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Motivational Factors of Generation Z for Attending the Conferences: Business or Pleasure – why not Blesure?

Abstract

Student conferences are a significant segment of student life, providing additional education and professional development. They contribute to the increasingly necessary networking, dissemination of ideas, knowledge, skills and competencies. An important consideration in organizing student conferences to attract participants is to explore participants' motivations for attending conferences. As student conferences are becoming increasingly important, this paper explores Generation Z's motives for attending student conferences. The aim of this paper is to investigate or determine Generation Z's motives for attending student conferences. To this end, the following hypotheses indicate that destination and conference program represent significant motivational factors for Generation Z to attend student conferences. The research was conducted with Generation Z students in Croatia and surrounding countries, with a sample of 206 respondents. The research results confirm this, as Generation Z emphasizes the program and content of the conference as the most important motives for attending conferences (although the student conference program differs from the program of scientific and professional conferences), as well as the attractiveness of the destination. The specificity of this generation lies in the fact that they are technologically literate and strive for new experiences, for something they cannot find on YouTube. The contribution of this paper is that it helps conference organizers to adapt to Generation Z, as it offers them some new insights into Generation Z's motivating factors for attending conferences.

Keywords: conferences, generation groups, generation Z, motives, tourist destination

1. Introduction

Globally, with numerous economic troubles in the form of economic crises facing the world in the last ten years, congress tourism is one of the sectors experiencing its growth and development, and is becoming an increasingly important segment of the tourism market. It has completely died during the pandemic, but it remains to be seen how much it will actually spread in addition today's new crises, and how much will online conferences will take off. However, this tourism sector is still developing, tourism companies approach it in different ways, thus giving the global market the complexity of supply and demand. Congress tourism is a sector that involves a lot of people and money, which means organization, mediation and high-capacity destinations.

Since congresses are a unique, but also a specific experience, the most important item of the congress is certainly the area or topic of the congress, and then the organization. In terms of organization, it is important to provide participants with a quality offer of accommodation, but also the technological aspect that has been relevant lately due to the fact that technology is constantly advancing and it is important to be in trend with technology, but also try to offer something new. Participants remember the congress. What should not be left out, are additional tourist facilities that include culture, recreation, gastronomy and entertainment.

In addition to the organizers of the congress, which are the key to the event, it is important to mention service providers, such as hotels and congress centers, intermediaries or agencies and tour operators, but also the congress participants whoever they are, without whom the congress would not be possible. As the most important aspect of the congress, these are the participants who expect impeccable service for the entire duration of the congress, ie their stay in the destination.

Generation Z, which is quite new in the context of congress tourism and whose needs, desires and motivational factors have not yet been sufficiently explored, presents a challenge for all conference organizers. This paper will identify important motivating factors that drive this generation when participating in conferences.

2. Theoretical background

Congress tourism means a specific form of tourism in which the main motive for travel is not vacation, but active or passive participation of individuals in gatherings and events of different character. [1] Congress tourism usually includes thematic gatherings of scientific and professional character that are organized in a certain place, most often attractive tourist destinations. Such gatherings very often involve a relatively large number of participants, mostly business people, whose consumption in the destination is on average higher than usual visitors.

According to the ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association), congress tourism is a subset of the broader field of business tourism, and business

tourism involves providing content and services to millions of delegates who annually attend meetings, congresses, exhibitions, business events, incentive travel and corporate hospitality. [2]

Gračan and Rudančić-Lugarić claim that the interaction of congress tourism and other economic activities present on the tourist scene is extremely important. In addition to organizing the gathering in a rented hall and using the accommodation facilities of the local hotel, congress tourism includes other economic components that indirectly support congresses, such as transport, telecommunications, catering services, local shops, organization of various excursions or special events, all contributing to better post-congress experience of participants. [3]

Despite the global economic crisis of 1980 and pressures on the budgets of international organizations, institutions and companies, the number of international congresses held after the 1990s (especially around 1993-2000) grew at a growth rate of 2.3% per year. In 2011, the size of congress tourism in the world reached a significant point; its direct or indirect share in the world economy is estimated at about \$ 150-200 billion. [4]

The closer the development of international congress tourism is to the present, the more it has a tourist component, ie part of meeting the tourist needs of congress tourists, which implies its tendency to experience the congress destination as a real tourist, exploring its cultural and historical heritage, gastronomy and attractions.

