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GUIDING THE FUTURE: WHAT GENERATION Z EXPECTS FROM TOURIST GUIDES

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Abstract: Tourist guides have a significant role in the tourism industry, serving as intermediaries facilitating travelers' understanding of their destinations. Historically, guides have been essential in travel experiences, providing insights, narrating the history, and enhancing the overall journey. Hence, the influence of tourist guides on tourist satisfaction and their role in influencing the destination's image have been the subjects of numerous researchers. However, there is not much research regarding Generation Z attitudes about guides. Generation Z is the generation that will travel more in the future. With that in mind, the aim of this paper is to investigate the attitudes and preferences of Generation Z regarding tourist guides, focusing on the essential qualities, behaviors, and types of information that meet their expectations. The survey involved 203 participants. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed for exploratory factor analysis (EFA), independent *t*-tests, and one-way ANOVA, whereas R was utilized for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The findings highlight the need for tourist guides to possess substantial knowledge and demonstrate practical communication skills, as Generation Z respondents prioritize knowledgeable and well-informed guides, valuing their expertise about the destination. However, the study also found that facilitating active group participation and promoting connections with local communities are less important to this generation.

Keywords: tourist guide; generation Z; tourist guide performances

1. Introduction

Tourist guides, as highlighted by Huang et al. (2010), are not just employees in the tourism industry, but they are the ones who shape the entire experience for the tourists. They deliver quality service, create a destination image, and most importantly, they shape the tourists' experience. As per the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG), a tourist guide is a person who guides visitors in their preferred language, and explains the nature, culture, and tradition of the destination. In addition, a guide usually possesses some kind of

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qualification or a license, which is issued and recognized by the relevant authority, usually the Ministry of Tourism (European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, n.d.).

The evolution of the guiding profession has been marked by significant changes, adapting to the evolving needs of visitors. Today, guides function as communicators who craft unique experiences for tourists. Weiler and Black (2015) identify four keyways in which guides assist tourists: through understanding, physical access, empathy, and encounters. In addition, the authors point out that the profession will change in the future regarding the experience a guide can provide for guests. Many scholars agree that crucial qualities of a successful guide are the capability and willingness to assist guests (Al-Okaily, 2021; Chang, 2014; Heung, 2008; Zhang & Chow, 2004). Al-Okaily (2021) highlights the guide's role in mediating interactions between residents and tourists, underscoring the importance of examining how respondents value this assistance.

Technological advancements have notably transformed the tourism industry, enhancing global promotion and travel safety (Wahab, 2017). One of the areas in which these changes have a significant impact is the profession of tourist guides. New applications, like audio guides, threaten to replace traditional guides and, in the future, reduce their hiring during travel. However, according to Nazli (2020), the guide's human emotion and personal experience at the destination cannot be replaced by applications and digital voice, and that human interaction is what will ensure the sustainability of the tourist guide profession.

Through the knowledge and education, tourist guides play a vital role in reducing negative tourist impacts and enhancing the visitor experience (Güzel et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to assess how respondents perceive the significance of a guide's knowledge.

There is ongoing debate regarding the precise years defining Generation Z. This generation stands out with the increased awareness of the environment's well-being and the fact that they publicly call out people to action (Orea-Giner & Fusté-Forné, 2023). For Generation Z, the environment and climate change play a significant role, and an increasing number of representatives of this generation are changing their habits and supporting sustainable travel (Barbe & Neuburger, 2021). This research focuses on adults who have reached the age of 18, as defined by the Family Law of the Republic of Serbia (Porodični zakon Republike Srbije, 2005), with a particular focus on those between the ages of 18 and 25, representing the Generation Z.

The aim of this paper is to explore Generation Z's attitudes toward tourist guides, focusing on the key qualities necessary for success in this profession. This research offers insights into the perspectives of a generation that is beginning to travel independently, identifying ways to enhance satisfaction among tourism service users. Therefore, it is important to examine their travel motivations, what they find satisfying, and strategies to encourage the use of tourist guide services. With all this in mind, the research question (RQ) was:

RQ: What expectations does Generation Z hold for tourist guides, and how do these expectations influence their overall travel satisfaction?

