

# Generation Z, COVID-19 and Tourism



Donna Pendergast  and Kyrra Wilks 

**Abstract** Generational theory is an engaging way to consider a birth range of people with shared experiences that have shaped their collective values and beliefs. The COVID-generation, comprised of Generation Z and the current Alpha birth generation, share the experience of the global pandemic during their impressionable, formative years. As a generation they will shape and carry into the future the collective memory of the COVID-19 generation. This chapter narrows the lens to Gen Z as the youngest complete birth range generation aged 10–24 at the time the pandemic was declared. The character traits of Gen Z are explored and a systematic quantitative literature review conducted to consider what contemporary research reveals about Generation Z’s tourist/tourism behaviours, especially those related to health, safety and wellbeing, and how has this been impacted by the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating and widespread effect on the travel industry and the recovery, and we share insights into the lived experiences of Gen Zs from around the world, who tell their stories and provide thoughts about their future as travellers. These unmediated stories located in the chapter reveal that Gen Z are indeed keen to engage in future travel and will bring their unique generational character traits to shape the reconstitution of the travel industry, which will in turn feature in the collective memory of this generation.

**Keywords** Generation Z · Travel · Tourism · COVID-19

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J. Wilks et al. (eds.), *Tourist Health, Safety and Wellbeing in the New Normal*, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-5415-2\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-5415-2_13)

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization [WHO], (2020a). According to the Worldometer, the world population on 1 July 2020 in the midst of the global pandemic was 7,794,798,739 with a median age of 30.9 years. Almost a year later, by 26 April 2021, the records indicate there have been 147,768,496 coronavirus cases 3,122,001 deaths, including the largest number of more than 586,148 in the United States of America (USA) (Worldometer, 2021). This data is regarded as being a gross underreporting of the infection rate, as many countries in the world are not well-resourced, leading to undertesting and subsequently underreporting (Lau et al., 2021). The pandemic has impacted all humankind and will continue to have an effect long past this initial period of infection, with widespread vaccination the only foreseeable circuit breaker that operates from the strategy of protecting against severe disease and ideally establishing herd immunity (Wouters et al., 2021). No one is exempt from infection, however,

people aged 60 years and over, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart and lung problems, diabetes, obesity or cancer, are at higher risk of developing serious illness. However, anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age (WHO, 2020b, n.p.).

including Gen Z.

Throughout time, the study of major events and the impact on humans has been captured in a number of ways and through a range of demographic lenses. One is through the consideration of birth ranges, grouped into generations, who have shared experiences of major events impacting them, and how they subsequently continue to shape the character of the generation over time (Pendergast, 2009). Depending on the age at which the events occur, the impact can have different effects, having such profound social, economic, health and other impacts that the script for that generation diverges from what was anticipated. These events are typically captured in stories that are told and retold, and over time these become the collective memory of each generation. As Holmes (2020, para. 6) explains:

[C]ollective memory is a term historians use to refer to the ways the public 'remembers' an event or a period of time. It is the version that gets publicly told, endorsed and reworked through films and history books, commemorative activities, monuments and school curricula.

This global pandemic is of such wide reach and magnitude that it can be regarded as an event that will shape all living generations, and particularly impact the younger generations during their formative years, as they journey as a collective through the pandemic as a shared experience that will shape their values and perceptions, leading to enduring characteristics and traits that will define the generation. They will create the collective memories of the generation through their storytelling (Pendergast & Dobson, 2021).

The concept of generational theory as a social construct with which to explore tourism has been detailed elsewhere, particularly with regard to Generation Y (see Pendergast, 2010). It enables segmentation for understanding tourist behaviours and

comes with the benefit of extending beyond mere description to deeply understand the root of motivations and aspirations that drive the generation and their decisions (Huang & Lu, 2017). Futures tourism literature extensively explores this construct, using it to predict the effects of generational demographic changes across the industry in both broad and specific ways (Gardiner et al., 2014).

Generational traits across all living generations have been shaped by the pandemic and the world's response to it. The need for a global rapid response meant every aspect of our lives was affected—from how we live, work, and operate in communities—challenging the core values of each generation, but none more so than the impressionable Gen Z and Alpha generations that are in their formative years during this disruption to humankind. The pandemic response has led to a global shift that has seen: the need for physical/social distancing; “iso” (home isolation); the shift to learning at home; closure of social, retail and sporting facilities; the shutdown of the international tourism industry and domestic travel; resource shortages and panic buying of products such as toilet rolls, pasta and other essentials; and every aspect of our lives to move into a constant state of uncertainty and high alert. This is unprecedented and the effects far-reaching.

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the generation that is currently emerging from childhood into early adulthood—the Z generation (hereafter Gen Z)—to gain insight into the ways in which the pandemic might shape this collective as tourists, with a focus on health, safety and wellbeing. To do so, the chapter will provide as a basis the literature surrounding generational theory, with a spotlight on the Gen Z, consider emerging literature which proposes impacts, and will provide voice to members of the generation, offering a range of narratives about their lived experience of the pandemic and how this is shaping them as current and future tourists.

## Generations Impacted by COVID-19

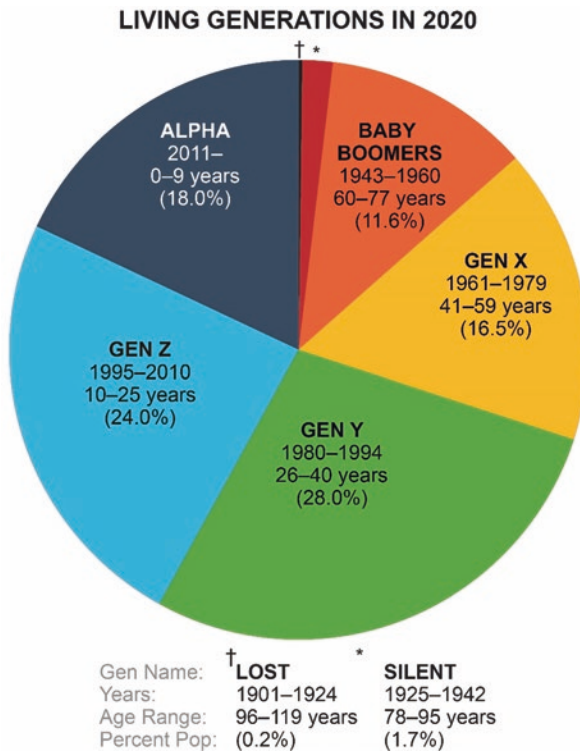
The living generations in the world population at the time the global pandemic was declared are represented in Table 1. The range of the birth years attributed to each generation, the generational names, and even the population numbers are all contestable, reinforcing the reality that generational theory is not a pure science, but is a way of looking at groups that is both popular and inclusive and provides a broad brush-stroke lens. For the purposes of this chapter, the details provided in Table 1 will be used.