Congress, convention or conference are general terms that encompass all gatherings of participants that are not business-oriented, but at a predetermined place and time. They include participation in an organized meeting in which participants have an interactive, debate, seminar and / or competitive role, the topic or purpose of which may be of any nature. They are mostly hosted by professional, commercial or other non-corporate organizations. [5]

3. Important determinants of generation Z

Although each human is an individual for himself, there have already been many attempts in history to generalize and define different groups of people. One of the results of generalization is the creation of the concept of "generation". Generations are defined as a recognizable group that shares years of birth, age location, and significant life events at critical stages of development. Living in a just environment (e.g., economic, historical), exposure to the same events (e.g., cultural, environmental) and under the influence of similar technologies can affect people enough to think, make decisions, and behave in a similar way.

In the modern world, at least five different generations have been identified: [6]

- Traditionalists (silent generation or the largest generation), born between 1928 and 1944, who value authority and a top-down management approach,
- Baby Boomer generation, born between 1945 and 1965, prone to workaholism,

- Generation X, born between 1965 and 1979, a generation that feels comfortable with authority and considers the balance between business and private life important,
- Generation Y (Millennials), born between 1980 and 1995 and who generally grew up prosperous and technologically savvy,
- Generation Z, born after 1995,
- Generation Alpha, born after 2012.

How to attract Millennials is one of the most talked about topics in the event industry. Organizers focused on understanding their learning habits, travel behavior, and expectations in the workplace. While these insights are truly important to the continued success of the meetings industry, it is equally important to look beyond the Millennials to the large number of conference attendees who come after them: Generation Z.

Of course, some members of Generation Z are not yet old enough to attend the conference, because, among other things, individuals born in 2010 are in that group. But Generation Z includes those born in 1995 and later, meaning the oldest members of Generation Z have graduated from college and are already in the job market. When they begin their professional lives, they need the traditional benefits associated with conferences: networking opportunities and career connections. [7]

Generation Z lives every day with a digital amphitheater and a virtual community known as social media and for this reason it is necessary to analyze their habits and motives that drive them. They expect interactivity and digital media to be integrated into everything related to the event, from pre-event promotion to daily activities and sharing photos and videos after the event on social media and websites. This is, in fact, so important to them that keeping an event in place without free, fast Wi-Fi is one of their biggest torments, precisely because they need free Wi-Fi to post and share content during events, especially in rooms that have a weak mobile internet signal.

Members of Generation Z are an astute group of conference attendees, and have reached the stage where they can always see the best speakers in the world via YouTube, so they have high expectations of the keynote speakers at the conferences. This makes the engagement of speakers at conferences attended by members of Generation Z even more difficult and challenging, because when they are thrilled with something, then they convey it to everyone. They want speakers who are energetic, interesting and who get involved in the very purpose and goal of the conference. PowerPoint and generic, 'normal' stage settings are quite annoying when Generation Z members are in the audience. [7]

In addition to speakers, it is well known that this generational group highlights other important features when participating in conferences. They also care about the social aspect, which is manifested through various entertainment, cultural and sports events that must be an important part of every conference they attend.

Generation Z longs for experiences worth Instagram and other social networks where they can post their experiences. Creating special experiences that will instantly get attention on social media is what will trigger the cameras of their cell phones and

begin to win their hearts and minds.

