



Post-Pandemic Travel Decisions on Domestic Tourism Destinations for Young People

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ABSTRACT

The tourism sector is one of the largest industrial sectors and drivers of the world economy that is vulnerable to disasters. The spread of covid-19 causes tourist destinations to rely heavily on the presence of domestic tourists, especially for safety and health reasons for the younger generation. Indonesia's potential market of 280 million people with a majority of young people is an important factor in the growth of the tourism sector. This research aims to understand the travel decisions of the younger generation after the pandemic in domestic tourist destinations. This research is qualitative in nature with a case study approach. Researchers determined informants who are members of the Millennial Generation and Generation Z by conducting in-depth interviews and collecting secondary data through informants' personal social media. The research results are divided into three phases, namely the pre-travel phase, the phase during the trip, and the post-travel phase. The researcher concluded that after the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a change in the decision-making process of young people who were influenced by social media.

Keyword: Travel Decision, Domestic Tourism, Young People, Post-pandemic

ABSTRAK

Industri pariwisata merupakan salah satu sektor industri terbesar dan penggerak perekonomian dunia yang rentan terhadap bencana. Penyebaran covid-19 menyebabkan destinasi wisata sangat bergantung pada kehadiran wisatawan domestik khususnya karena alasan keamanan dan kesehatan bagi kaum generasi muda. Pasar potensial Indonesia yang terdiri dari 280 juta jiwa dengan mayoritas penduduk berusia muda merupakan faktor penting dalam pertumbuhan sektor pariwisata. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami keputusan perjalanan pasca pandemi bagi generasi muda pada destinasi wisata domestik. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Peneliti menetapkan informan yang tergabung dalam Generasi Millennial dan Generasi Z dengan melakukan wawancara mendalam serta mengumpulkan data sekunder melalui sosial media pribadi para informan. Hasil penelitian dibagi menjadi tiga fase yakni pre-trip phase, during trip phase, dan post-trip phase. Peneliti menyimpulkan bahwa pasca pandemi Covid-19 terjadi perubahan dalam proses pengambilan keputusan para kaum muda yang dipengaruhi oleh social media.

Keyword: Keputusan Perjalanan, Pariwisata Domestik, Kaum Muda, Pasca Pandemi



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1. Introduction

Tourism is an industry that is connected to various sectors so that it cannot be attributed to just one institution. The emergence of the covid-19 pandemic is proof that the tourism industry is connected to the economic, social, and political sectors. First, the economic impact is seen along with the limited acceptance of foreign tourists due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Janjua et al, 2021). In 2019, tourism contributed

significantly to Indonesia's GDP, with foreign exchange earnings from tourism reaching approximately 20.7 billion U.S. dollar. However, the pandemic led to a sharp decline in international tourist arrivals, plummeting from 16.1 million in 2019 to just 4.05 million in 2020, resulting in substantial revenue losses (Nurhayati, 2024). The rapid spread of Covid-19 has caused many countries to implement quarantine and travel restrictions. These conditions have an impact on the country's foreign exchange earnings from foreign tourists.

Limited movement due to the Covid-19 pandemic places domestic travelers as the central figure expected to sustain the tourism industry. Therefore, many tourist destinations depend on domestic tourists. Saidmurodovich et al (2021) state that domestic tourists are one of the main sources of income for the tourism industry in Uzbekistan. As for Indonesia, the urge to visit domestic tourist destinations can be seen from the high promotional activities carried out by the government in introducing five super-priority tourist destinations. The domestic market, comprising over 280 million people with a significant proportion of young individuals, became pivotal in sustaining the industry. Secondly, from a social perspective, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused changes in people's lifestyles, especially in making travel decisions. After facing social limitations, traveling has become a form of expression of people's freedom. In addition, visiting domestic tourist destinations is the easiest way to feel free from the Covid-19 pandemic. Qiu, Park, Li, & Song (2020) stated that people, especially the younger generation, are willing to pay more for traveling as a form of pandemic recovery. They have a clear purpose when traveling and even contribute to local parties (Uysal, 2022).

This makes the younger generation a strong market in visiting domestic tourist destinations. Indonesia's potential market of 280 million people with a majority of young people is an important factor in the growth of the tourism sector. The younger generation tends to seek experience and adventure, including in choosing the tourist attractions they want to visit. The younger generation is assumed to be the most connected to the internet. Many decisions they make are influenced by the internet, especially in terms of traveling. The role of the internet, especially social media, is recognized as the main source of influence (Kalingga, 2024). Studies reveal that Indonesian youth, particularly Generations Y and Z, exhibit distinct travel behaviors across pre-, during, and post-travel stages, heavily influenced by information and communication technology. This demographic's propensity to seek unique experiences and their adeptness with digital platforms position them as a crucial market segment for domestic tourism.