The generations that dominate the workforce are the Baby Boomer, Generation X and Y. Gen Z includes some who are school-age through to those new to the workforce, with members ranging in age from 10 to 24 years at the time the pandemic shut down the world in 2020. Gen Z is the first birth generation of the twenty-first century. The Alpha generation is the current birth generation, and all of those aged 9 and under in 2020 are considered to belong to this cluster. At the time of the pandemic declaration, many Alpha generation and Gen Z members were in home care or schooling. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the data presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Living generations in 2020 at the time the pandemic was declared, 11 March 2020

Birth years	Generation name	Age range in 2020	Estimated percentage of world population <sup>a</sup>
1901–1924	Lost	96–119	0.2
1925–1942	Silent	78–95	1.7
1943–1960	Baby Boomer	60–77	11.6
1961–1979	Gen X	41–59	16.5
1980–1994	Gen Y	26–40	28
1995–2010	Gen Z	10–25	24
2011–	Alpha	9 or younger	18

<sup>a</sup>Estimated from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019)



**Fig. 1** Living generations in 2020 at the time the pandemic was declared, 11 March 2020. (Source: Estimated from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019))

This means there are almost 2,000,000,000 Gen Zs globally—close to a quarter of the world population. According to generational theory, the human lifespan includes four phases where values and belief systems are shaped and tested, as summarised in Table 2.

During the childhood years values and belief systems are being acquired, and later they are tested and challenged, and ultimately transferred to others (Pendergast,

**Table 2** Phases in the lifecycle with value and belief system actions

Phase of lifecycle	Age	Value and beliefs	Explanation
Childhood	0–20	Acquiring	Being nurtured, acquiring from others and influences.
Young adulthood	21–41	Testing	Challenging and testing, reshaping.
Mid-adulthood	42–62	Asserting	Asserting values and beliefs, leadership, managing and directing.
Elderhood	63–100	Transferring	Asserting values and beliefs, leadership, managing and directing, reflecting and mentoring.

2010). With regard to Gen Z, with ages ranging from 10–25 at the height of the pandemic, the phase of life includes both childhood and young adulthood. This means that the acquisition and testing of values and belief systems is underway, and hence the impact of the pandemic on these social aspects are profound, shaping the ways in which Gen Z character traits will evolve. During these life phases Gen Z is focused on school and education, peer groups and experimenting with relationships, with the oldest entering the workforce, socialising with friends and gaining independence from families. Importantly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) data reveals that 94% of the world’s student population, many of whom are Gen Z, have been affected by school closures, impacting 1.6 billion learners and further projecting that 24 million students risk not re-entering education due to permanent school closures, health and safety risks, financial and other factors resulting from the pandemic. For those who do return, the length of out-of-school learning has been more than a year, with long-term school closures widely experienced. For many, their transitions such as rites of passage, firsts and lasts, milestone events, final year of school, gap years, travel plans, 18th birthdays and other activities typical of transition to young adulthood have not happened as expected, or have been completely abandoned, and the effects of these losses are expected to be profound (Prestridge & Pendergast, 2020; Pendergast & Dobson, 2021). In order to understand this situation relevant to their health, safety and well-being in the tourist domain, this chapter turns first to the characteristics of the Gen Z and then considers how the pandemic may affect their tourism behaviours.

## Gen Z

As already explained, the economic, social and political conditions impact on all generations in different ways because of their phase in the human lifecycle. During the formative years of the childhood phase (0–20), these conditions have the effect of shaping the characteristics of the generation. At this time the Gen Z group aged 10–25 years are in both the childhood and early into the young adulthood phases of the lifecycle. Prior to the pandemic, researchers identified five defining traits of Gen Z—they are: *digital, global, social, mobile, and visual* (McCrinkle & Fell, 2019).

**Table 3** Traits of Gen Z

Trait	Explanation
Digital	Born into a digital world with wireless access means blurred boundaries between home/social and school/work. They are genuine digital natives. Borderless world with easy access to information; intuitive users of technology; not afraid; screen-experienced; always 'on'. Screen generation. Media saturation. Self-educate through access to knowledge and digital literacy capabilities are independent and able to process information to make decisions.
Global	Access to technology and unbounded information means high exposure to a broad range of cultures and experiences. A broader experience from global influences which become less regional; movies, music; fashion; celebrities is available in synchrony at any time. Gen Z has more in common with their international peers than any previous generation. They have never known a world without war and terrorism so crave safety and security.
Social	Connected to peers constantly through social media platforms—hyper-connected. Networked and constantly connected to their peers means constant shaping by the social world they are constantly connected to and values are shaped by the approvals (likes) and constant feedback through these networks. Social media immersion is a defining aspect.
Mobile	Technology on the move and multiple jobs and careers and to experience portfolio careers. Gen Z use five screens on average. This is the most highly educated generation and hence values of sustainability, ethics and equity are more visible and influential in shaping values. Because they access technology while mobile they expect immediate response.
Visual	Prefer visual over text and hence videos and image-based messaging is preferred. Enables breakdown of language barriers through images and colours. Communication has shifted from predominantly auditory to visual with photos, videos. Gen Z expect personalisation.

Table 3 outlines these five defining traits of Gen Z with insights and elaborations from across the literature added to explain the characteristic.

It is clear from these five defining traits that digital technology and the engagement with digital tools is a feature that defines Gen Z. Indeed, the ubiquitous impact of digital technology on this generation is an effect like no other, and they are the first generation to be wholly born in the digital era which has quickly evolved into the Information Age. A digital timeline is presented in Fig. 2 which highlights the rapid acceleration of the digital world and the tools that have become readily accessible to Gen Z (Figs. 3 and 4).

## Gen Z and Tourism

There is an extensive literature that characterises Gen Z as distinct from other generations. It can also be argued that Gen Z's "profile as tourists has been extensively outlined, with an orientation toward individualism and mobility as well as an interest in digital and gamified tourism experiences" (Tang et al., 2020, p. 4020), consistent with the five traits previously outlined. Particularly important is the consideration

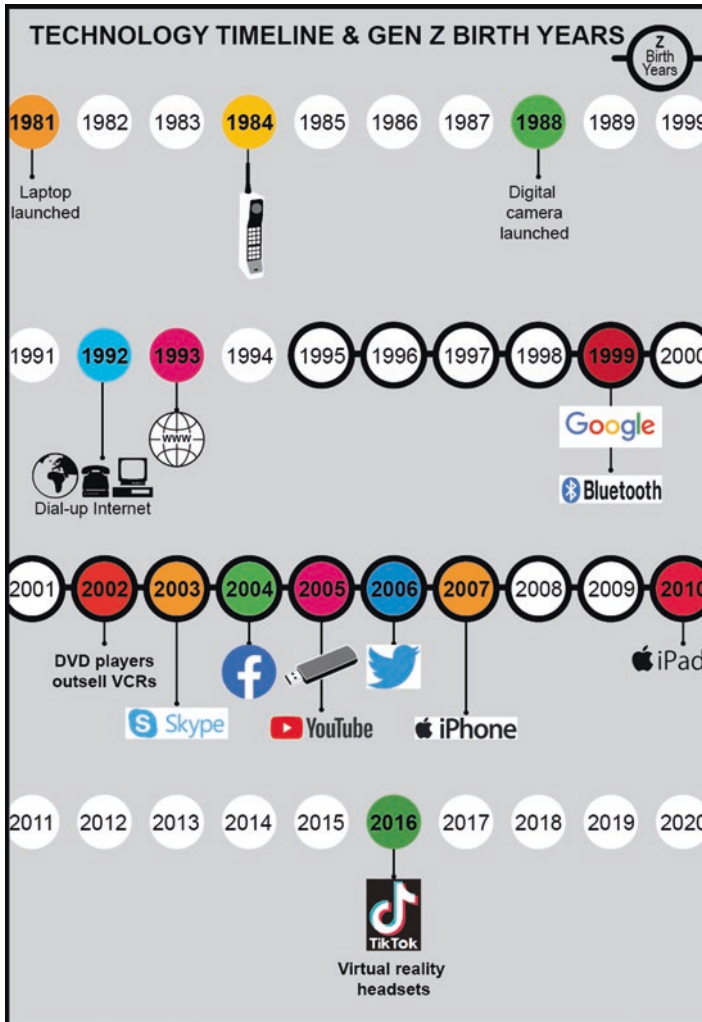


Fig. 2 Technology timeline and Gen Z. (Source: Developed by Professor Donna Pendergast)

