

## How do travel bloggers influence Generation Z's travel decisions? An exploratory study through five Italian famous travel bloggers

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### Abstract

The increasing adoption of new communication channel such as social networks in Generation Z has created new job professional during the last decade: travel bloggers. The aim of this paper is to understand the influence of travel bloggers on Generation Z's travel decisions. A mixed qualitative and quantitative survey design was employed for this study. Empirical data were drawn from 475 Generation Z's travellers in Italy, using a purposive sampling technique. The results of this study reveal that travel bloggers for Generation Z's travel decision making are lightly relevant. This study is amongst the first to empirically investigate the influence of travel bloggers on tourism decision making of Generation Z travellers in the realm of social and mobile business. The paper offers relevant theoretical and managerial implications. First, the paper enriches the travel decision-making Generation Z theory by providing evidence of factors leading to the higher sharing of influence amongst travellers. Second, the paper adds to the literature on Generation Z, demonstrating the individual determinants of influencers sharing videos and photos about products and services in online tourism communities. Thus, building upon the findings of this study, the authors provide some guidelines for travel blogger to promoting destination on social media pages.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, travel blogger, travel decision making

## Introduction

In the last decade, communications technology has been a competitive driver in tourism marketing. Tourists can now keep in almost constant contact with their network, friends, work and fellow travelers remaining co-present in their social, home and work life (Law et al., 2024).

Social medias, sites, and blogs are allowing individuals to shift between these multiple platforms even if they are in different locations around the world (Ampountolas et al., 2024). New forms of multi-location work are rising. In particular, the decreasing costs of these technologies has facilitated a huge rise in workers that are not limited to one location ‘digital nomads’ (Muller, 2016). There are individuals who are ‘pursuing employment that allows for global travel, flexibility in work hours and a departure from the traditional office environment’ (Nash et al., 2018, p. 2). Digital nomadism was defined to describe a geography of work: workers can do their job independently from their location.

However, new research has begun to recognize the importance of place as fundamental in the lifestyle choice of digital nomads. The opportunity of experiencing different places and cultures is highly valued to learn new skills and improve mindset values (Li et al., 2024). The importance of the place where someone worked, and experiences critically differentiates digital nomadism from remote working. Whereas remote work may be wholly unconcerned with place, the value in experiencing different cultures and places is a motivating factor in individuals undertaking a digitally nomadic lifestyle and they are a part of the population that can be influenced by travel bloggers to decide their new place of work. In this context the focus of recent research has shifted to the centrality of an intriguing example of a digitally nomadic worker (Maggiore et al., 2022, Mainolfi et al., 2022, Duffy & Kang, 2020).

Travel bloggers can be a sort of digital nomad: they can work from everywhere around the world and take the most important advantage, because their income and content creation is based on their place where they stay for a limited amount of time.

Millennials and Generation Z are a major part of the future workforce, and it is important to understand their needs which include digital nomadism solutions, their dreams, given also the pandemic years is to work from everywhere (Pataki-Bitto & Kapusy, 2021).

While substantial research exists with respect to influence of travel blogger travel decisions styles of other generational cohorts (Generation X and Millennials), attention needs to be paid to the travelling style of Generation Z as they are emerging consumer segment. Therefore, this study examines how contextualized the work of travel blogging in relation with

how it is perceived by Generation Z sample and how they can influence their travel decision-making process.

Research outcomes should shed light on understanding how travel blogger can influence Generation Z's travel decisions, concluding by offering practical recommendations for tourism commerce, communicating the desired features of travel apps that influence Generation-Z's purchase intention. Consequently, there are three specific objectives in this study:

1. conduct a quantitative approach on the target. Their responses provide much better insight into the existing partial and fragmented knowledge in investigating the decision-making process for Generation Z travelers in the realm of social and mobile business of travel bloggers;
2. identify the underlying determinants for influencing the Generation Z's travel decisions so that travel bloggers can discover better practices for upgrading channel effectiveness and pursuing competitive advantage. This research will evaluate how they do their difference in terms of quality and creations through Generation Z and we will try to understand how is relevant the influence of travel blogger in Generation Z;
3. provide managerial implications for practitioners and marketers of tourism sector in order to increase the travel blog marketing's channel ability to attract floating consumers thereby achieving competitive advantage.

