

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SOCIAL SPACE AND TRAVEL DECISION MAKING OF GENERATION Z IN BENGKULU CITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between social media as a social space and the travel decision-making of Generation Z in Bengkulu City. A quantitative approach with a correlational design was employed, involving 384 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using validity and reliability tests, classical assumption tests, and Pearson correlation analysis. The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between social media as a social space and travel decision-making among Generation Z ($r = 0.792$; $p < 0.05$). This indicates that higher levels of interaction and engagement in social media are associated with a stronger tendency to make travel decisions. However, this relationship reflects a statistical association rather than a causal effect. These findings suggest that social media plays an important role as a context for interaction and information exchange that relates to how Generation Z forms travel preferences and decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has evolved beyond a communication tool into a social space that influences how individuals interact, construct meaning, and make decisions, including in the context of tourism. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok enable users to share experiences, exchange information, and engage in discussions that shape perceptions of travel destinations (Scheffer-Sumampouw, 2022; Purbohastuti, 2017; Fitriani, 2021). This phenomenon is particularly relevant to Generation Z, which is commonly defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019; Burger et al., 2021). As digital natives, Generation Z has grown up with constant exposure to internet-based technologies, making social media an integral part of their daily lives, including in seeking information and forming preferences related to tourism activities (Dolot, 2018; Priporas et al., 2017).

The increasing intensity of social media use among Generation Z has transformed how tourism-related information is accessed and evaluated. Social media not only provides information but also facilitates interaction through user-generated content, comments, and online discussions, creating a digital environment where individuals

are exposed to various perspectives, experiences, and recommendations regarding travel destinations. These interactions contribute to shaping attitudes and behavioral intentions (Chang & Chang, 2023). Previous studies have shown that social media plays a role in influencing travel decisions, particularly through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), destination image, and content exposure (Alvionita et al., 2021; Saraswati et al., 2024; Krisnayani et al., 2021). However, most of these studies emphasize the functional role of social media as a source of information and promotion, while limited attention has been given to its role as a social space where interaction and meaning-making occur.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of social media as a social space can be understood through the notion of the public sphere. Habermas (1989, 1996) explains that the public sphere is a space where individuals engage in communication and form shared understanding. In the digital context, this concept is further extended by Fuchs (2023), who argues that social media functions as an interactive arena where users actively participate in producing and exchanging meanings (Calhoun, 1992). In this context, social media is not only a medium for information dissemination but also a space where social interaction shapes individual perceptions and preferences, including in tourism-related decisions.

Based on this perspective, exposure to content, interaction with other users, and social validation on social media may relate to how Generation Z develops interest and makes travel decisions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between social media as a social space and travel decision-making among Generation Z in Bengkulu City, with a focus on identifying whether there is a significant relationship between individuals' engagement in social media and their travel decision-making behavior.

Based on the research background and identified gap, this study addresses the following research question: *Is there a significant relationship between social media as a social space and Generation Z's travel decision-making in Bengkulu City?* Accordingly, this study aims to examine the relationship between social media as a social space and travel decision-making among Generation Z in Bengkulu City.

Based on the preceding discussion, the hypotheses proposed in this study are as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between the use of social media as a social space and Generation Z's travel decisions in Bengkulu City.

H0: There is no significant relationship between the use of social media as a social space and Generation Z's travel decisions in Bengkulu City.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between social media as a social space and travel decision-making among Generation Z in Bengkulu City. The population in this study refers to Generation Z individuals in Bengkulu City, with an estimated total of 103,686 individuals based on age group data obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Bengkulu City (BPS Kota Bengkulu, 2023).

The determination of the sample size refers to the table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which is commonly used to determine sample size based on a known population. Based on this approach, the number of samples used in this study is 384 respondents, which is considered sufficient to represent the population. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, in which respondents are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). The criteria include: (1) individuals categorized as Generation Z, (2) residing in Bengkulu City, (3) actively using social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, and (4) having experience in accessing or engaging with tourism-related content on social media.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed online using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Sugiyono, 2019). The research instrument consists of items measuring two variables, namely social media as a social space as the independent variable and travel decision-making as the dependent variable. Prior to data analysis, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure the quality and consistency of the data (Ghozali, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical analysis and inferential statistical analysis, including classical assumption tests and Pearson correlation analysis (Ghozali, 2018). The Pearson correlation test was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. This study focuses on identifying statistical

relationships and does not aim to establish causal relationships.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the characteristics of respondents are described to provide an overview of the research sample. The data were processed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 26. The following table presents the distribution of respondents based on gender from a total of 384 respondents.