of Gen Z, tourism, and their digital capabilities, and how this takes effect in the shape of social media influencers.

According to the World Economic Forum (Viens, 2019), Gen Z are classified as the first generation to have never known a world without the internet, spending an average of 2 hours and 55 minutes of daily activity on social media. They access a wide variety of sites including YouTube (89% of Gen Z), Facebook (77%), Instagram (74%), and Twitter (48%), amongst others. In a recent study by the IBM Institute for Business Value when Gen Z were asked, “how do you spend most of your time outside of school or work?”, 74% responded that they would spend time online, while only 44% would spend time with family and 23% with exercise (Cheung

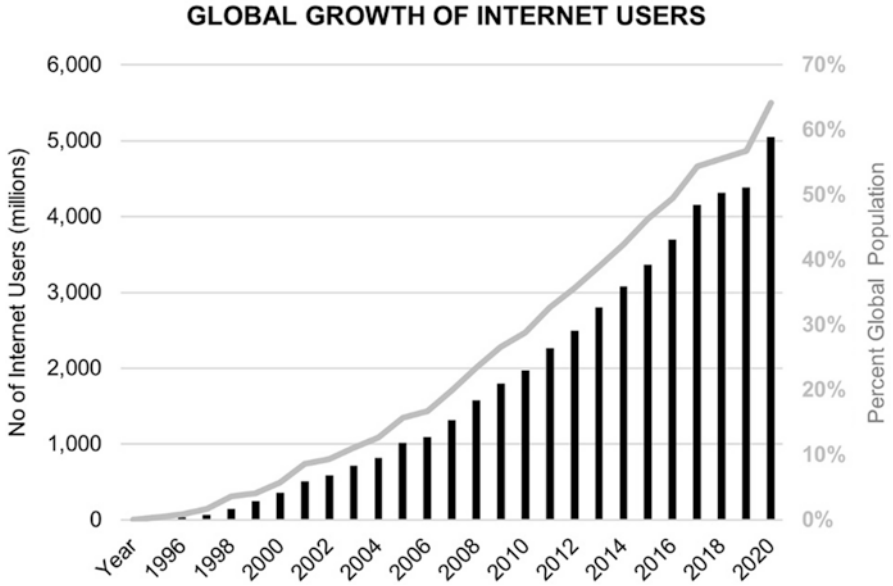


Fig. 3 Global Growth of Internet Users. (Source: International Telecommunication Union (2019))

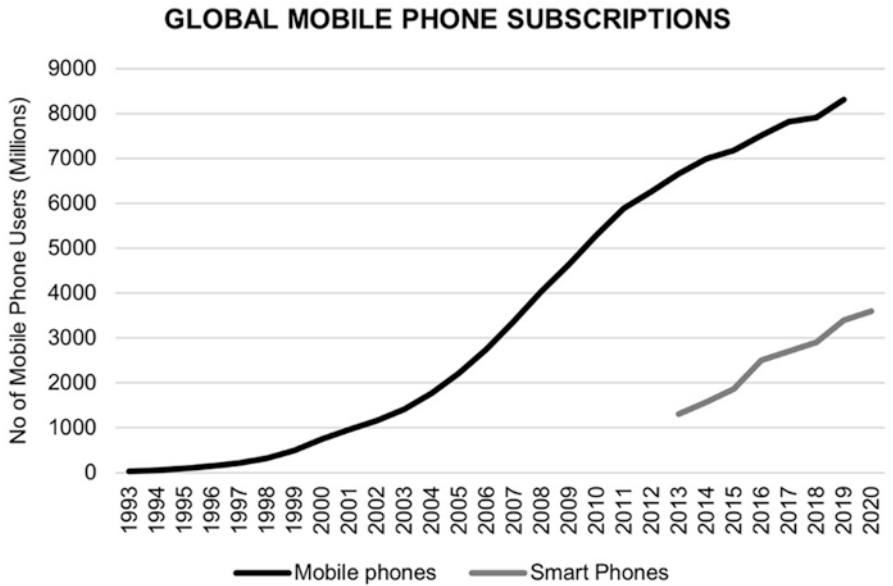


Fig. 4 Global Mobile Phone Subscriptions. (Source: O’Dea (2021a, b))



et al., 2017). In a recent report 50% of European Gen Z'ers say they have used social media more often to relax since the COVID-19 outbreak (Facebook IQ, 2020). These trends of high social media usage and interaction are predicted to continue to increase in the future alongside the need to stay connected with a growing global population (Viens 2019).

Due to their high interaction and reliance on social media, Gen Z are often influenced by what they see advertised and shown through the media, one specific example being within the field of tourism. As of the beginning of 2021, there were 467,759,338 Instagram posts with the hashtag *#travel* (ICEF Monitor, 2021). Industry research shows that social media plays a considerable role in determining where young people travel in the world, with many of the platforms relying on the key concept of “escapism”, where followers are inspired to live the life they see through their screens (Hutchinson, 2017).

This spread of online social networking has prompted the widespread appearance of social media influencers (Cox et al., 2009). According to Freberg et al. (2011, p. 90) a social media influencer can be defined as “a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media”. In a questionnaire-based global survey by Rakuten Marketing (2019) in five countries with 3600 consumers, it was suggested that 88% of respondents use social media travel influencers to find new travel destinations. Influencers commonly post landscape photos, images of experiences and images of themselves in beautiful locations. These influencers specifically target the Gen Z segment, because of their high influence via social media (Pop et al., 2021). Jade Broadus, creative director of Travel Mindset, a new company which connects influencers and travel companies, gives professional insight into the emerging trends stating, “People trust influencers like they trust their best friend” (Baran, 2021, para. 8). The defining feature which determines a social media influencer’s success is the trust of their followers, which positively promotes their willingness to purchase/travel as shown by the influencer (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

There are a number of lists ranking the most influential global travel influencers, for example, *Forbes Top Travel Influencers*. In a May 2021 report which identified the most influential travel influencers by followers and engagement, it was reported that @beautifuldestinations ranked number one in terms of influence, with over 17 million followers and 1.51% engagement rate (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021). The top 10 included a number of larger influencers such as National Geographic Travel (43 million followers), as well as many individual influencers with many millions of followers each (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021), as presented in Table 4.

