

Gen-Z Leadership Style in the World of Tourism

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Abstract. In the tourist sector, there is ongoing discussion on the leadership style of Generation Z (Gen Z). The general public maintains that because of their different thought processes and lifestyles from millennials, Gen Z is not yet ready to lead professionally. Generation Z brings about a significant shift in leadership by fusing technology innovation, sustainability, and diversity awareness. In the constantly changing tourism industry, Gen Z leaders are looking for new ways to lead by utilizing cutting edge technology to boost productivity and offer more customized travel experiences. They put sustainability first, giving the environment and social responsibility first priority when making decisions. Though there are differences in the leadership styles of the millennial generation, this essay aims to demonstrate that Gen-Z leadership may create a new tourism industry. This study approach collects data through a literature review and employs descriptive and qualitative methodologies. As a result of this writing, Gen Z leaders also show a dedication to diversity and tolerance, fostering good bonds with the community, and comprehending the requirements of a varied traveler base. This leadership approach strengthens the reputation of the place as a responsible travel destination by encouraging active engagement with global challenges. In addition to reshaping the travel and tourism sector, Gen Z's leadership style is a major factor in future sustainability targets.

Keywords: gen-z, leader, leadership, style, tourism

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In the global economy, tourism is a crucial and critical sector, especially for developing nations where it makes a substantial contribution to infrastructure development, job creation, and foreign exchange. One of the main non-oil and gas industries in Indonesia that contributes to GDP and national income is tourism. Its ability to absorb labor, generate commercial possibilities, and boost local economies are all indicators of its success, in addition to the quantity of domestic and foreign visitors (Hutabarat, 2003).

75.49 million Gen Zers, or 27.94% of Indonesia's overall population, were counted in the 2020 census. 69.38 million people, or 25.87% of the population, are millennials. Therefore, when managing the skills of Gen Z members, it is essential to recognize and support them (Lu & Miller, 2018). These days, the nature of work has changed in tandem with technological advancements. Because less software and electronic management are needed, employers can save money and let one employee take on greater responsibility without neglecting operational requirements (Khatun & Saadat, 2020). Therefore, it's imperative to make the most of Generation Z's potential, especially in the travel and tourism sector. However, there are some occupations that technology simply cannot replace, such as those in the hospitality and tourism sectors.

Members of Generation Z make up the majority of employees in the hotel and tourism industries (Goh, 2020). Gen Z refers to those who were born between 1996 and 2009. Generation Z was born in an age akin to the Great Recession, which presented a number of challenges and uncertainties. The next generation's leaders will be Gen Z. However, many of the problems with Gen Z leadership are caused by the difference in thinking between Gen Z and the previous generation, which makes it assumed that the general public has not yet adopted Gen Z's leadership style (Grabitinger & Sladek). As a result, they are thought to have a more pragmatic outlook on life.

Research indicates that Generation Z will account for 20% of the workforce when the Baby Boomer generation retires during the next four years. Future professional and societal changes will be profoundly impacted by the numerous Y generation ideas and characteristics that persons born in this age group bring with them. Research indicates that Gen Z is driven mostly by a sense of fulfillment in their work and a preference for freedom over control. They are sometimes called Generation C (content-centered, community-oriented, and computerized), which usually describes them as quickly embracing and using technology in their daily lives (Coombs, 2013). Generation Z is the product of technological breakthroughs. It is predicted that Generation Z will be more educated than any other generation, according to McCrindle (2014). He also characterizes them as materialistic, pragmatic, and practical. Furthermore, Generation Z prefers interactive learning, which places an emphasis on involvement, flexibility, and multitasking. In addition, this generation values regular input on yearly reviews, technology-enabled communication, and flexible work schedules. It also seeks to enhance its career swiftly (Goh, 2018). According to Dingot Hamonangan Ismail, the DKK concluded that transformational leadership is a suitable leadership style for Generation Z because it is more adept at identifying the potential resources of younger generations.