To achieve this, findings are discussed in relation to other studies which have used theoretical framework to understand self-presentation in the online world, each analyzed travel blogger has been evaluated on different variables, to understand the reason of their work's success (Goffman's, 1959). Their profile will be analyzed from the point-of-view on how they attract Generation Z, how they influenced them and which are their profiles's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Literature review**

The development of old social network based on connections (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) and new social networks based on AI (Instagram, Tik Tok) has led to an increase in online travel information through video communication. Travel bloggers have proliferated in the last twenty years, facilitating the rise of the modern amateur travel writer (Blair et al., 2020). Tourism is a visual sector, people are influenced through images and videos, the development of the new social media based on video communications of low quality, frequently use and popular on Instagram, has facilitate the travel contents' creators.

Travel blogs as the equivalent of personal online diaries and are made up from one or more individual entries strung together by a common theme, for example a trip itinerary (Puhringer & Taylor, 2008). Travel bloggers are therefore individuals who create and maintain blogs, or better show their profiles on new social media based on keywords search and AI. Within their travel blogs, individuals attempt to generate income through means such as paid partnerships, guest posts, sponsored posts, advertising and affiliate links, the effort that this content creator job need is not so easy as it seems from the outside.

Travel bloggers may also undertake offline work related to their blog such as running ‘how to blog’ courses or completing speaking engagements (Azariah, 2011).

Travel blogging is therefore a particular form of work, where individuals see themselves as digital nomads and so it is considered a particular kind of digital nomadism. For travel bloggers, digital nomadism is an integral part of the work that they do, it is the heart of their contents, without travelling it is impossible to follow this career.

These particular kind of job based on travel and contents have become the favourite target of tourism market players that need a push in their digital communication. These collaboration want to reach a wider audience, offering them free trip and promotional travel (Marino et al., 2018).

This research tries to answer to two most important questions “H1: How travel blogger influence Generation Z?” and “H2: What are the main points of success of these five most important Italian travel bloggers profiles?”. Analysing previous literature concerning all generations, the main point of strength of travel bloggers has been synthetized in authenticity of the contents, their capacity to report their travel as real life experience and not a construct made by local brands and governments to increase tourism to their locations. Authenticity can be compared to the ability of the influencer to create quality contents.

Second point of strengths has been identified in their capacity to create community and interactions, that transform a travel blogger in a self-brand influencer. Travel blogger, as a persona, is also a brand that must increase its ability to influence. The capacity to create an active community around their profile could be a competitive advantage (Blaer et al., 2020, Duffy & Kang, 2019).

This studies are focused on Generation Z. Their decision making process is strongly t influenced by travel blogger. Previous study on Generation Z show that their decision making process on tourism and hospitality is based on high used of mobile apps and mobile social media, with video contents as the most important channel of communication. They

are exposed to digital contents more than 14hours/days and this familiarity with digital contents has create a clear decision making-process, that can be explained in inspiration, social recognition, planning search and evaluation, booking, post-booking evaluation. They can be attracted from a digital content of a tourist location but they are able to find other similar contents on the same platform, to understand if they are really interested to go to that place, after collecting informations, especially through video, they start planning their travel and they are also proactive to give a feedback after their travel.

This research tries to understand the role of a travel blogger in this decision-making process and if its contribution is relevant. In particular research concerns five most important Italian travel bloggers to be sure that their contents respect the two main values seen above of community creation and authenticity and maintain the potential to influence Italian Generation Z.

### **Methodology**

This is an exploratory study based on research on five travel bloggers, focusing understanding the influence of them on Generation Z's travel decision making. This research is inductive and descriptive, develops concepts, ideas and understanding from the data provided (Yin, 2009) and the research method is mixed, that is, qualitative and quantitative (Taheri & Okumus, 2024).