Hence, due to Gen Z’ers high social media engagement, their travel destinations, purpose, and measures of success and fulfilment are highly filtered by the expectations set by social media influencers.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, six boxes will share unmediated insights from Gen Z individuals, providing them with a voice to share their experiences of the impact of the pandemic, and to think about the future effects on their tourist hopes. These insights are not intended to be representative of all Gen Zs. This chapter now turns to explore the literature utilising a systematic quantitative literature review.

**Table 4** Top ten travel influencers in 2021

Rank	Name	Followers (Millions)	Engagement rate
1	@beautifuldestinations	17	1.51%
2	@natgeotravel	43	0.20%
3	@jessicathivenin	6.2	6.92%
4	@earthpix	19	0.66%
5	@wonderful_places	15	1.04%
6	@raghavjuyal	8.3	2.06%
7	@artem_chek	3.9	5.01%
8	@ppteamrafa	6.7	1.50%
9	@earth	3.5	4.92%
10	@earthfocus	6.7	1.25%

Developed from Influencer Marketing Hub (2021)

### **Kyrra Wilks, 18 Years, 8 Months, Australia**

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, I was completing my final year of schooling on the Gold Coast. I was also in the leadership role of College Captain and a member of many school groups such as bands and involved in a number of extracurricular activities—music and cultural-related.

Yes, the words *digital*, *global*, *social*, *mobile*, and *visual* describe my generation. We are a generation who has grown up learning how to utilise technology and gain the benefits of communicating and connecting efficiently, enabling us to network and share ideas. However, I believe, especially after the global pandemic, that there are some other important key words which describe our generation. These are: resilient, connected, passionate, advocates and proactive.

I mainly use one iPhone, a laptop which I take to University and a desktop computer for studying and work at home. I am active on Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat.

Every year our family would take a family holiday overseas. Most of the travel I have done in my lifetime has been international, due to my parents travelling a lot for work, especially when I was younger. Some of my favourite travel experiences include exploring Europe and spending holidays in the snow in Japan. A highlight was my school China tour where we lived with homestays and were able to experience life in another country, spending time in our sister school and engaging with the culture. I enjoyed this experience so much because it taught me a lot about different cultures, allowed me to gain an appreciation for different music, arts and communication forms and enabled me to make meaningful friendships and connections with people from different backgrounds and upbringings.

I was meant to attend a Europe Music Tour with 30 other students from Year 7–10 to perform in cathedrals and competitions around Europe in June

(continued)

2021. However, unfortunately due to COVID-19, this trip was cancelled and all of the fundraising and practice for the trip was not able to be used. Finally, I had been planning for around 12 years to travel to Europe at the end of school with my family to celebrate graduation. The trip was meant to include travelling to the main tourist attractions—the Eiffel Tower, the Colosseum and the Louvre Museum. However, this trip was also not able to go ahead, and instead I ended up travelling to Noosa (due to border closures) for my end of year celebrations.

The pandemic drastically impacted my final year of schooling in many ways. To begin, it meant that our cohort spent around 6 weeks learning from home, meaning that our learning was quite disrupted. This combined with the new ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) curriculum certainly made it a very challenging year. Furthermore, the pandemic had a major effect on my role as College Captain, because—how can you bring people together when you are so physically separated? For our leadership team this meant being innovative in our ideas and coming up with new ways to connect—for example, live streaming assemblies, online meetings, online cross-country, and so on. Socially, I found the global pandemic to be extremely testing. However, with our amazing forms of networking through technology, I was able to stay very well-connected with all of my friends, teachers and peers throughout this time, making it as smooth as it possibly could have been. The pandemic affected us all in many different ways. For me, it meant many missed opportunities and special occasions and time with friends and family. However, it also taught me resilience, challenged me to improve my communication skills and forced me to think outside the box—abilities I will have for the rest of my life.

Due to recent announcements that international travel may not open up again properly until 2023, all of my international travel plans have been put on hold. However, I am about to head to Cairns for my family's first holiday since the pandemic was announced over a year ago. We have decided to travel somewhere within our state of Queensland so that, if border restrictions are put in place again, hopefully it would not cancel our travel arrangements. At the moment, I believe this is the safest way to travel, locally and safely, with everything being so unpredictable. I also plan to finally reschedule my end of school travel plans to Europe after I finish my degree in 2025. By this time, I believe the international restrictions will all have eased, and the vaccines will (hopefully) have been distributed globally.

I believe that once I return to international travel in 2025 everything will almost be back to normal—although I do believe that many of the changes we have made throughout the pandemic will be long-lasting. For example, improvements in personal hygiene, like handwashing, using facemasks, cleaning surfaces. Businesses have also improved many of their practices, for example, sanitising tables, chairs, any surfaces which are in contact with

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multiple individuals. Improvements like these will continue to improve the health and safety standards of travel well into the future. Not only have physical health standards changed, but also the mindsets of international travellers. I believe that people will be more conscious of their own health and safety and pay more attention to the places they travel, the food they consume, the way they sanitise their hands, and so on, which is a great step to overcoming not just the COVID-19 pandemic, but all diseases and viruses able to spread, eg. the number of deaths from common flu have been drastically decreased throughout the pandemic due to these improved practices. So no, I am not concerned about travelling in the future, just interested to see how we can adapt and improve with these new changes.

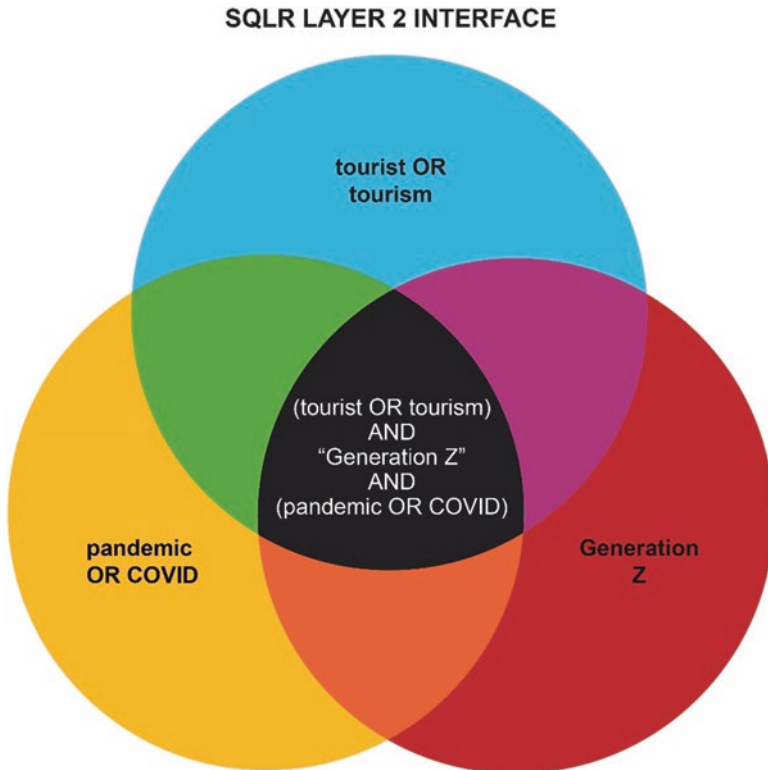
## Systematic Quantitative Literature Review

A systematic, quantitative literature review (hereafter SQLR) was conducted to identify the most pertinent literature for this chapter. SQLR is an approach to interrogate the literature that is exhaustive, rigorous and replicable, an approach that is gaining in popularity due to its value (Pendergast et al., 2020). This SQLR has a particular interest in health, safety and wellbeing and was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 at the interface of *Generation Z* and *tourist OR tourism*, and Phase 2 at the interface of *Generation Z*, *tourist OR tourism*, AND *COVID OR pandemic* (see Fig. 5). Our guiding research question was: What does contemporary research reveal about Generation Z's tourist/tourism behaviours, especially those related to health, safety and wellbeing, and how has this been impacted by COVID OR the pandemic?