However, with all the great technical achievements and innovations, social networks as additional factors that attract Generation Z to attend conferences and create a new experience, something interesting has been proven. Stillman [7] offered statistics proving that 84 percent of Generation Z respondents state that they prefer face-to-face communication, and it is clear that they are still looking for the kind of human connections that can be created at events, which has certainly been lost in the last two years of the pandemic of COVID-19.

In order to prove the above or set hypotheses, research was conducted on members of Generation Z who participate in conferences in the field of tourism and hospitality, so the following conferences from the country and the surrounding area stand out: MEKST conference in Novi Sad (2014. - 2021.), IMTHS (International Meeting of Tourism and Hospitality Students) in Šibenik (2018.), Split the Week conference in Split (2020., 2021.), Future Tourism Conference in Budva (2018., 2019.), Wave 4 Tourism in Opatija (2021.), as well as numerous other conferences that from year to year attract an increasing number of participants and lecturers.

4. Overview of previous research

The meetings industry is one of the most competitive and profitable market segments (Swarbrooke and Horner (2001)[8], and the authors Severt et al (2007)[9], Opperman and Chon (1997)[10], Chen (2006)[11], Lee, Petrick and Crompton (2007) [12], explored the perspective of congress participants on issues related to decision-making on participation in the congress.

Authors Crouch and Louviere (2004)[13] conducted research and singled out destination factors important when choosing a congress destination.

Oppermann and Chon (1997)[10] argue that additional destination opportunities, including shopping, local attractions, and recreational activities, attract participants.

Lee and Back (2008)[14] used destination-specific factors as dimensions crucial to measuring congress quality, testing the market value of the brand on participants. To assess destination-specific factors, they used accessibility, additional opportunities, safety, travel costs and concluded that these factors positively affect the satisfaction of participants, ie if the availability is satisfactory, the destination provides enough additional content and opportunities, and is safe, participants are positively perceived the destination.

Yoo and Chon (2008)[15] developed measurement scales to assess decision-making factors for congress participation and to find three destination-specific factors: destination benefits, safety and health, and travel opportunities for participants. All of these factors are related to accessibility, additional congress facilities, and the destination environment.

Research Oppermann (1998)[16], Severt, et. al. (2007)[9], Yoo and Chon (2008)

[17], Lee and Back (2008)[14], Lee, Kim and Lee (2012)[18] showed that participants were motivated to attend the congress due to the possibility of developing professional and social networks, expanding professional contacts, monitoring changes in the profession and acquiring new knowledge and ideas.

Participants do not want to feel isolated or excluded and are motivated to maintain interaction and networking (Rittichainuwat, Beck, & LaLopa (2001))[19]. Individuals choose congresses that best serve their goals of education and social networking.

According to the study of leisure involvement, pleasure and behavioral intentions (Li, Z., Ge, Y., Su, Z., & Huang, X. (2020))[20], it can be concluded that the design of events and services at the event are good ways to increase interest among visitors. Most visitors want to fulfill a specific purpose or need by visiting.

The results of Meeprom and Silanoi (2020)[21] showed that the perceived quality of a particular event had a direct impact on behavioral intent. In addition to the hedonistic nature of experiencing a special event, the role of perceived overall performance quality of a special event had a positive appeal of behavioral intent such as the intention to revisit the event and a positive Word of Mouth marketing. As an upgrade to this, the Event manager could make an effort to improve the quality of the event to encourage attendees to share their experiences with others through social media.

It follows that the main motives for participation are certainly the destination where the conference is held and its environment, networking and interaction with other participants, but also the design and quality of the event. In this paper, it will be investigated whether Generation Z gives preference to the destination or conference program when participating in conferences. To prove this, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H0: Destination and conference program represent significant motivational factors for Generation Z to attend student conferences,

H1: Destination represents a significant motivational factor for Generation Z to attend student conferences,

H2: Conference program represents a significant motivational factor for Generation Z to attend student conferences,

H2.1.: Conference entertainment program represents an important motivational factor for Generation Z to attend student conferences,

H2.2.: Conference professional program represents an important motivational factor for Generation Z to attend student conferences.