Qualitative research was used to collect data through interviews. In addressing the objectives, an interview guide was prepared for the online interview with members of the Italian Association of Travel Bloggers (AITB) that includes the most influential tourism bloggers in Italy. During the interview, researcher asked them data about the top five travel bloggers in term of influencers. This sampling technique is considered appropriate for exploratory research when seeking ideas or insights (Butcher & Yodsuwan, 2024). These five travel bloggers' focus on innovative tourism content, and they are the most famous travel bloggers at this moment for Generation Z. They are the following: Arena Giovanni (chosen because he posts travel ideas around the world at low prices); Bancale Diana (chosen because she posts information about solitary trips); Marras Alessandro (chosen because he is halfway between influencers and travel blogger); Sara and Lorenzo (chosen because they specialize in couple travel); Toffalini Alice and "the world through Alice" (chosen as she offers urbex trips and mysterious, unusual places far from mass tourism). All the five travel blogger have a fan base on their profile of 80% of Generation Z followers. Data were analyzed by NJAlitics, before starting to present those influencer to the sample.

### *Sample characteristics*

Quantitative research aims to identify and present observable data from a population sample of Italian Generation Z respondents.

The respondents consisted in individuals who contacted by secondary school students between the ages 14 and 18, approximately trained in data collection procedures and used as interviewers. This approach has been successfully used in previous research (Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2009, Jones & Reynolds, 2006).

Interviewers administered questionnaires and were instructed to screen potential respondents with three qualifying questions on the cover page of the questionnaire: a) an age range that categorized the respondent as a member of Generation Z; b) an acknowledgement that the respondent had known almost one of the five Italian travel bloggers and c) confirmation that the respondents love travel.

An introduction to the questionnaire was just below the seven questions on the cover page, including an assurance to respondents that their responses would be kept confidential.

The questionnaire has four sections and thirty questions. The first section included demographics questions. Another section asked respondents to report their travel habits in a series of dichotomous questions and frequency level questions. In order to explore how often the respondents use online social network for travel purpose, intensity has been measured using 8-points Likert scale that varies between always = 8 to rarely = 1. The remainder of the questionnaire focused on the general knowledge of five travel bloggers and their influence on holiday choices, including an exhaustive list of strengths of each travel blogger.

The questionnaire was written in Italian because all five travel blogger are Italian. This study required participants to be born between 1997 and 2012 to be part of Generation Z according with studies of Combi (2015) and US Census Bureau (2015). To facilitate interviews, participants live in Italy and used smart phone apps or at least had experience and knowledge of using smart devices. Interviewers collect this sample through face to face interview. To limit nationality and social influence, participants are Italian or have lived in Italy since childhood. This sample frame is also greater than comparable studies (Fedrina et al., 2021, Barbe & Neuburger, 2021, Robinson & Schanzel, 2019). Field work was carried out over a five-month period from September to November 2024.

### *Data collection*

A ten-page questionnaire was used as the survey instrument and it was developed with four main constructs including scale items. Further, to

collect required information from many respondents, interviewers used a face-to-face survey method.

Three pretests were conducted to test the questionnaire among the students and professional friends from other generation. Validity of the research instrument can be appraised by a panel of able professionals whose expertise can judge whether the scale measures what it intends to measure and the questions are clear (Zikmund et al., 2013).

The first pretest (n = 24) were conducted with a high school class of traditional students (Generation Z). Some basic formatting issues were addressed because of the pretest. A second pretest (n = 12) was conducted with an undergraduate marketing class of traditional students (Generation Z). Modifications and reviews, including a radical change of two questions, were made because of this second test. A third test (n = 3) was conducted with professional member of Italian Association of Travel Blogger.

Based on the input received, modifications, including a cancellation of few items in the questionnaire, which were considered unnecessary, were done and wordings change to enhance understandability.

The data for the main study were collected, coded, and entered into the SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) program.