We have adopted the systematic quantitative literature review methodology as prescribed by Pickering and Byrne (2014) and Pickering et al. (2015), which provides for an approach that follows a step by step method. The process is visually summarised in Fig. 6 and will be explained in the following section.

In order to review published empirical research, searches were conducted across eight main databases: Griffith University library journal database, ProQuest Central, Web of Science, Social Science Citation Index, Informit, ScienceDirect, Directory of Open Access Journals, MDPI Open Access Journals. These provide access to the major publishers internationally. The inclusion criteria were:

1. Empirical research-based and specified methodology—quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods
2. Published in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings with full-text available
3. Published in English (or with a translation available)
4. Phase 1—Published from 2000–2021 with *Generation Z AND tourist OR tourism focus*
5. Phase 2—Published from 2000–2021 focused on *Generation Z AND tourist OR tourism AND COVID OR pandemic*.



**Fig. 5** SQLR Phase 2 INTERFACE of Generation Z AND tourist OR tourism, AND COVID OR pandemic. (Source: Developed by Professor Donna Pendergast)

Articles were identified using the following methodology (see Fig. 6):

1. Searches for relevant articles which were added to the database (based on titles and scan of the abstracts)
2. As articles were identified, keywords from those studies were added to the initial list of search terms (*tourist OR tourism; COVID-19 OR pandemic*)
3. Bibliographic branching was used by reviewing the reference lists of articles we included in our database to see if there were any further studies that were relevant to our review. One was initially found but on full reading was excluded due to the criteria.

As presented in Fig. 6, 274 studies were identified from the Phase 1 database search for *tourist OR tourism; AND Generation Z*; and 39 studies were identified from the Phase 2 database search for *tourist OR tourism AND Generation Z AND COVID OR pandemic*. The following systematic method was then applied:

1. Abstracts of all 274 and 39 articles respectively were skim-read and included/excluded according to criteria

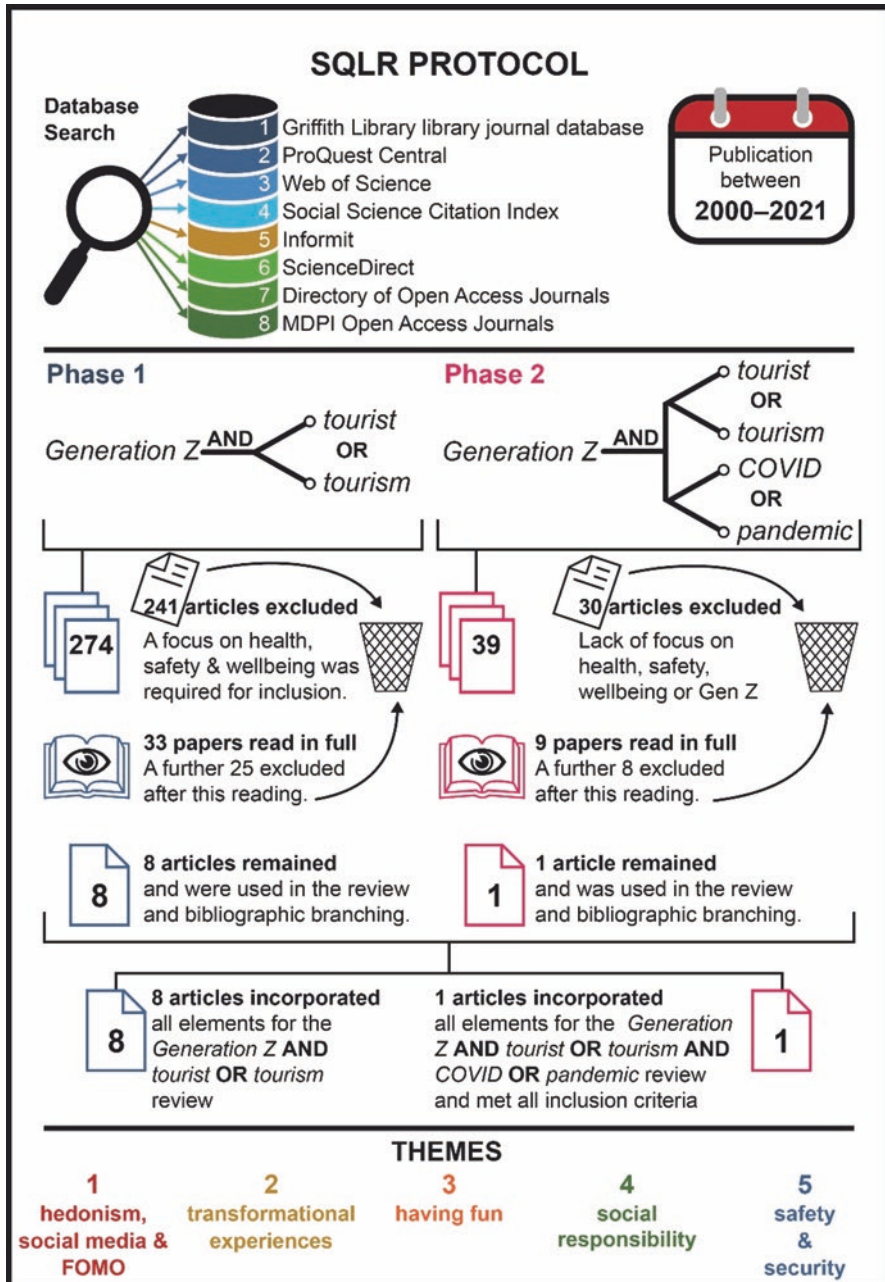


Fig. 6 SQLR protocol. (Source: Developed by Professor Donna Pendergast)

2. For Phase 1, 241 were excluded (a focus on health, safety and wellbeing was required for inclusion). Specific exclusions included a focus on topics such as: workforce, employment, consumer, other generations, those lacking research. For Phase 2, 30 were excluded, because of a lack of focus on the areas of health, safety or wellbeing; and the absence of Gen Z application
3. For Phase 1, 33 papers were read in full; for Phase 2, nine papers were read in full
4. For Phase 1, a further 25 were excluded after this reading; for Phase 2, eight papers were excluded
5. For Phase 1 the remaining eight were included in the review and also used for bibliographic branching. For Phase 2, just one paper was included in the review and also used for bibliographic branching
6. Bibliographic branching revealed one additional paper
7. Eight articles incorporated all elements for the *Generation Z AND tourist OR tourism* review. One article incorporated all elements for *Generation Z AND tourist OR tourism AND COVID OR pandemic* review and met all inclusion criteria.