Table 1 : Respondent Profile Description

	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<u>1</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>181</u>	<u>47,00%</u>
<u>2</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>203</u>	<u>53,00%</u>
	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>384</u>	<u>100,00%</u>

Source: Processing Results with SPSS, 26

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that male respondents amount to 203 individuals or 53% of the total respondents, while female respondents amount to 181 individuals or 47%. This indicates that male respondents slightly dominate the sample, although the difference is not significant. The relatively balanced distribution between male and female respondents suggests that the data are sufficiently representative in capturing the perspectives of Generation Z in Bengkulu City regarding the role of social media as a social space in influencing travel decision-making.

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the residuals are normally distributed as a prerequisite for further statistical analysis. The test was performed using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov method with a significance criterion of $p > 0.05$.

Table 1. Normality Test Results

Unstandardized Residual

N		384
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	,0000000
	Hours of deviation	1,95499533
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	,040
	Positive	,040
	Negative	-,040
Test Statistic		,040
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		,179 ^{c,d}

Source: Processing Results with SPSS, 26

Based on Table 2, the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.179, which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that the residuals are normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been satisfied, allowing further analysis to be conducted.

The linearity test was conducted to examine whether the relationship between the independent variable (social media as a social space) and the dependent variable (travel decision-making) follows a linear pattern.

Table 2. Linearity Test

Component	F	(Sig.)
Linearity	672,048	0,000 (< 0,05)
Deviation from Linearity	2,474	0,005 (< 0,05)

Source: Processing Results with SPSS, 26

Based on Table 2, the significance value for linearity is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that there is a statistically significant linear relationship between social media as a social space and travel decision-making. However, the significance value for deviation from linearity is 0.005 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that there is a deviation from a perfectly linear relationship.

These findings suggest that although the relationship between variables is not perfectly linear, a significant linear component still exists. In social research, relationships between variables tend to be complex and not strictly linear. Therefore, the presence of minor deviations does not invalidate the use of Pearson correlation analysis, as long as the overall trend of the relationship remains consistent. Thus, the relationship between the two variables can be considered sufficiently linear for further analysis, with careful interpretation.

The next stage is to conduct Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between the variables.

Table 4. Linearty Test

Variable	n Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
X → Y	0.792	0.000	Strong positive relationship

Source: Processing Results with SPSS, 26

Based on Table 4, the correlation coefficient between social media as a social space and travel decision-making is 0.792 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates a strong and positive relationship between the two variables. This means that the higher the level of interaction, engagement, and participation in social media, the higher the tendency of Generation Z to make travel decisions. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted.

This finding is consistent with previous studies which state that social media plays an important role in influencing tourism-related decisions through exposure to content, interaction, and user-generated information (Saraswati et al., 2024; Krisnayani et al., 2021; Alvionita et al., 2021). These studies emphasize that social media not only functions as a source of information but also shapes perceptions and preferences toward tourism destinations.

From a sociological perspective, this result can be understood through the concept of social media as a social space and the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; Fuchs, 2023). Social media provides a space where individuals can interact, exchange experiences, and form shared meanings. In this context, Generation Z actively engages in communication processes that influence how they perceive and evaluate tourism destinations.

Furthermore, several social mechanisms explain the relationship between social media and travel decision-making. First, interaction among users allows the exchange of experiences and recommendations, which serve as informal references in evaluating travel options. Second, user-generated content creates social validation, where destinations that receive high engagement are perceived as more attractive. Third, repeated exposure to tourism-related content strengthens individual preferences and increases the likelihood of decision-making.

Overall, the strong correlation value ($r = 0.792$) indicates that social media is not merely an informational tool but also a social space where interaction, validation, and meaning-making processes occur. These processes contribute to how Generation Z in Bengkulu City form their travel preferences and make travel decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there is a strong and positive relationship between social media as a social space and travel decision-making among Generation Z in Bengkulu City. Social media functions not only as a source of information but also as a space for interaction, social validation, and meaning-making, which are associated with how individuals form travel preferences and make decisions.

These findings imply that stakeholders in the tourism sector, particularly destination managers and digital marketers, need to optimize social media as an interactive space rather than merely a promotional tool. Creating engaging content, encouraging user participation, and facilitating interaction among users can enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotion strategies targeting Generation Z.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to a correlational approach, which

does not explain causal relationships between variables. Second, the presence of deviation from linearity indicates that the relationship between variables may involve more complex patterns that are not fully captured in this study. Therefore, future research is recommended to use more advanced analytical approaches or mixed methods to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media and travel decision-making.

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