The notable research gap in the literature is Generation Z's preferences and expectations regarding tourist guides' characteristics. Existing research examines the influence of tourist guides on overall tourist satisfaction and destination image, but there are fewer studies focused specifically on Generation Z (Barbe & Neuburger, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Pricope Vancia et al., 2023; Stojavljević et al., 2023), who are beginning to travel more extensively (Akgış İlhan et al., 2023). This gap includes understanding how Generation Z's characteristics

and values influence their perceptions of what makes a quality guide and how these preferences may differ from other demographic groups. Additionally, there is a need for a more detailed exploration of how Generation Z values interactive elements in tours compared to traditional guide roles that focus primarily on information delivery. The research gap underscores the necessity for a more thorough understanding of Generation Z's expectations and preferences in the context of tourist guiding, an underexplored area compared to general research on tourist satisfaction and guide effectiveness.

2. Literature review

Traditionally, tourist guides' primary role was guiding tourists, providing information, and enhancing their experience. Despite the evolution of the tourism industry, these primary responsibilities have stayed the same (Ren et al., 2024). Today, tourist guides are expected to interpret destinations and heritage effectively and use their knowledge to increase tourist satisfaction and experience (Düz, 2018). Cohen (1985) identified several roles for guides, including social, instrumental, interactional, and communicative functions. Syakier and Hanafiah (2022) highlights guides' roles as leaders, storytellers, and mentors, as their role impacts visitors' satisfaction and the destination's image (Ap & Wong, 2001; Rabolic, 2010). Despite changes in the profession, the essential duties of tourist guides remain unchanged.

Lin et al. (2017) revealed that the efficiency of tourist guides relies on their professional competencies, which include knowledge, skills, attitude, and service quality, and strongly affect consumer satisfaction. Broad knowledge, communication skills, and optimistic presentation are essential attributes of a good tourist guide. Mihele and Bolog (2023) emphasize the complexity of the tourist guide role, which involves interpreting cultural, historical, and geographical information, leading tours usually in foreign languages, and ensuring guest satisfaction. These responsibilities can be challenging, whereby guides need strong motivation, professional development, including interest in promoting their profession (Zhumbei, 2020).

The professional development of a tourist guide often begins with formal education, typically acquired through secondary or higher education institutions. However, the importance of informal learning, derived from diverse experiences and lifelong education, is also emphasized, as the combination of formal and informal learning enhances a guide's ability to interact with tourists (Albrecht et al., 2022). Brito (2020) mentions that formal education is essential for acquiring guiding skills, including communication, interpretation, and problem-solving, particularly in managing demanding guests. Additionally, the process of licensing tourist guides is crucial for ensuring the quality of guides who can skillfully present history and culture to their visitors (Rama et al., 2024). According to the Law on Tourism of the Republic of Serbia, a tourist guide must pass a professional exam to obtain a tourist guide license (Zakon o turizmu Republike Srbije, 2019).

Tourist guides face significant challenges, including problems with drivers, hotel staff, museum employees, and employment agencies (Gültekin & Icigen, 2019). Unlicensed guides in the tourist market frequently offer lower prices, negatively impacting licensed guides' ones and their business (Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). Job insecurity is a major issue, which was especially present during the COVID-19 pandemic (Galí, 2022). The role demands considerable emotional investment due to regular interaction with tourists, and yet, their well-being is often overlooked despite the physical and emotional difficulties (Alrawadieh et

al., 2020; Mackenzie & Raymond, 2020). Burnout syndrome is noted among guides due to high emotional labor and client expectations, which impacts their health (Akkuş & Arslan, 2023; Demirdelen Alrawadieh & Dinçer, 2021; İrigüler & Güler, 2016; Mei et al., 2020). While burnout can negatively affect their form and quality (Nermin & Demir, 2019), guides have substantial independence during tours, which may ease some emotional difficulties (Alrawadieh et al., 2020).