### **Christopher Airey, 18 Years, 7 Months, Australia**

I was in year 12 when the global pandemic was declared. At this time, I was College Captain and actively involved in various musical bands and volunteer groups.

Yes, I believe the words *digital, global, social, mobile, and visual* are some words that can be used to describe our generation. This is due to us growing up alongside new technologies forming a more digital and interconnected world.

I use my phone for social media communication and my laptop for education and gaming-related communication. I predominantly use Snapchat and occasionally applications such as Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp and TikTok.

Our family loves to travel and go on various adventures, generally around Christmas time. When I was younger, we mainly travelled to Fraser Island each year as we loved to escape to a semi-isolated island. No phone reception, 4 × 4 driving, fishing, and rainforest adventures. Fraser was our ultimate holiday. As I grew older, we started travelling along the entire eastern coast of Australia—up to Cairns and down to Tasmania. After holidaying here, we started going international with our first major holiday to America. Since then, I have had the privilege of exploring New Zealand, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, and small islands around Japan.

As I was involved heavily in music at my school, we had planned to travel through Europe and go on a music tour. We had intended to perform in various cathedrals, festivals, and schools while learning about the history and the culture behind each new place. Additionally, we had booked a cruise to the Whitsundays with my extended family.

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COVID has taught me to cherish the little things! Whether that be sitting down for a whole family dinner, seeing a friend, or going out for lunch, as when we could not do anything of the little things due to isolation, I began to feel more appreciation for these little activities. COVID has also taught me to adapt and to be resilient. It has taught me to see the bigger picture and find out-of-the-box solutions instead of just cancelling an event due to difficulties.

I currently do not have any travel plans as I have recently started tertiary studies; however, this year, it would be amazing to get away and travel to either Fraser Island or down to Perisher and ski. In the future, if travelling overseas is permitted, I would love to go to Japan! I have always dreamt about going to Japan and skiing in their snowfields while learning more about their culture.

### ***Phase 1 Tourist OR Tourism AND Generation Z***

In order to drill down deeper into the literature to focus on health, wellbeing and safety, and Gen Z tourism behaviour based on evidence from research, the eight publications that met all inclusion criteria were critically reviewed and common themes identified. There were five themes generated from the papers:

1. hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out
2. transformational experiences
3. having fun
4. social responsibility, and
5. safety and security.

Each of these themes will now be considered.

#### **Hedonism, Social Media and FOMO**

Styvén and Foster (2018) explored the propensity for Gen Z travellers to make travel decisions based on seeking the *need for uniqueness* (NFU) and achieving *opinion leadership* (OL)—all connected to social media sharing of the travel experience. For Gen Z, sharing their travel experience on social media is important for their emotional wellbeing because they attach importance to how others view them. It is seen to be important to share travel experiences that are themselves unique, meeting their NFU, and a kind of accumulation of this leads to OL. In this way, Gen Z tourists are themselves vital for marketing, becoming the self-related drivers of *electronic word-of-mouth* (eWOM) that has such an impact on return and new visitor numbers through this influencing, both intended and unintended. These authors highlight the role of the Gen Z “self” as becoming part of the tourist product and connected to the brand. Other researchers also noted the hedonic reasons





**Fig. 7** Selfies are a feature of Gen Z—and travel experiences are captured by Gen Z as selfies. (Images courtesy of Kyrra Wilks)

underpinning emotional aspects of Gen Z travel behaviours, with Robinson and Schanzel (2019) revealing that the popular concept of fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) associated with Gen Z broadly is a reason for travel for some (Fig. 7).

### **Transformational Experiences**

Likewise, Wee (2019) explored Gen Z and educational travel noting that rites of passage travel allow for a more fluid understanding of Gen Z rather than adopting a rigid typology. The need for a paradigm shift in the tourism economy that moves

beyond the experience economy to the transformational, where lived experiences, networking, and educational growth are enabled, was emphasised. The notion of “extraordinary” was also identified in a study conducted by Haddouche and Salomone (2018) where Gen Zs revealed travel as being a chance to escape their usual routine and engage in new experiences and new tourist practices, with a keenness for the extraordinary and exceptional. This links with the NFU, OL and FOMO identified in the first theme.

### **Having Fun**

Tang et al. (2020) explored Gen Z subjective wellbeing (SWB) as it related to workplace culture, emphasising this as a valued aspect of Gen Z employees in the hospitality industry and more broadly as travellers. So too is the need for the experience to involve “having fun”—engaging in activities that promote good moods, the desire to laugh, and having stories to tell (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018).

### **Social Responsibility**

The next theme in the literature emerging out of this literature search was the unique relationship of Gen Z to sustainability and the environment. Buffa (2015) provided insights into the benefits of taking a generational lens and aligning this with the young traveller segment to consider sensitivity to issues of sustainability and the subsequent implications for destination strategies. More recently, Sharmin et al. (2020) identified the importance of environmental sustainability awareness as a characteristic of Gen Z tourists, and the need to promote this with both millennial tourists and local authorities enabling activities given their sensitivity to this aspect of travel that meets their social responsibility inclinations and hence enhances their emotional wellbeing.

### **Safety and Security**

Robinson and Schanzel (2019) reiterate a number of characteristics about Gen Z travellers that relate to each of the aforementioned themes. In addition, they point to the importance of safety, stating that “Generation Z has never known a world without war and terrorism and as such they crave safety and financial security” (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019, p. 129). The implications are that Gen Z will consider the destination profile in terms of frequency of terrorist attacks, security procedures, socio-political issues at the destination, and environmental factors such as sustainability practices and the weather. Nevertheless, the researchers concur that Generation Z has become “accustomed to and adapted to the volatile global environment in which they have grown up” (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019, p. 135). Robinson and Schanzel (2019) developed a model arguing that experiences for Gen Z fit into three realms:

physiological, relating to body; psychological, relating to the soul; and spiritual, relating to the spirit. Taken together, these three realms provide a useful summary of the themes identified in Phase 1 of the SQLR.

**Anica Moller, 17 Years, 11 Months, Australia**

When the global pandemic hit, I was a year 12 student at Somerset College on the Gold Coast. I was also working part-time as a waitress at Mike's Kitchen Steakhouse.

Honestly, I do believe the words *digital*, *global*, *social*, *mobile*, and *visual* well describe the Z generation as we are in our most technologically advanced era. However, it is not to say this is all we can be described as. I see Generation Z as independent, revolutionary, accepting and unique.

I use two devices—one phone (social), one laptop (university work and social) and Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook are my main social media platforms.

Prior to COVID-19, my family and I were avid travellers. We loved to travel both overseas and interstate. We would usually travel to South Africa (every year or so) to see all our extended family. As both my parents have grown fond of running, it was not unusual for us to travel interstate to Sydney, Tasmania or Canberra for a marathon. My favourite travel experiences include our 2017 trip to America (with family) and my 2019 school trip to Germany (alone). I loved both these trips so much as I was able to live in such a different way and experience daily life and culture as foreigners do. Germany was a 3-week couch tour and exchange program in which I became more independent and environmentally conscientious. I also made friends for life overseas. America was the light in a very dark time for my family where I was able to live so many of my fantasies bred from social media—such as experiencing snowy mountains, true American greasy barbecue and pumpkin spice lattes. Travelling is an extremely bonding experience to not only other people you are with or interact with, but different cultures and ways of life.