Data were collected among the face-to-face interview individual aged between 20 and 25 (Generation Z), including high school and college students. Finally, the researchers obtained 455 complete and useable responses in Generation Z sample set from the face-to-face survey, from the total of 475 collected surveys. Respondents were explicitly asked to reflect on online context when filling out the responses to the questionnaire items. Thirty responses were eliminated due to their non-random missing value. The non-response biases was tested and compared the “early” and “late” respondents’ responses, based on the date of the received replies to the questionnaire (Tjuatja et al., 2024).

### **Data analysis**

The study’s one-round survey combines quantitative approaches. In order to improve the indicators’ validity, convergence, consensus and concordance verify the representation of the sample compared to the population. The t-test was applied: the first 30 per cent of responses was compared with last 30 per cent and thus, the independent sample of t-test displayed an insignificant difference between these two groups, implying no case of unit non-response bias with the collected data. Moreover, a sticky to each respondent were provided when they began to fill up the questionnaire to elicit the honest and true responses from the chosen sample. Giving gifts (such as coupons, cash incentives and samples) in face-to-face interview is



widely practice among the research to motivate survey respondents and to improve the completion rate (Givi et al., 2023).

## **Findings and discussion**

The results of this study yield several insights that confirm previous findings and shed light on the future of travel bloggers enhancing their competitive advantage in Generation Z.

### *How travel blogger influence Generation Z?*

Firstly, only 28% of sample were influenced in their travel destination decision by video and photos posted by travel bloggers and 26.1% of sample from social networks and offers. Adding these two groups, 54,1% of travel destination decision from this sample has been taken by digital world influence. H1 was “is Generation Z influenced by travel bloggers?” and less than a third of the sample has been influenced by them and H2 was “do you think travel bloggers are useful to choose travel destinations?”. This sample has only 2.85% that give worth to travel bloggers reviews.

Previous studies about Generation Z and travel bloggers found that travel bloggers influence was less than 20% and Generation Z was annoyed by travel posts of travel-bloggers (Robinson, 2019).

### *What are the main points of success of five travel bloggers profiles?*

Given the first part of these results, researchers have asked to the sample to evaluate five different Italian travel bloggers (Diana Biancale, Alice Toffalini, Alessandro Marras, Sara and Lorenzo, Giovanni Arena) to better understand their advantages and reasons of success.

For each of them five questions were analyzed and a comparative study was conducted to understand if there were correlations and same results.

H3 was “what do you like the most about a travel blogger profile?”. The most important answer puts the attention on image and video contents. 37,1% of the respondents say that they like how they take care of the high level of digital and engaging contents. 51% of the respondents was influenced because of the possibility to discover new tourism destinations out of the mass tourism, so it was highlighted the capabilities of these travel bloggers to find new places. This question was closed and asked to the sample to choose only the most important advantage of a travel blogger profile between a given list. Other suggestions are the following: honesty of contents, photos and people; sponsorship of destinations seems more realistic than advertising; they share real and personal experience; fascinating places catch attention.



The answers to the open question “what would you like travel bloggers to post in their social networks” proposed in the questionnaire are interesting. Out of total of 112 responses, there are some recurring issues that many respondents are interested in. First of all, there is a particular attention to photos and videos, in which the respondents are particularly interested as they can see the images of the places that travel bloggers visit, as if they were a sort of videodiaries. Images of museums, landscapes, hotels, monuments, restaurants can also be shared on social networks through reels, small summary videos of the holiday in which to insert practical information or advice on a tourism destination. Respondents were particularly interested in collect practical aspects of the travel in order to be able to better organize their holidays.

Every travel blogger analysed has these two strongest advantages for the followers against competitors, that are less important travel blogger in Italy, and they have to keep this gap during their content creation (Peres et al., 2024).