To better understand tourists' needs, it is important to analyze Maslow's five-level theory of motivation, widely accepted as a framework for human behavior in various research fields (Maslow, 1943). He identified five fundamental human needs: physiological, safety and security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. According to this theory, these five basic human needs must be fulfilled before other needs can be met, including the need to travel (Šimková & Holzner, 2014). Taormina and Gao (2013) suggest that fulfilling needs impacts every aspect of individuals' personal and social lives. The age of the consumers often impacts their habits.

Today, Generation Z represents 40% of consumers of products and services in the world consumer population, and it is anticipated that this generation will shape both the products offered and the services provided, thereby directly influencing the future development of different industries (Andruszkiewicz et al., 2023). Generation Z will play a crucial role in future economic, political, and social change due to their technological proficiency and commitment to social and environmental responsibility. This generation primarily acquires knowledge by exploring Google, YouTube, social media, and other digital platforms (Bogueva & Marinova, 2020). Liu et al. (2023) found that entertainment, word-of-mouth, and social media marketing significantly influence Generation Z's destination choices. Understanding their consumer motives and travel behaviors is crucial. Stojšavljević et al. (2023) highlight that Generation Z values community and environmental care. They rely on social networks and friends' posts to research destinations and organize their travels. Generation Z grew up in an environment that prioritizes environmental protection and green solutions, and their behaviors and choices clearly reflect a strong commitment to the environment (Dragolea et al., 2023). With the growth of social media, influencers appeared as well, as people who attract many followers (Leung et al., 2022). The problem that arises when using the services of influencers is a lack of trust in their recommendations, especially if they promote an unrealistic lifestyle or a brand that has proven to be irresponsible. Generation Z tends to trust influencers who are perceived as credible and ethical, avoiding those associated with unfavorable brands (Pradhan et al., 2023).

3. Data and methods

The research involved participants from Serbia and was carried out using a questionnaire divided into two segments. The first segment included 43 items that evaluated the essential qualities of a tourist guide on a five-point Likert scale. The second section of the questionnaire concentrated on the socio-demographic attributes of the respondents, including gender, age, place of residence, and field of education. For the research, a review of the available literature was carried out, and some of the questionnaire items were adapted from previous research (Alazaizeh et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2010; Makopo et al., 2018; Zhang & Chow, 2004). In addition, the authors newly developed nine items based on literature and research on the tourist guide profession adapted to the domestic tourist

guides in Serbia. The items analyzed the extent to which respondents valued the professional competence of tourist guides, their organizational skills, time management during the tour, ability to evoke emotions and actively engage guests, as well as their personal characteristics such as humor and trustworthiness, which contribute to the overall impression of the guide.

Data for the research was gathered from March 2023 to August 2023. All participants were informed and assured that their participation was anonymous and voluntary, and that the results would be used specially for scientific purposes. The online questionnaire (Google questionnaire) was distributed through Facebook groups and private messages. The sample consists of 204 respondents from the target group Generation Z (18–25 years old), living in Serbia. One respondent was outside the target group at the age of 27, whereby the answer was excluded from the research. The valid sample consists of 203 respondents. The data were analyzed using SPSS Version 17, which was employed for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify potential factors. For CFA, the authors utilized the R project, incorporating packages such as lavaan, semPlot, psych, semTools, GPArotation, and MBESS. The final analyses, including independent t-tests and one-way ANOVA, were performed using SPSS Version 17 once more.