Being a successful leader of the Z generation today and in the future is challenging. However, the current generation Z leadership's spirit can assist in overcoming the challenge. A leader must possess the adaptability to adapt to changing circumstances. Leaders must be well-educated and willing to help others without discrimination (Mustomi & Reptiningsih, 2020). The Z-generation leadership style is different from the previous leadership paradigm due to a change in capacity. Compared to previous generations, the current generation, referred to as Generation Z, is more proficient with information technology. Additionally, they are more independent, driven, courageous, and have a preference for rapid gratification. By understanding the characteristics of current generation Z, a new leader can influence the next generation (Kusmana & Peramesti, 2018). The Z-generation leadership revolution will produce new leadership due to the different leadership philosophies or tactics used in leadership.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Leadership studies have long focused on the dynamic relationship between leaders and their teams, examining how different leadership styles impact performance, motivation, and organizational adaptability. With the growing presence of Generation Z in the workforce—particularly in sectors like tourism, hospitality, and digital services—there is a pressing need to reassess traditional leadership paradigms and understand the values, motivations, and expectations of this new generation.

Kristyowati (2021), in her article “*Generasi ‘Z’ dan Strategi Melayaninya*”, provides a comprehensive psychological and sociocultural analysis of Generation Z in the Indonesian context.

She notes that Gen Z—those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s—have been shaped by rapid technological development, global connectivity, and shifting educational paradigms. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z places high value on immediacy, personalization, and authenticity.

They are generally independent, critical thinkers, and are accustomed to learning and interacting in digital, visual, and interactive environments. Kristyowati argues that in order to lead or serve this generation effectively, organizations must adopt strategies that embrace openness in communication, flexibility in management, and genuine recognition of individual identity. In terms of leadership, this means that top-down, authoritarian models are likely to be rejected by Gen Z, who prefer to follow leaders that act more as coaches or mentors rather than traditional figures of command and control (Kristyowati, 2021, pp. 23–34).

The relevance of flexible and transformational leadership is further supported by the work of Gameda and Lee (2020), who conducted a cross-national study on leadership styles, work engagement, and outcomes among Information and Communication Technology (ICT) professionals. Their research found that transformational leadership—defined by vision-sharing, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support—was significantly more effective in increasing employee engagement and productivity than transactional or laissez-faire approaches. Although their research focused on ICT professionals, the findings have clear implications for industries undergoing rapid technological transformation, including tourism. Gen Z workers, who often operate in fast-paced, tech-driven environments, thrive under leaders who provide autonomy, offer meaningful feedback, and encourage innovation. These qualities are integral to transformational leadership, which aligns with Gen Z’s expectations for both professional development and personal fulfillment (Gameda & Lee, 2020).

Combining these two perspectives, it becomes evident that the leadership models which best resonate with Generation Z are those that are adaptable, inclusive, and relational. Effective leaders in the Gen Z era are expected to be empathetic communicators, technologically literate, and open to collaborative decision-making. In sectors like tourism, where personalized services, customer interaction, and cultural sensitivity are paramount, such leadership styles are not only beneficial but essential. Gen Z’s emphasis on sustainability, social justice, and innovation requires leaders to adopt value-based and socially responsible frameworks. Leaders who fail to meet these evolving expectations risk disengaging both Gen Z employees and the increasingly conscious Gen Z consumer base.

Furthermore, these studies suggest that leadership success with Gen Z is not only about style but also about organizational structure. Kristyowati highlights the importance of a supportive environment that allows Gen Z to express creativity and individuality. This aligns with Gameda and Lee’s emphasis on empowerment and trust as key motivators. Therefore, leadership must also consider restructuring traditional workplace hierarchies to be more horizontal, fostering spaces where ideas are openly exchanged and innovation is encouraged from all levels.

In conclusion, the scholarly works of Kristyowati (2021) and Gameda & Lee (2020) contribute critical insights into understanding the leadership preferences of Generation Z. Their findings reinforce the argument that effective leadership in the contemporary era—especially in service-oriented and tech-

integrated sectors like tourism—requires a shift toward transformational, participatory, and ethical leadership models. By internalizing these insights, organizations will be better equipped to harness the strengths of Gen Z, ensuring not only effective team performance but also long-term organizational relevance and resilience in an increasingly globalized and value-driven world.

RESEARCH METHOD

The descriptive qualitative research methodology and data collection techniques used in this method are obtained through library research; specifically, the data is gathered by analyzing and examining research-related theories found in a variety of publications. To bolster claims and ideas, extensive and critical analysis is performed on library resources sourced from a variety of references. gathering information by looking for sources and compiling it from a range of sources, including books, journals, and previous studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (HEADING 1 STYLE)

Gen Z was born into a world of advanced technology, where the Internet is present in every sector of the economy. Thus, the term "NET generation" is occasionally used to refer to Generation Z. Gen Z, sometimes referred to as Generation NET, is highly adept at utilizing a wide range of information sources and is heavily dependent on technology. They are always on the Internet and never take their phones off of them. The gadgets in Generation Z's hands allow them to access any type of information. This generation already has some people who earn a good life.