5. Research results

For the purposes of this research, an online survey questionnaire was developed and distributed from April to June 2022. The spatial scope of the research includes respondents, students of Generation Z from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, who participate in student conferences in these countries, and most of them are students of tourism, hospitality, marketing, economics and related areas. The total number of respondents who completed the survey is 206.

The research was conducted through an online survey questionnaire developed in Google Forms. The survey questionnaire consists of 13 questions of different types, created by authors. In addition to closed-ended questions, the questionnaire also contains open-ended questions with free entry, as well as satisfaction questions that contain Likert's scale for measuring attitudes, and in this case the degree of agreement with the stated statements. Accordingly, these are primary data as they represent the results of the author's research, most of them represented by descriptive statistics and inferential statistics methods.

Out of the total number of 206 respondents, 77.2% of them are females, while only 22.8% are males. Regarding the age of the respondents, most respondents are between 18 and 25 years old, more precisely 94% of them, while the remaining 6% are respondents aged between 25 and 28 years. The majority of respondents come from Croatia, as many as 68%, while 19.4% come from Serbia. A slightly smaller percentage of respondents come from Slovenia, 7.8%, while the rest of the respondents come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and other countries.

According to the level of completed education, the largest percentage of respondents, 35% of them have completed secondary vocational school and 21.4% of respondents have completed high school, which is expected given that the largest number of respondents are still in undergraduate studies. A slightly lower percentage of 31.1% of respondents have completed undergraduate studies, which is also expected considering that these are respondents who, in addition to conferences, are preparing to enter the labor market. Nevertheless, 10.7% of them have completed graduate studies, which confirms the fact that student conferences are also attended by students who have completed their university education, but are still eager to learn and acquire new knowledge and skills.

Regarding the frequency of conference attendance, the majority, as many as 81.6% of them point out that they attend conferences 1-2 times a year, while respondents who attend conferences 3-4 times a year are still in a much smaller number, 12.6%. However, it is also interesting to note that 5.8% of respondents attend conferences more than 4 times a year.

Regarding the conferences they have visited so far, the respondents highlighted the conferences MEKST, Split the Week, Wave 4 Tourism, Turizmijada (Future Tourism Conference), IMTHS Šibenik, Weekend Media Festival, Marketing Madness and LEAP Summit.

Considering the amount of money they are willing to set aside for the registration fee at the student conference, as many as 81.6% of respondents point out that they are willing to set aside up to € 100, and 15% of them are willing to set aside up to € 200. A much smaller percentage, 3.4% of them, are willing to set aside more than € 200 to participate in a student conference.

Regarding the way they learn about student conferences, respondents point out that they learn most about student conferences through social networks (68%), recommendations from colleagues (59%), the Student Union (59%), and a slightly smaller number of them learn about student conferences via LinkedIn.

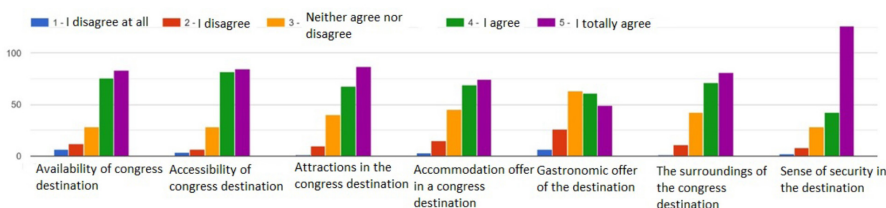


Figure 1: The importance of factors when choosing a congress destination
Source: authors

Regarding the importance of motives when choosing a congress destination, respondents agree that important motives are certainly the availability of the congress destination, its accessibility, attractions located in the congress destination, but also the offer of accommodation in the congress destination. To a lesser extent, they agree that an important motive when choosing a congress destination is the gastronomic offer of the congress destination, while the environment of the congress destination, which includes excursion opportunities, natural / cultural sights, shopping, is a more important motive when choosing. Regarding the importance of the last factor, the feeling of security in the destination, the respondents point out that this is an extremely important factor when choosing a congress destination. This motive will stand out even more in the future, among others, as an increasing number of tourists seek safety when visiting a destination, including Generation Z. All that said, the set hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