In the sample of 203 respondents (Table 1), the 78,3% of the respondents were female, and 25.1% of the total number were 22 years old. Additionally, a significant majority of respondents live in urban areas. This could imply access to more educational opportunities, resources, and job markets, which may influence their fields of study and career aspirations. The data shows a preference for social and humanistic sciences, followed by natural sciences. The lower representation in fields like civil engineering and urban sciences and biotechnical sciences.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents ($N = 203$)

		<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	44	21.7
	Female	159	78.3
Age	18	7	3.4
	19	12	5.9
	20	19	9.4
	21	25	12.3
	22	51	25.1
	23	44	21.7
	24	26	12.8
Do you live in an urban or rural area?	Urban area	162	79.8
	Rural area	41	20.2
What field do you belong to?	Natural sciences (mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, informatics, geography)	50	24.6
	Social and humanistic sciences	88	43.4
	Technical and technological sciences	32	15.8
	Civil engineering and urban sciences	4	2.0
	Medical sciences	22	10.8
	Biotechnical sciences	7	3.4

4. Results

4.1. Principal component exploratory factor analysis

To test the factor structure, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on 43 items related to tourist guides' characteristics and competencies, using principal component

analysis with Promax rotation and Kaiser Normalization. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.939, demonstrating that the dataset was appropriate for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test confirmed the adequacy of the data with statistically significant results ($\chi^2 = 6422.295$, $df = 903$, $p < .000$).

In this regard, factor analysis is regarded as suitable for data with MSA values greater than 1.0. Four key factors were identified, explaining 58.039% of the data variance. These results imply that factor analysis is suitable for the explored data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Factor 1 (16 items) refers to the professional competencies that tourist guides should possess. Factor 2 (11 items) shows the interpersonal skills and organization needed for this profession. Factor 3 (seven items) indicates empathy, while Factor 4 (nine items) shows the personal characteristics that guides should have. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of exploratory factor analysis

Variable	Professional competence	Interpersonal skills and organization	Empathy	Personal characteristics
	$\alpha = .924$	$\alpha = .910$	$\alpha = .822$	$\alpha = .888$
Tourist guides are able to follow the code of ethics in the profession	.564			
Tourist guides know destination's culture and history	.768			
Tourist guides are familiar with the attractions at the destination	.755			
Tourist guides understand local people's lifestyle	.597			
Tourist guides are prepared to handle unexpected urgent situations	.705			
Tourist guides are available whenever customers need them	.554			
Tourist guides ensure that the needs of their customers are well managed	.678			
Tourist guides continuously remind tourists about safety concerns	.790			
Tourist guides are well-informed about the cultures of the customers they serve	.693			
Tourist guide is briefing visitors on daily itinerary	.749			
Tourist guides raise awareness, concern, and appreciation for the local environment	.706			
Tourist guides help minimize conflicts between visitors, local residents, and site staff	.612			
The tourist guide provides novelty and variety	.586			
The tourist guide engages visitors in the learning experience	.740			
Tourist guides are fluent in the language used for their tours	.706			
The tourist guide is able to adjust his/her interpretation to different groups of people (varying in interest, knowledge and area of expertise, age)	.623			
Tourist guides are skilled to manage customer complaints effectively		.750		
Tourist guides are healthy		.748		
Tourist guides ensure they are well-presented and maintain an appropriate appearance		.747		
Tourist guides can cooperate with other service staff (e.g., driver)		.836		

Table 2. Results of exploratory factor analysis (*continued*)

Variable	Professional competence $\alpha = .924$	Interpersonal skills and organization $\alpha = .910$	Empathy $\alpha = .822$	Personal characteristics $\alpha = .888$
Tourist guides are capable of arranging tour-related activities		.794		
Tourist guides are on time		.768		
Tourist guides make every effort to follow the itinerary and daily schedule		.619		
The tourist guide guides the tour with clear, easy to follow structures		.766		
The tourist guide is able to adjust his/her interpretation depending on the tour duration		.630		
The tourist guide is able to instill the authority without being authoritarian		.531		
Tourist guides are skilled to solve problems and conflicts which emerge from tour arrangements		.620		
Tourist guides are promoting happiness of visitors in the group			.675	
Tourist guides act as an effective intermediary between tourists and locals			.659	
The tourist guide makes people feel empathy or emotion			.756	
Tourist guides are capable of addressing customers' psychological needs			.701	
Tourist guides are passionate about their profession			.548	
Tourist guides are willing to help			.506	
The tourist guide can resolve conflicts that emerge between guests in the group			.665	
Tourist guides have a great sense of humor				.699
Tourist guides are honest and trustworthy				.670
Tourist guides are polite				.704
Tourist guides are friendly				.804
Tourist guides have good personality				.780
Tourist guides respect customers				.783
Tourist guides can improve connections among tourists				.795
The tourist guide encourages interactive learning and active participation of guests				.546
The tourist guide is open to group questions				.745