My family and I had planned another America trip at the end of 2019—as a celebration of the end of my schooling. This would replace my “Schoolies” experience. I had also planned to have a week-long road-trip with a group of girls from school, however, the border restrictions to New South Wales at the time prevented this.

At first, I believed the impact of the pandemic towards me was not that severe. But over time, there has been many small yet impactful and inconveniencing changes made to my life. As COVID-19 hit in my senior year of schooling, I was confronted with online school, cancelled school festivals, a 4-month delayed and restricted formal, no Schoolies and more. These were all inconveniences I could bare. However, not being able to see my sick family in South Africa or my immediate family in Gold Coast after my first semester of living away proved to be a bit more challenging.

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I am currently too focused on my University studies to plan any other travel besides Darwin-Gold Coast trips. Nevertheless, I am still beaten with excitement at the prospect of overseas travel in 5 years' time. Although the pandemic may affect the areas of the world I am able to travel, it will not affect my enthusiasm or eagerness to do so.

My concerns of travelling in the future include the potential risk of more outbreaks. However, I also believe by the time all borders and international laws are eradicated, travel as we know it will continue normally.

### ***Phase 2 Tourist OR Tourism AND Generation Z AND COVID OR Pandemic***

The second Phase of the SQLR added the context of the pandemic to the literature search. Out of necessity the timeframe for the SQLR was drastically reduced from the Phase 1 20-year scope to cover just over 12–14 months in Phase 2, given the pandemic at the time of writing this chapter had been declared just over 12 months before. Thirty-nine articles were discovered across the data bases. After applying the protocols as outlined in Fig. 6 and removing duplicates from Phase 1, just one publication met all inclusion criteria. Several theoretical papers and opinion pieces were excluded because they had no empirical research component.

The singular research study meeting all inclusion criteria investigated the impact of the pandemic on the youth tourism market, revealing that:

The pandemic did not have a great impact on tourists' travel attitudes and preference. In this context, it is estimated that there will be no major change in the travel mobility of young people in the post-pandemic period. On the other hand, the pandemic impacts the participants in the hygiene and safety dimension. In this regard, it is estimated that young tourists will be sensitive about hygiene and safety in their travels (Asan, 2020, p. 503-4).

Hence, the study concluded that Gen Z will be willing to start travelling again but will have a heightened focus on hygiene and safety, which aligns with a theme from the Phase 1 review. It is important to note the limitations of this study given it utilised a convenience sample of just 103 respondents through an online survey administered in the early months of the pandemic. It is expected that the literature will grow dramatically in this field. While the literature is not yet available for a meaningful SQLR, it is possible to speculate as to the possible effects of the pandemic on Gen Z and to consider some of the commentary offered by experts in the field.

**Baxter Dent, 18 Years, Australia**

I was in Grade 12 at school, playing music at pubs and cafe's 2–3 days per week, when the pandemic was declared.

The words *digital*, *global*, *social*, *mobile* and *visual* describe the modern era of society, not just our generation. However, our generation have been exposed to modern devices and the internet since birth and have grown up alongside the behemoth technological revolution.

I use two digital tools—Phone and Laptop—and use Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Goodreads.

Unfortunately, I wasn't a particularly good traveller prior to the pandemic; I had been to a number of places, but never mentally left home. Looking back, I lacked an appreciation for local culture in both overseas and domestic locations.

My future travel plans were (and still are) vague, but I did have a romance about a vagabonding lifestyle overseas, most likely throughout Europe and Asia—living amongst the people for months on end.

As a professional musician, I believe that it set my career back; as the pandemic came down, I was just starting to find my footing in the industry, which was wiped away as restrictions tightened, and I had to rebuild my network and momentum during the recovery period. Excluding that minor setback, I feel that I am, overall, better equipped to handle the world because of the pandemic. It gave me a lot of time for introspection and self-development, as well as leisure time, which gave me time to work and rest in balance, which I had struggled with throughout 2019.

My immediate travel plans are all within the Oceania region, I would like to do a road trip around Australia and visit close friends in New Zealand, but after I finish my degree and “set up” the rest of my life, I would like to travel to Europe for an extended period of time, and explore Tibet.

I have a number of concerns about travelling in the future, the most pressing of which is a fear that it will detract from the rest of my life due to the time and financial costs associated with leaving for an extended period of time.

I feel better about international travel following the pandemic, as there is a new implicit trust that government and business will (at least for a while) take greater care to create and enforce high standards across a number of fields, especially cleanliness and health.

**Impact of COVID-19 on Gen Z**

Beyond this SQLR with its narrow inclusion parameters, there is a growing literature base that reveals COVID-19 is widely accepted as a risk factor that influences tourist behaviour (Batic et al., 2021). Within this risk acceptance, Gen Z is a market segment that has been identified as important to the travel industry's reconstruction, primarily due to their willingness to travel and to do so in a safe and sustainable

manner in order to ameliorate the risk (Kelly, 2020). For example, Gharzai et al. (2020) suggest the character traits of Gen Z provide constructive responses to the pandemic, identifying their collaborative nature, aptitude for visual and electronic communication, capacity to study and work from home, ability to rapidly distil information, and keenness to connect with peer groups as being among the attributes that will contribute to an intergenerational response to the pandemic and to restarting the tourism industry.

A study conducted by McCrindle and Fell (2020) reveals that while all generations have been impacted, Gen Z has reported the most uncertainty and highest percentage of negative responses. The top five emotions in response to COVID-19 expressed by Gen Z indicate they are: anxious (49%); frustrated (44%); overwhelmed (35%); confused (34%); and, unprepared (33%). Across all of the generations, only the Baby Boomer and Builder generations included a positive word, in both cases the word *hopeful* at 34% and 45% respectively. The most frequent word used by all generations except Builders was *anxious*, with the Builders indicating *vulnerable* as the most frequent word to describe their feelings (50%). Nevertheless, the same study revealed that: “Gen Z were the most likely to say that COVID-19 will increase the next generation of children’s desire to travel and explore the world (82%)” (McCrindle & Fell, 2020, p. 7).

### **Jennaye McIntock, 18 Years, Australia**

When the pandemic was declared I was a Year 12 student working part time at McDonalds.

To some extent I agree with the description of Gen Z as *digital, global, social, mobile, and visual*, but in fact we are truly the first generation to navigate a world entirely filled with technology in every aspect of life. So, we have also become pioneers, creators and imaginative thinkers instead of the “lazy” generation relying on tech for everyday life.

I have one phone, one laptop, one Apple watch, and Bluetooth headphones. My social media is: Tiktok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest.

I was lucky enough to travel around the world in January of 2020, right as whispers of an unknown virus began. Being able to see so much of the world and different cultures right before the pandemic was an incredibly lucky experience that made me so sad to consider I would not see them for some time.