#### *How travel bloggers are known by the sample?*

Finally, research analyses how the sample, if they know them, how they have reached their accounts. First of all, only 27% of the sample knows all five travel bloggers, so this part of the analysis was conducted on 124 respondents and the 57% has found one of this influencer through friends sharing post or accounts, so the main factor for an influencer to develop his profile its digital word-of-mouth. (Li et al., 2024)

#### *Are Travel Bloggers Influential in Travel decision making process for Generation Z?*

Although most of the sample examined uses Social Networks to find out about possible trips (51%): it seems that travel bloggers influence is rising from less than 20% to reach the 30%. During next years there will be an increase of 10% of people that choose their travel destination through social media, but that they are not a key reason to choose travel destination for Generation Z and that internet in general in the next decade could go behind that 51% of influence through a 60%-70%. So in the near future travel destinations decision making process will be influenced by the digital world, but it seems travel bloggers will not be the key factor.

#### *Which are the factors that give travel blogger profiles advantages?*

Social media find their success in high quality contents and network sharing, travel bloggers from this study seem to confirm that the key to success is to take care of their profile videos and images contents (37,1%) and curiosity, the capacity of each of them to discover new travel destination

that are not known to the general public (51%). While the first factor is possible to be developed with the help of digital experts, the second, with the increase presence of new travel blogger will began the most difficult advantage to reach, every part of the world is estimated to be part of a travel blogger review in a few year from now. The key to success for them is a social profile content.

#### *How travel bloggers profile can be discovered?*

From the point of view of sample, the most important channel of acquisition for a travel blogger is digital word of mouth, people that talk about them and want to share their contents with friends. Given the topic, is more important than in other sectors: if a person is attracted to travel in a particular destination he will easily intend to share the content he found with his friends and travel bloggers profile to convince them to join him in a travel. Digital word of mouth was 57% of our sample, while other options were surfing on social media platform (22%), surfing internet in general(13%), video platform (5%), other (3%). This channel of acquisition is the most important one for influencers.

### **Conclusions**

The main purpose of the research was to examine how travel bloggers influence decisions of Generation Z in a tourism context. The proposed framework addresses the research gap by analysing profile influence, factors that give travel bloggers profile advantages, knowledge and main points of success and points of weaknesses.

A small series of propositions suggested by the previous literature is offered, which was tested with survey data. As a results, this study expands the discussion of tourist information search and influence behaviour from a generational perspective, Generation Z. It offers a synthesis of competitive factors of five travel bloggers profiles (e.g. image and video contents, vlogdiaries) affecting vacation decision-making and information research. In addition, the research expands the literature on how Generation Z use technology in tourist decision-making.

From a theoretical perspective, this research confirms that travel blogger profile and travel behaviour variables are critical to investigate in decision-making process. As the findings indicates, Generation Z tends to use technology to search information for vacation planning. The findings cannot be generalized to all global travel bloggers, but as indicated above, there are several managerial implications in relation to the way travel bloggers tend to influence Generation Z and how they should proceed in the future.

Results indicate that the more travel bloggers perceive themselves as opinion leaders, the more likely they are engaging in social comparison on social media.

### ***Managerial Implications***

The travel market is rising together with digital competition and hotel, tourism and sectors players need to use travel bloggers and new digital channels. Possessing competitive advantages, through travel bloggers could be the key success for those players. “The relationship established between travel bloggers and readers becomes strategic for engagement and for activating trust and loyalty mechanisms” (Maggiore et al., 2022). From a practical perspective, the results helps practitioners develop a framework for positioning, segmentation and destination strategies that relate to tourist information search behaviour. In order to target Generation Z, travel bloggers may put emphasis on online promotion of destination with storytelling, images and videos that attract this generation.

If the travel blog target Generation Z, marketers may enhance, protect and consolidate the role of travel blogger as a key stakeholder for all tourism organizations and operators in the promotion and enhancement of a destination, a small city, a region or an entire territory.

Companies need to invest now to create the travelers of the future and gain competitive advantage in their market, it is important that they understand that investing in travel bloggers now will have its ROI in the next decade and not at the moment of the investment.

An extra conclusion is the key importance of the influencer choice by the marketing team and the use of software that can help company understand which is their best choice (Maggiore et al., 2022).