4.2. Measurement model validity - Confirmatory factorial analysis

Confirmatory factorial analysis led to the exclusion of nine variables with high residuals (PC9: 0.177, PC12: 0.173, PC14: 0.194, ISO3: 0.200, ISO4: 0.227, ISO7: 0.188, E1: 0.305, E2: 0.252, E6: 0.207). This adjustment resulted in a model with an acceptable fit (CFI = 0.954, TLI = 0.951, RMSEA = 0.066, SRMR = 0.068, $df = 521$, $p < .000$), as shown in Table 3. The CFI and TLI scores exceed the 0.95 verge, while SRMR and RMSEA are lower than the acceptable 0.08 cutoff. The final destination cognitive image scale comprised four latent factors: Professional Competence (PC), Interpersonal Skills and Organization (ISO), Empathy (E), and Personal Characteristics (C) with a total of 34 items.

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis results

Dimension and item description	M (SD)	SL	α	ω	AVE	CR
Professional Competence – PC	4.413		0.92	0.93	0.599	0.939
PC1 - Tourist guides are able to follow the code of ethics in the profession	4.34 (.889)	.747				
PC2 - Tourist guides know destination's culture and history	4.68 (.683)	.833				
PC3 - Tourist guides are familiar with the attractions at the destination	4.77 (.546)	.986				
PC4 - Tourist guides understand local people's lifestyle	4.36 (.852)	.702				
PC5 - Tourist guides are prepared to handle unexpected urgent situations	4.52 (.747)	.820				
PC6 - Tourist guides are available whenever customers need them	4.32 (.833)	.740				
PC7 - Tourist guides ensure that the needs of their customers are well managed	4.29 (.895)	.706				
PC8 - Tourist guides continuously remind tourists about safety concerns	4.43 (.820)	.716				
PC10 - Tourist guide is briefing visitors on daily itinerary	4.17 (.918)	.747				
PC11 - Tourist guides raise awareness, concern, and appreciation for the local environment	4.36 (.898)	.708				
PC13 - Tourist guides are promoting happiness of visitors in the group	4.15 (.896)	.689				
PC15 - Tourist guide engages visitors in the learning experience	4.56 (.758)	.808				
PC16 - Tourist guides act as an effective intermediary between tourists and locals	4.44 (.771)	.805				
Interpersonal Skills and Organization – ISO	4.407		0.89	0.91	0.635	0.906
ISO1 - Tourist guide is open to group questions	4.46 (.834)	.862				
ISO2 - Tourist guides are skilled to manage customer complaints effectively	4.15 (.958)	.722				
ISO5 - Tourist guides can cooperate with other service staff (e.g., driver)	4.57 (.757)	.876				
ISO6 - Tourist guides are capable of arranging tour-related activities	4.69 (.658)	.834				
ISO8 - Tourist guides make every effort to follow the itinerary and daily schedule	4.53 (.726)	.861				
ISO9 - Tourist guide guides the tour with clear, easy to follow structures	4.37 (.806)	.796				
ISO10 - Tourist guide makes people feel empathy or emotion	4.10 (.960)	.633				
ISO11 - Tourist guides are skilled to solve problems and conflicts which emerge from tour arrangements	4.39 (.874)	.761				
Empathy – E	4.038		0.75	0.80	0.556	0.721
E3 - Tourist guides are capable of addressing customers' psychological needs	3.65 (1.090)	.615				
E4 - Tourist guides are passionate about their profession	4.07 (.947)	.645				
E5 - Tourist guides are willing to help	4.58 (.695)	.622				
E7 - The tourist guide can resolve conflicts that emerge between guests in the group	3.86 (1.196)	.621				