The role of the internet and social media has become increasingly significant in travel decision-making. Indonesian youth rely on these platforms for real-time information and inspiration, with social media serving as a primary influence on travel choices. This trend highlights the necessity for tourism stakeholders to engage actively on digital platforms to attract this tech-savvy audience. Technological advancements, such as travel apps and virtual reality, have further enhanced the appeal of domestic destinations. These tools offer immersive previews and seamless planning experiences, aligning with the younger generation's expectations for convenience and innovation in travel. Embracing these technologies can significantly boost domestic tourism by catering to the preferences of young travelers.

The tourism sector can optimize its potential by following the trends of young people, providing a more attractive tourist experience for the domestic Indonesian young generation, and working with related parties. Despite the recognized importance of the younger generation in revitalizing Indonesia's domestic tourism post-COVID-19, there remains a paucity of comprehensive studies examining the specific factors influencing their travel intentions. While existing research has explored general tourist behaviors and risk perceptions during the pandemic, there is a notable gap in understanding how Indonesian youth's attitudes toward health risks, technological adoption, and social media engagement uniquely shape their domestic travel decisions in the current context. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing targeted strategies that effectively cater to this demographic, thereby bolstering the recovery and growth of Indonesia's tourism sector. Based on this explanation, this study aims to analyze the factors that influence the decision of the younger generation to travel domestically after the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Method

The determination of informants was based on the classification of generations, namely the Mature Generation (born in 1924-1945), Boom Generation (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennial

Generation (1981-2000) and Generation Z (2001-2012) (Oh & Reeves, 2014). Based on this, the informants determined in this research are those who are members of the Millennial Generation and Generation Z. Participants were selected based on their active engagement in domestic tourism post-pandemic, as evidenced by their social media activity and travel frequency. Data were collected from January – August 2023. In-depth interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved, ensuring a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The inclusion of digital data from social media posts, websites, and related articles provided a triangulated perspective, enhancing the study's credibility and depth. This methodological approach aligns with Creswell's (2013) emphasis on utilizing multiple data sources to construct a holistic view of the research problem. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, involving coding and categorizing data to identify emergent patterns and themes. The iterative process of data collection and analysis allowed for the refinement of themes and the development of a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing domestic travel decisions among the younger generations. Ethical considerations were paramount; informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. By integrating qualitative data from diverse sources and focusing on specific generational cohorts, this study aims to provide actionable insights for stakeholders in Indonesia's tourism industry, facilitating targeted strategies to engage Millennial and Generation Z travellers effectively.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 15 respondents involved in this study. The majority of respondents are female, with a percentage of 53.3%, while males account for 46.7%. In terms of generation, the majority of respondents were from the Millennial Generation, with a percentage of 66.7%, while Generation Z accounted for 33.3%. This shows that this study involved more respondents from the Millennial Generation than Generation Z. In terms of evidence of engagement in domestic tourism, the majority of respondents actively upload photos, videos or stories on social media related to their trip. 46.7% of respondents uploaded more than 10 contents, 33.3% uploaded between 6-10 contents, and 20% uploaded less than 5 contents. This shows a fairly high level of engagement from respondents in sharing their travel experiences on social media.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender (15 respondents)		
Female	8	53.3%
Male	7	46.7%
Generation		
Millennial	10	66.7%
Z	5	33.3%
Evidence of Engagement		
Photos/Videos/Stories Upload		
<5	3	20%
6-10	5	33.3%
>10	7	46.7%
Travel Frequency (a year)		
<5	15	100%
6-10	0	0
>10	0	0

However, it is interesting to note that all respondents (100%) reported traveling less than 5 times in a year. No respondents traveled between 6-10 times or more than 10 times in a year. This may indicate that while respondents actively share travel content on social media, their physical travel frequency is relatively low. There are several possible explanations for this, such as time or budget constraints, or a preference for longer, more in-depth trips over frequent short trips. Further research is needed to better understand the factors that influence respondents' travel frequency.

3. Result and Discussion

The development of information technology and internet usage is increasing, which means that more and more people are accessing the internet both from children and adults. In addition, these developments also encourage the progress of post-pandemic tourism through online promotions on social media, which involves many young people involved in the growth of the tourism sector both before and after the covid-19 pandemic (Bahril, 2024). Before traveling, tourists must have an overview of activities in several phases, including:

