the manuscript, visualisation, and finalisation of the manuscript; **Gábor Michalkó**: Project management, conceptualisation, data collection.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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