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis results (*continued*)

Dimension and item description	M (SD)	SL	α	ω	AVE	CR
Personal Characteristics – C	4.405		0.91	0.94	0.663	0.859
C1 - Tourist guides have a great sense of humor	3.88 (.998)	.510				
C2 - Tourist guides are honest and trustworthy	4.64 (.633)	.897				
C3 - Tourist guides are polite	4.73 (.596)	.943				
C4 - Tourist guides are friendly	4.59 (.694)	.800				
C5 - Tourist guides have good personality	4.28 (.893)	.773				
C6 - Tourist guides respect customers	4.73 (.606)	.994				
C7 - Tourist guides can improve connections among tourists	4.49 (.805)	.797				
C8 - Tourist guide is able to adjust his/her interpretation to different groups of people (varying in interest, knowledge and area of expertise, age)	3.67 (1.120)	.531				
C9 - The tourist guide encourages interactive learning and active participation of guests	4.65 (.691)	.932				
Overall scale reliability			0.967	0.974		

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; SL = standardized loading; α = Cronbach's Alpha; ω = McDonald's Omega; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

By examining the findings from the descriptive statistical analysis, the best-rated factors stand out as "Tourist guides are familiar with the attractions at the destination" ($M = 4.77$; $SD = .546$), "Tourist guides are polite" ($M = 4.73$; $SD = .596$) and "Tourist guides respect customers" ($M = 4.73$; $SD = .606$). The lowest rated variables were "Tourist guides are promoting the happiness of visitors in the group" ($M = 3.60$; $SD = 1.105$) and "Tourist guides act as an effective intermediary between tourists and locals" ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 1.090$).

4.3. Construct reliability

To assess reliability, several indices were employed, including Cronbach's Alpha (α), McDonald's Omega (ω), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). As presented in Table 3, both ω and α values surpass the verge of 0.7 (Hayes & Coutts, 2020), indicating that the scales demonstrate adequate reliability. Convergent validity is confirmed when the item-to-factor loadings are statistically significant, and the AVE value is greater than 0.50. Nevertheless, an AVE of over 0.40 is considered acceptable if the CR for each dimension is above 0.60, according to Fornell & Larcker (1981) and Huang et al. (2013). It is important to note that PC latent construct has CR value 0.932 that is above 0.9, thus indicating strong internal consistency within the construct, suggesting that the items are highly correlated and reliably measure the same underlying concept. However, it is also important to note that very high CR values (e.g., above 0.95) could imply redundancy among items, which might not add new information to the construct.

4.4. Construct convergent and discriminant validity

Authors used the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion to evaluate discriminant validity. The Fornell-Larcker criterion compares factor correlations to

the square root of each factor's AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4 shows that the square root of the AVE for each factor surpasses its correlations with other factors, thereby confirming discriminant validity. For the HTMT analysis, validity is compromised if the HTMT ratio is close to one, with a recommended value of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001; Henseler et al., 2015; Teo et al., 2008). Table 4 shows that all HTMT values are below the 0.90 threshold (shown in italics), meaning the HTMT criterion is met. However, the values for the constructs PC and ISO are close to this threshold (0.892), which suggests a more lenient level of discriminant validity and may indicate some issues with distinction between these constructs. Overall, the measurement model exhibits both reliability and validity.

Table 4. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT)

	PC	ISO	E	C
PC	0.773			
ISO	0.598 (0.892)	0.796		
E	0.371 (0.791)	0.469 (0.846)	0.745	
C	0.350 (0.870)	0.386 (0.819)	0.246 (0.737)	0.814

Note. Regular numbers represent the square root of the AVE; numbers shown italic are HTMT values.