Don Tapscott outlines the characteristics of Generation Z as follows:

1. Freedom: They call for liberty, autonomy, and diversity in every sphere of existence.
2. Customization: Consistently personalize their jobs and purchases.
3. Scrutiny: They demand transparency and examine all facts.
4. Integrity: Demand honesty from businesses.
5. Collaboration: This trait was ingrained in me from an early age.
6. Entertainment: You can anticipate being amused and enjoying your job.
7. Speed: Demand immediate outcomes and quick communication.
8. Innovation: Always look for advancements in technology.

Similarly, Gazali identifies the characteristics of Generation Z as being creative, inventive, cooperative, multitasking, heavily reliant on technology, and favoring visual content. It is believed that Gen Z demands a distinct kind of leadership. They are wary and distinct due to their critical thinking, multitasking, and digital naïveté. Despite the public's perception that Gen Z leadership is ineffectual, their capacity to lead can spur change via sustainability, ethics, and innovation.

Leaders of Generation Z employ technology to improve operational efficiency, encourage inclusion, support sustainability, and personalize services. Their principles produce a fresh approach to leadership that meets the demands of contemporary travel. Gen Z is driven, creative, independent, and extremely flexible—qualities required for contemporary leadership positions in the global tourist industry. Their craving for comfort and quickness, however, can cause tension and frustration, which is why leadership development and mentoring are necessary.

In today's rapidly changing environment, Generation Z's distinct set of traits greatly influences their leadership style. They are extremely skilled with digital tools and platforms because they were raised in a technologically advanced environment. Instead of long-form writing, they are naturally drawn to audio-visual content, including interactive media, infographics, and videos. Their learning style, communication style, and information processing in leadership contexts are all reflected in this choice. Gen-Z is renowned for their drive to do work fast and successfully as well as their skill at multitasking. These qualities are particularly beneficial in hectic work settings where quick thinking and agility are required. They are also quite inventive and imaginative, frequently tackling issues from novel and unusual angles. Their ability to think critically allows them to challenge established structures and investigate more innovative, efficient solutions.

Because technology permeates every aspect of their existence, they are not only reliant on digital tools but also extremely receptive to new developments. Because of their technological prowess, they are able to take the lead in rapidly evolving fields like digital marketing, remote employment, and tech-driven sectors. The open-mindedness and collaborative nature of Gen-Z further distinguishes them. They place a high importance on collaboration, diversity, and the sharing of ideas. They are able to establish robust teams, foster creativity, and establish more vibrant, inclusive workplace cultures because of their collaborative approach.

Gen-Z offers a new viewpoint influenced by technology, societal change, and a fast-paced global environment as the youngest generation starts to assume leadership responsibilities. Their ascent has enormous promise, but it also presents a special set of difficulties. The idea that Gen-Zers can be unfocused or excessively individualistic is one of the main issues that are frequently linked to them. At least early in their careers, some Gen-Z leaders may put their own objectives ahead of team cohesion since they grew up in a culture that places a strong priority on individuality and self-expression. Furthermore, this generation grew up in a time of instant gratification, where information is readily available and results are frequently obtained instantly via social media, technology, or other means. This kind of thinking can occasionally result in a preference for short-term gains, possibly at the price of long-term strategic planning.

The enormous opportunities that Gen-Z leadership offers should not be overshadowed by these difficulties, though. The adaptability of this generation is one of its strongest points. Due to their upbringing in a rapidly changing digital environment, Gen-Z is exceptionally adept at picking things up fast, particularly when it comes to new technology or adapting to change. They have the courage to try new things, change course, and question established structures—qualities that are extremely valuable in the uncertain world of today. Furthermore, Gen-Z leaders are frequently bold, morally upright, and creative. They approach problem-solving with audacious, imaginative ideas, and they frequently give diversity, sustainability, and innovation first priority. They can interact

with a global audience thanks to their ease with digital platforms, which makes them powerful brand ambassadors and communicators in a world that is becoming more interconnected by the day.

From all angles, there are several benefits that can result from a Gen-Zer taking on a leadership role. Here is an example of how a Gen-Zer will behave in the tourism industry for further information.