Pre-Trip phase

This research investigated the influence of social media on post-pandemic domestic travel decisions among Millennials and Gen Z in Indonesia. Findings reveal that social media plays a pivotal role in shaping travel preferences and behaviors during the pre-trip phase. Millennials and Gen Z rely heavily on social media platforms for destination inspiration, itinerary planning, and accessing reviews for accommodations, tours, and dining. This reliance is driven by social constraints and the desire to make informed decisions based on peer recommendations and experiences. Furthermore, the study highlights a preference for domestic travel destinations among these generations, attributed to lingering health concerns following the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media platforms serve as primary information sources, offering a sense of security and facilitating informed choices. This aligns with previous research by Fotis, Buchalis, and Rossides (2012) and Pantano & Di Pietro (2013), who emphasized the pervasive influence of social media throughout the travel journey. The findings underscore the importance for stakeholders in the Indonesian tourism industry to leverage social media effectively, creating engaging content and targeted campaigns to resonate with Millennials and Gen Z. By understanding the evolving digital landscape and travel motivations of younger generations, tourism businesses can adapt their strategies to attract and retain this crucial market segment.

This research reveals that accessibility, safety, and information are pivotal factors influencing domestic travel decisions among younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, in the post-pandemic era. The findings indicate a shift in travel preferences towards domestic destinations, driven by perceived convenience and safety (Longwoods International, 2020; Ticau & Shahrazad, 2022). Gen Z, known for their explorative nature (Carter & Mankoff, 2018), favors domestic travel due to its affordability and ability to alleviate boredom with routine. In contrast, Millennials prioritize accessibility and ease of reach when selecting domestic destinations, aligning with previous research emphasizing the importance of accessibility in travel decisions (Huang & Hsu, 2009). The abundance of information available online and through social media platforms plays a crucial role in shaping travel choices for these generations. Research underscores the need for tourism stakeholders to cater to these generational preferences by providing easily accessible and safe destinations with comprehensive online information. Leveraging social media platforms for engagement and promotion can effectively target younger travelers (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). By comprehending the motivations and priorities of Millennials and Gen Z, the Indonesian tourism industry can formulate customized strategies to appeal to and engage these pivotal demographics. This involves the promotion of lesser-known destinations, the provision of authentic cultural experiences, and the emphasis on sustainable tourism practices (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). The research provides significant insights for the revitalization of domestic tourism in Indonesia, the promotion of economic growth, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Future inquiries could investigate the long-term repercussions of the pandemic on travel patterns and the evolving preferences of younger demographics.

In addition, psychological anticipation during the pre-trip phase plays a vital role in enhancing the overall travel experience. Anticipation can significantly contribute to travelers' emotional well-being and satisfaction, even before the actual consumption of the travel product. Studies have shown that the planning and dreaming stages of travel can generate substantial happiness and excitement. Therefore, tourism providers should consider offering tools and content that support and enrich the planning experience. These initiatives may include virtual tours, trip customization platforms, or storytelling that enhances tourists' imaginative engagement with the destination.

During Trip Phase

This study reveals that social media plays a crucial role in shaping travel decisions among Millennials and Generation Z, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Our findings indicate that these generations actively utilize social media platforms for destination inspiration and information gathering prior to embarking on their trips. Notably, at least one social media recommendation significantly influences their choice of destination, highlighting the power of online peer influence in travel planning (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Furthermore, during their travels, Millennials and Generation Z exhibit a strong tendency to visit places discovered through social media searches, demonstrating the platform's ongoing impact throughout the travel experience.

This research also underscores the importance of experiential tourism for younger generations. Destinations offering physical activities and opportunities for adventure resonate strongly with Millennials and Generation Z, aligning with previous research that suggests such activities contribute to psychological well-being (Hermawan, Nurdin, & Hutagalung, 2022). Moreover, the act of documenting travel experiences through visually appealing content and sharing it on social media is integral to their travel behavior. This emphasizes the significance of aesthetics and the desire for self-expression and social validation among these digital natives (Gretzel, 2016). Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the evolving travel motivations and behaviors of younger generations, emphasizing the need for tourism stakeholders to leverage social media and curate experiences that cater to their preferences for adventure, aesthetics, and digital engagement.

This research reveals distinct patterns in the trip phase experiences of Millennial and Generation Z travelers, highlighting the influence of pre-trip expectations and travel styles on their enjoyment and satisfaction. Millennials, known for their desire for relaxation and leisure, tend to engage in more flexible and spontaneous activities during their trips. Their pre-trip planning focuses on securing accommodation and transportation, leaving room for improvisation and serendipitous experiences. This approach aligns with their goal of escaping routine and embracing novel experiences, as evidenced by their preference for exploring local cultures and engaging in unplanned adventures (Mill & Morrison, 2009).