4.5. Descriptive statistics on socio-demographic implications on tourist guides characteristics

The scale's validity and applicability were evaluated based on the gender, age, place of residence, and field of study of the respondents. To determine differences between the respondents' gender and place of residence, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. The test revealed that females rated higher factors PC ($t = -2.589$, $p = .010$), C ($t = -2.085$, $p = .038$), and ISO ($t = -3.784$, $p = .000$). However, the Independent Samples T-test revealed no statistically significant differences based on the respondents' place of residence.

Additional differences were examined using one-way ANOVA and the Post Hoc LSD test for age and field of study. No statistically significant differences were found concerning the respondents' age. The only statistically significant difference regarding the field of study is noted with the factor E ($F = 2.711$, $p = .022$). Respondents in "Social and Humanistic Sciences" group consider this factor more significant compared to respondents in "Technical and Technological Sciences" and "Medical Sciences" groups. In addition, respondents from the science group "Biotechnical Sciences" consider this factor more significant than those from "Technical and Technological Sciences" group.

5. Discussion

A tourist guide's role is essential in tourism, as they represent the destination, interact directly with visitors, and significantly impact tourists' satisfaction during their trip. Generation Z is considered the generation that will travel more and more in the future, i.e., they are the future of travel. For this reason, it was necessary to analyze their attitudes about what is important to them during their trip, what information they consider essential, how tourist guides should behave, and how to interpret important information. In this way, insight is gained about the critical factors that will significantly affect the satisfaction of tourists in the future and what tourist guides must pay special attention to in order to deal with this business successfully.

Tourist guides are essential in shaping travel itineraries, communicating with both tourists and locals, and managing unforeseen issues, all with the goal of enhancing tourist satisfaction. To be effective, guides should be well-educated, adept at interacting with diverse groups, and continuously improving their skills through various educational opportunities. Lovrentjev (2015) points out the necessity of educational programs for providing practical knowledge and maintaining industry quality. The World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations (WFTGA) offers specialized training that includes practical knowledge and diverse guiding techniques, adhering to the Code of Guiding Practice to ensure professionalism and service consistency (Artemyev et al., 2019; Houška, 2012). Preparation is crucial for tourist guides, whether they are local or guide tours to new destinations. If a tourist guide welcomes guests as a local guide, they must have strong language skills to communicate with visitors, present attractions, and recommend authentic experiences. Similarly, guides leading tours to other destinations need proficiency in relevant languages and thorough knowledge of the destination. Cetin and Yarkan (2017) confirm that successful tourist guides' communication skills, effective presentation, and knowledge of attractions are fundamental attributes.

The results suggest that the qualities of a good tourist guide can be divided into four factors (Professional Competence, Interpersonal Skills and Organization, Empathy, and Personal Characteristics) that influence tourist satisfaction. Factors and variables were derived from published scientific papers, which, through further research, coincided with the results obtained in this paper.

According to our respondents, knowledge of tourist attractions and respect for guests are among the essential qualities of tourist guides. This is consistent with the research of Syakier and Hanafiah (2022), which states that a tourist guide must know tourist attractions and, preferably, have a good personality. Lin et al. (2017) also highlighted that knowledge and communication skills are the most important.

The factor, 'Interpersonal Skills and Organization,' consists of 11 variables describing the key attributes of tourist guides in the execution of tourism activities and their interactions with other individuals involved in these activities, including their relationship with tourists. As global tourism activity increases, tourist guides must be equipped to handle various urgent situations they might face (Huang et al., 2010), and they must also be agile enough to adapt their presentation to different target groups, their cultural background, needs, and the duration of the tour (El-Menshaway, 2016). According to our research, respondents consider the ability to quickly adapt to any situation as a significant feature of a guide.

Generation Z's eco-consciousness significantly impacts their travel habits. They are willing to sacrifice for the environment and promote pro-environmental behavior (Ribeiro, 2023). Our survey shows that Generation Z believes tourist guides who act as ambassadors of the destinations they guide (Rabotić, 2010) should encourage awareness, concern, and appreciation of the local environment (PC11 - M = 4.36).