1. **Innovation in Technology:** Digital tools are a natural part of Gen Z leaders' leadership practices. This is shown in the tourist industry through the use of big data for customer behavior research, AI-driven customer support, virtual reality for destination previews, and mobile applications. Because Gen Z is proficient with these technologies, they can maximize consumer experiences and personalize offerings.
2. **Focus on Sustainability:** Gen Z principles have a strong foundation in environmental sensitivity. They are spearheading efforts in the travel industry to promote ecotourism, lower carbon footprints, and guarantee moral travel practices. They support long-term viability and the growth of responsible tourism by incorporating sustainability into their decision-making procedures.
3. **Inclusivity and Diversity:** A strong sense of social justice is a defining characteristic of Generation Z. In their capacity as leaders, they promote inclusive environments in travel agencies. They create travel experiences that are relevant and accessible to a variety of clientele, such as members of underrepresented groups and tourists with impairments. The development of community-based tourism that honors regional customs and cultures is encouraged by their leadership.
4. **Opportunities and Difficulties:** Gen Z is acknowledged as being very flexible, quick learners, and risk-takers despite being perceived as individualistic and goal-oriented. Under the right direction, their audacity and inventiveness can spur tourism innovation. However, how well they are coached and assimilated into the current organizational structures will determine how successful they are as leaders.
5. **Partnership & Cooperation:** Gen Z thrives in flat companies that encourage transparency, continuous feedback, and collaboration, in contrast to earlier generations who preferred hierarchical hierarchies. They look for positions that allow them to co-create, contribute to a common goal, and have their ideas acknowledged. This is demonstrated in the tourist industry through community involvement in tourism initiatives and participatory planning.

As a result, Gen Z leaders are changing not just the way tourism companies function but also the definition of leadership in a globalized, values-driven society. Gen Z leaders' distinctive fusion of technological know-how, sustainability, and inclusivity is bringing about revolutionary transformation in the travel and tourism sector. Their focus on technology boosts productivity, customizes experiences, and draws in tech-savvy tourists. Being ecologically sensitive and promoting ethical tourist practices, sustainability is central to their leadership. The commitment of Gen Z leaders to diversity increases inclusivity, fosters ties within the community, and increases the

number of travelers. The development of a robust, accountable, and internationally integrated tourist sector that is future-proof depends on this dynamic leadership approach.

CONCLUSION

Digital fluency, environmental stewardship, inclusion, and high flexibility are the driving forces behind Generation Z's rise to prominence in the global tourism sector, marking a significant shift in leadership paradigms. Gen Z leaders exhibit the capacity to provide significant innovation and renewal that is in line with the demands of the twenty-first century, despite the general pessimism regarding their professional preparedness.

First, Gen Z can streamline operations, customize travel experiences to individual preferences, and engage new market segments with unprecedented precision thanks to their native proficiency of cutting-edge technologies, which range from big data analytics and artificial intelligence to virtual reality and mobile applications. Incorporating digital technologies into all aspects of service delivery not only increases productivity but also produces highly customized travel experiences that appeal to tech-savvy tourists.

Second, Gen Z leadership has a strong commitment to sustainability. Their strategy choices are informed by environmental awareness, which ranges from encouraging ecotourism and lowering carbon footprints to implementing moral, neighborhood-focused procedures. This green philosophy appeals to a growing number of environmentally conscious consumers while also positioning their businesses as conscientious stewards of destination resources.

Third, their leadership ideology is based on social justice and inclusivity. Gen Z executives actively promote vacation and work environments that respect cultural diversity, provide accommodations for minority and special needs tourists, and encourage authentic community involvement. Their flat-hierarchy, cooperative approach enhances the authenticity of tourism services and empowers local stakeholders.

However, there are difficulties for this new generation of leaders. Sometimes, a tendency toward individual success and a culture demand for quick outcomes might jeopardize long-term strategic planning and group cohesiveness. Organizations must make investments in mentorship programs and flexible structures that strike a balance between the generation's need for independence and direction in long-term, sustainable thinking if they want to realize Gen Z's full potential. In conclusion, Generation Z is actively changing the tourism sector now and is not just the leaders of the future. They present a revolutionary strategy that promises increased resilience, worldwide competitiveness, and alignment with changing environmental and human values by combining technological innovation, ethical sustainability, and inclusive collaboration. Gen Z leaders are in a position to shape the tourist industry's next phase of expansion and accountability as the industry continues to globalize and digitize.

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