In contrast, Generation Z travelers demonstrate a preference for meticulously planned itineraries, driven by their desire to maximize vacation time and experience a diverse range of activities (Li, 2018). Their pre-trip planning involves extensive research and detailed scheduling, reflecting their need for structure and control. This meticulous planning, however, can lead to heightened expectations, potentially resulting in disappointment if unforeseen circumstances disrupt their itinerary or if the reality doesn't match their idealized vision. The findings underscore the importance for tourism stakeholders to recognize the diverse travel styles and expectations of Millennial and Generation Z travelers. By understanding these nuances, tourism providers can tailor their offerings and communication strategies to better cater to the specific needs and preferences of these generational cohorts, ultimately enhancing their travel experiences and satisfaction. Simultaneously, social media sharing during travel has created a performative layer to tourism, where experiences are often curated for public consumption. This shapes both individual enjoyment and broader destination image. Tourism stakeholders must proactively engage with digital narratives and ensure service excellence aligns with online representation. Immediate feedback through digital channels can be an opportunity for service recovery or enhancement. Real-time reputation management, therefore, becomes an essential component of destination strategy.

Post-trip Phase

The post-trip phase, aptly termed "sharing is living," reveals distinct generational differences in how young travelers process and share their experiences. Gen Z, digital natives immersed in social media, exhibit a pronounced tendency to actively document and share their journeys online (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). This aligns with their desire for self-expression and social validation, utilizing platforms like Instagram and TikTok to curate and broadcast their travel narratives (Pearson, 2016). Conversely, Millennials, while still engaged with social media, demonstrate a more nuanced approach. They often prioritize personal reflection and savoring the memories, delaying or even forgoing immediate online sharing (Millward Brown, 2015). This suggests a shift towards valuing authentic experiences over performative online personas. The concept of unforgettable travel experiences will continue to evolve, especially

regarding positive travel experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Furthermore, Gen Z's active participation in online reviews and recommendations highlights their role as influencers, shaping travel decisions for their peers (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). This contrasts with Millennials, who, while influenced by online content, often draw inspiration from diverse sources, including personal networks and travel blogs (Nielsen, 2015). This generational shift underscores the evolving dynamics of travel inspiration and decision-making in the digital age. Understanding these nuanced behaviors is crucial for tourism stakeholders to tailor their engagement strategies and effectively cater to the distinct preferences of Gen Z and Millennials, ultimately enhancing the overall travel experience and fostering sustainable tourism growth (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, & Koo, 2015). Of the three phases of travel, the pre-trip phase is the phase that has a major influence on the success of tourist travel activities. One of the important activities before traveling is about choosing a tourist destination. Accuracy in the selection of tourist destinations is very important to the travel route, schedule, and budget spent during tourism activities.

Furthermore, the post-trip phase extends the tourist's engagement through memory consolidation and story sharing. Recounting experiences via blogs, reviews, and social media helps preserve emotional highs and shapes collective narratives. This stage is crucial for brand reinforcement and future decision influence. Service providers can benefit from monitoring and leveraging this content to guide strategic improvements. Encouraging positive sharing practices can amplify word-of-mouth marketing organically. Beyond mere recollection, this phase also facilitates personal reflection and internalization of travel's transformative effects. Emotional and cognitive shifts gained from exposure to new cultures and environments often leave lasting impressions. These experiences contribute to identity formation and intercultural competence. Recognizing these outcomes helps to promote tourism as not only recreational but also educational and developmental. Understanding and capturing these deeper benefits can shape more meaningful tourism offerings.

4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly altered the landscape of travel, particularly for young people who are now navigating a world with heightened health and safety concerns. As travel restrictions ease, a cautious approach prevails, with domestic destinations emerging as the preferred choice for many young travelers. This preference for domestic travel is evident across all stages of the travel journey, from the initial inspiration and planning phase to the actual trip experience and post-trip reflections. The pandemic has instilled a sense of uncertainty and risk aversion, leading young people to prioritize destinations perceived as safer and more controllable. Furthermore, the pandemic has accelerated the reliance on digital platforms, particularly social media, for travel inspiration, research, and booking. Young travelers, who are already highly engaged with social media, are increasingly turning to these platforms to seek information, connect with fellow travelers, and share their experiences. This highlights the importance for tourism stakeholders to actively engage with young audiences on social media throughout their travel journey. By providing relevant content, facilitating online booking, and fostering a sense of community, the tourism industry can effectively capture this demographic and cater to their evolving needs.

The pandemic has also underscored the significance of managing expectations and ensuring a positive trip experience. Young travelers, having endured a period of limited travel opportunities, are eager to fulfill their travel aspirations. However, the pandemic has also heightened their awareness of potential disruptions and challenges. Therefore, providing clear and accurate information, offering flexible booking options, and ensuring a safe and enjoyable travel experience are crucial for meeting the expectations of young travelers and fostering positive post-trip sentiments. This, in turn, can lead to increased satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth marketing, contributing to the recovery and resilience of the tourism industry in the post-pandemic era.

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