The research aimed to identify optimal development paths for the tourist guide profession. The "Professional Competence" factor includes 16 variables focused on the guide's professional characteristics, including managing the itinerary, addressing safety concerns, and adapting interpretations for different audiences. This factor is crucial as it reveals the importance of these variables to Generation Z. Findings indicate that respondents place high value on guides' knowledge, interpretation, and management of

daily tour activities. This aligns with Huang et al. (2015) asserting that a guide's knowledge and empathy significantly impact tourist satisfaction and intentions to revisit.

Gnanapala (2015) notes that visitors' satisfaction with services can vary despite consuming similar products, highlighting the need for guides to tailor their presentations to different audiences. Guides should fully adapt their interpretation to the present group and be prepared for unforeseen issues during the tour.

A common topic of discussion among users of tourist services is to what extent the tourist guide should be friendly, without being too friendly, in other words, to find the balance between friendliness and professionalism. Similarly, research continues to find the right balance for a tourist guide's humor. Researchers have yet to fully understand how a tourist guide's sense of humor affects guests and their experience. According to the research results, for the respondents, humor is not one of the most necessary qualities of tourist guides, although they consider it important ($M = 3.88$). Fu et al. (2023) suggest that humor can build trust and produce positive word-of-mouth. In contrast, Hermanto et al. (2023) emphasize that a guide's performance can boost tourist satisfaction and promote repeat visits.

Among the identified factors, having strong professional competencies and a comprehensive knowledge of the destination's history, culture, and attractions are essential for tourist guides. Guides should also maintain strong relationships and collaborate with other tourism service providers to ensure seamless trips and manage unexpected situations effectively. Unlike technology, which lacks personal interaction, guides stand out due to their readiness to engage with guests and their openness to addressing questions. These qualities are vital for enhancing tourist satisfaction.

This finding suggests a unique perspective from Generation Z. They do not perceive the tourist guide as solely responsible for ensuring emotional engagement or addressing psychological needs. Instead, Generation Z values guides with comprehensive knowledge about the destination, localities, and history. They prefer guides who provide detailed information without requiring active involvement in the learning process.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the key characteristics of tourist guides as perceived by Generation Z. Guides are crucial for ensuring tourist satisfaction and meeting expectations during tours. Hwang et al. (2023) emphasize that guides' competencies are central to tourist satisfaction.

This research highlights Generation Z's attitudes and expectations regarding tourist guides. Findings reveal that Generation Z, a generation that is yet about to travel, prioritizes environmental impact and values guides who possess comprehensive knowledge and strong communication skills. However, they do not consider a sense of humor, psychological support, or active involvement in the learning process as essential qualities in a guide.

Based on the research and the results obtained, answering the research question provides valuable insights into the role of tourist guides. Generation Z values several key qualities in tourist guides, including knowledge about the destination's history, culture, and attractions, strong communication skills, and adaptability in handling unexpected situations. They value guides who show environmental awareness, reflecting their concern for sustainability. These attributes significantly enhance Generation Z's travel experience by

providing engaging and informative tours. High satisfaction with tourist guides affects future travel decisions, increasing the intention to revisit or recommend the destination. While humor and psychological support are considered valuable, they are less critical to Generation Z's overall satisfaction and decision-making process.

This study's limitations include a lower number of male respondents and a discrepancy between respondent numbers and their current residences, likely reflecting that many in this generation are students living primarily in urban areas with universities. Practical implications of this paper include the implementation of guide training programs that prioritize knowledge of local culture and effective communication, as well as a strong emphasis on sustainability to engage Generation Z travelers on environmental issues that align with their values, thereby enhancing overall tourist satisfaction.

Future research should broaden the target group to encompass all age categories to better understand evolving travel preferences across generations. In addition, there is potential for expanding research on Generation Z, particularly regarding how their travel preferences impact their travel experience, satisfaction, and future travel decisions.

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