Quality and capabilities of any influencer must be predicted by marketers that want to use these channel, because, as a result of this study, travel bloggers are not a certainty of success, they can influenced only a small part of their audience.

### ***Limitations and future research***

This work contributes to understand elements of tourism consumer behaviour of Generation Z. Given the five trillion economic growth US has set for herself, having nation’s average as 19 and in Italy by 2031 the income of Generation Z will exceed that of Millennials, this topic is vital for the tourism organizations to continue the study as suggested by Bank of America (2022) and Istat (2019).

*There are some limitations to this study that future research can address.*

This paper is limited by its focus on a part of Generation Z respondents (aged 20-25) perspectives on travel bloggers in Italy. By not collecting data from respondent under 20, this study could not directly compare Generation Z with Generation X and Y on travel blogger engagement, on travel preferences or on travel influencers. A cross-generational study between upcoming Generation Z (aged 10-19), Generation X, and the Generation Y could determine the generalizability of our results beyond Generation Z. Furthermore, re-running this study with no-internet users of Generation Z will uncover how generalizable Generation Z perceptions of travel bloggers through directly comparable data. Our use of Italian language in questionnaire limit the validity of research in Italy. Repeating this study with Generation Y and X will allow for researchers to better generalize and contextualize our findings.

Results also focus on Milan: one of the Italy's largest and most affluent cities in Lombardy region. As a prosperous urban region, results generalize to other Italian cities and regions, including islands such as Sardinia and Sicily. Complimentary research into rural – or other European urban – areas building on this paper's results will expand understanding of Generation Z perceptions toward travel bloggers. Doing so may help deliver a more extensive plethora of cognitive-based platforms instead of a one-size-fits-all approach.

This study wasn't conducted on an international sample of travel bloggers from a wide variety of countries. This didn't allow to cover somehow travel bloggers' different cultural backgrounds. However, the sample size was relatively small, which limited the possibilities for more advanced statistical analysis methods such as structural equation modelling. Thus, it might be interesting to send put more questionnaires in different language to increase the number of respondents. A large international sample would open to examining interrelationships between cross-cultural variables. For instance, cultural variables might influence perception of travel bloggers. Other functional relationship could be tested; for example, age might influence travel bloggers negatively. The fact that a non-probability sampling method was used means that the results cannot be generalized to the population of non-Italian travel bloggers. Rather, the findings would be seen as a first step towards shedding some lights on the travel bloggers in Generation Z who share the same interest. A large-scale survey or experimental design could be conducted to take the results of this study further. Moreover, big data analytics collected from travel blogs and other content posted online by travel bloggers might reveal interesting insights that might be juxtaposed to the findings of this analysis. The chosen setting for the study was Facebook, which continues to be the dominating social media

platform in many parts of the world. However, further research could look into how travel bloggers compare themselves socially with others on different platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat or YouTube.

There aren't a lot of studies and literature about Generation Z, so in the future, with development of internet a similar study should be developed in next generations to understand if they will be more influenced, also considering the rise of Instagram video contents and Tik Tok.

Findings of this study describe Generation Z as people who are influenced by digital, but not yet in a radical way by influencers. This could lead to the need to understand the impacts of a similar study between 5/10 years after this to understand if the results will remain the same or digital world and travel bloggers will rise their importance, given the continued growth of digital contents, it could even achieve the opposite result of starting to decrease the importance of bloggers in travel destination decisions, losing the second key factor of success "curiosity" to find new places to travel to.

Thus the generalizability of the current work's result is restricted. The results of this study were based on only five travel bloggers. The extension to other travel bloggers may strengthen the results. So the future studies could verify and extend the findings by employing larger and more representative samples. Future studies could also expand this work by including the Generation X (1960-1980) too in the sample to study the influence of travel bloggers. Though "soap bubble" generation in Italy seems to be such a potential segment, research on this generation remains thin and there is a lot to be explored (Benasso & Cuzzocrea, 2019).

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