My travel plans were truly endless, as every place I discovered online made it to my bucket list. Studying abroad was definitely an experience I wanted to try and realising that may no longer be a possibility was a tough pill to swallow.

I was for sure one of the lucky ones. I never lost job security, never had to wear masks for more than a week, didn’t lose my school formal or graduation. Any complaint about a missed party or concert however important to me seemed so medial and privileged compared to the dire circumstances faced by so many around the globe.

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I have savoured small plane trips only an hour long just to feel that excitement of travelling again. When it is safe to travel, best believe I am on the first flight away!

I don't believe many things in the world will go back to how they once were before, but I have no doubt the majority of us will be trying to make safe and COVID-free if we can help it! So I don't worry about travelling in the future.

It has made me appreciate my experiences so much more and savour every moment I got to spend travelling!

Prior to the pandemic Dimitriou and Abouelgheit (2019) proposed a list of 11 strategies to cater to Gen Z tourists, highlighting the importance of social and mobile tools. These 11 strategies have been utilised in Table 5 to consider firstly the alignment with the character traits of Gen Z, and secondly, their resonance with the SQLR. Notable in this list is the absence of very explicit strategies related to health, safety and wellbeing, which is of particular interest to this chapter.

**Table 5** Alignment between the SQLR and strategies to cater for Gen Z tourists

11 strategies to cater to Gen Z tourists	Alignment with 5 defining traits of Gen Z: digital, global, social, mobile, and visual mapped against the 11 strategies	Resonates with themes from Phase 1 and Phase 2 SQLR
Create highly targeted and personalised genuine content on mobile applications and online media platforms.	Digital Global Social Mobile Visual	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out Transformational experiences Having fun; social responsibility Safety and security
Create affordable packaged deals since this generation is on a budget and loves deals.	Social	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out Transformational experiences Having fun Social responsibility Safety and security
Create innovative apps that add real and new value to users that include but not limited to comparing, searching for a wide range of information and easily booking travel experiences.	Digital Mobile Visual	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out Transformational experiences Having fun social responsibility Safety and security

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**Table 5** (continued)

11 strategies to cater to Gen Z tourists	Alignment with 5 defining traits of Gen Z: digital, global, social, mobile, and visual mapped against the 11 strategies	Resonates with themes from Phase 1 and Phase 2 SQLR
Include more local people and local culture as part of the tourism package.	Social	Transformational experiences social responsibility
Include gen Zers themselves in their staff to help other employees become familiar with this generation’s wants and needs.	Digital Global Social Mobile Visual	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out Transformational experiences Having fun Social responsibility Safety and security
Promote travel as a lifestyle and an experience instead of promoting flight plus hotel packages.	Global Social	Transformational experiences Having fun Social responsibility
Carefully select, recruit and manage influencers such as vloggers (i.e., video bloggers), streamers and celebrities to promote their brands.	Digital Global Social Visual	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out
Encourage customers to post content of their experiences publicly.	Digital Global Social Mobile Visual	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out Transformational experiences Having fun
Enable the maximum personalisation of experiences and pay close attention to details.	Social Mobile Visual	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out Transformational experiences Having fun Social responsibility Safety and security
Consider creating 3-D virtual tours, augmented reality and video clips of products, services and destinations as this generation is so much more visual.	Digital Visual	Having fun
Tailor tourism products by incorporating more activities that will have a larger and stronger social media presence	Digital Social Visual	Hedonism, social media and fear-of-missing-out

Sources: Adapted from *11 Strategies*: Dimitriou and Abouelgheit (2019, p. 329); *Understanding Generation Z: Five defining traits* McCrindle and Fell (2019, p. 10)



## Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of generational theory as a lens for segmenting the field of tourism, with a particular focus on Gen Z. While the literature about generational theory and tourism is quite prolific, the SQLR reveals that research building an evidence-base as to the behaviours of Gen Z is not particularly abundant, especially when the focus is refined to health, safety and wellbeing.

Gen Z travellers are expected to play an important role in the reconstitution of the tourism recovery efforts post-pandemic and in the new phase of COVID-normal, globally. The literature points to generational traits that favour unique experiences that enable Gen Z to share their stories via social media while staying connected. Gen Z has a positive disposition to travel in the future but will ensure there is attention to safety and sustainability as a feature of the experiences. This is affirmed by the unmediated voices of members of Gen Z.

### **Jessica Shefford, 19 Years, 2 Months, Australia**

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the Gold Coast, I was a few weeks from finishing my first semester at university. I had not turned 18 yet and was still fresh to the university life.

Yes, I do agree with those specific words *digital*, *global*, *social*, *mobile*, and *visual* describe the Z Generation. We are a generation that has grown reliant on technology and utilise technology in ways other generations had not had the opportunity to. We are a generation that is social as there is more freedom of speech due to the power of social media. As well as this, we are extremely visual as we have opportunities to showcase any form of imagery we like to the world in a split second. Generation Z is completely different to any other generation as we are the generation that has started to adapt to world technology and experience the effects of it directly.

I am constantly using my iPhone, as well as a Macbook laptop for university. I use Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tiktok and Messenger.

Prior to the pandemic, I had been on several overseas holidays. I had travelled to Hawaii, New Zealand, Las Vegas, New York and Los Angeles—my favourite destination by far being New York. New York was by far my favourite destination as I felt like every single resident there did not take notice of you. I felt like you would wear pyjamas on the streets and no one would even take notice, due to how busy the streets are. I loved that feeling of freedom and that I felt like I could be myself and not have to worry about what other people thought. I rarely travelled interstate or within Australia so when COVID-19 hit the Gold Coast, I was quite upset I could not have the choice to travel overseas and go back to New York.

I had a plan that had been created since I was in high school, to do a university exchange to America. I planned to go to Columbia, and do a university

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semester there. My plans got completely shut down once the COVID-19 pandemic hit and it was quite upsetting. I had now lost this opportunity to develop global skills and fully understand another culture. Going on an exchange to Columbia would have made me a more suitable candidate for job opportunities as I would have gained an experience not many others have.

The pandemic drastically impacted my first semester of university. I was fresh into uni, and was just starting to learn the aspects of studying required. When COVID-19 hit the Gold Coast, I was then forced to do all of my university exams and classes online. This was a struggle for me personally because I was just starting to adapt to the regular way of uni, and now had to shift into a completely different one. Now that I am in my 5th semester, I have fully adapted to the online way of completing uni. When university goes back to the way it used to be, I am going to feel like I am back into my 1st semester all over again as I would have to re-learn all the aspects of studying.

The pandemic also affected my internship with one of the Gold Coast's leading hotels, the JW Marriott. I was recruited as an intern at the beginning of March 2020, but it sadly got postponed for 8 months, which placed a delay on my learning experience.

I plan to travel to Cairns in August 2021, as I believe it is important to help contribute to the local economies. I am also doing this as I feel secure with COVID in Queensland rather than going to another destination, where I may get stuck. In the next 5 years, I would love to go on a tour around Europe and live my life as much as possible being a young adult.

No, I do not have any concerns about travelling in the future. The pandemic will not affect my travel decisions as I believe that in 5 years, COVID will be gone. I will not have the fear of contracting the virus, nor being stuck in another country.

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