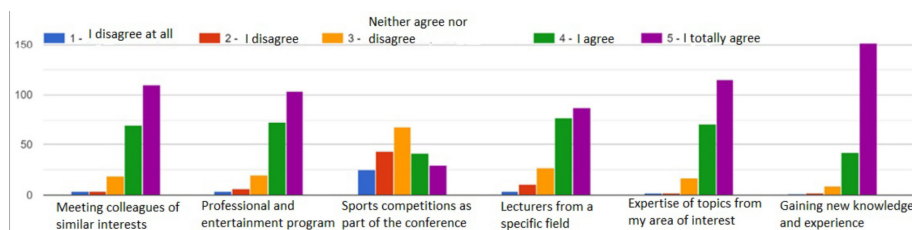


Figure 2: The importance of factors when choosing a student conference

Source: authors

Regarding the importance of motives when choosing a student conference, respondents agree that important motive is meeting colleagues of similar interests. Professional and entertainment program are also important motives for them, which confirms set hypotheses H2, H2.1. and H2.2. Regarding the importance of the motives of sports competitions within the conference, respondents are quite hesitant. Nevertheless, motives such as lecturers from a certain field, expertise of topics from their field of interest and the acquisition of new knowledge and experience are important motives for them when choosing a student conference. In addition, an important motive is the cost of attending the conference, which is expected since students are mostly on a limited budget. However, no less important motive, in addition to the price of participation, is the proximity of the conference venue.

Regarding the elements crucial in deciding to participate in the student conference, it is important to emphasize that the crucial element for as many as 74.3% of respondents is the program and content of the conference, while 52% point out that participating in the conference is an opportunity to visit a new destination. As many as 48.5% of respondents point out meeting friends and acquaintances as a crucial element when making a decision to participate in a student conference, and 39.1% of them say that this is the attractiveness of the destination where the conference is held.

When asked whether they would recommend a visit to student conferences to their colleagues, as many as 75.2% of respondents said they would recommend a visit to conferences, while 22.8% might recommend it. A small number of them would not recommend attending student conferences to their colleagues.

When asked what it means for them personally to participate in student conferences, respondents say that it is an opportunity for them to gain new knowledge and experience, learn about current events in the field of tourism, hospitality and marketing, meet and connect with new colleagues, but also renew relationships with to old colleagues, spreading interest, escaping from everyday life, useful lectures, but ultimately also fun.

6. Conclusion

By organizing international conferences, gatherings and similar business events, high economic effects are achieved and many influential visitors are attracted. Conferences affect the development of tourism, increase off-season traffic and create a new image of the destination. Conferences promote professional development through regional and international experience available to local communities. On the other hand, there are the organizational costs of food, drinks, entertainment and other elements of the entire congress event. However, the economic benefits associated with congresses and conventions exceed the costs of individual participants, as the average daily consumption of congress guests exceeds two to three times the consumption of ordinary tourists.

What is important for conference organizers is the knowledge of the needs, desires, preferences, habits, but also the motivational factors of individual participants, which are mostly defined as generational groups. Accordingly, there is a need to know the motivational factors of Generation Z, as a still insufficiently researched generation group, in order to create conferences just for them and find out which factors attract them when choosing a conference.

As a generation that is still mostly in the status of academic citizens, ie students, conferences are an ideal way for them to learn, further improve and learn new information in their field of interest, far removed and different from the usual literature from which they learn to successfully pass college exams.

Generation Z strives for unique and engaging experiences, experiences worth Instagram and other social networks, using the latest technical and technological advances, but still communicating face to face with other conference participants, especially after the coronavirus pandemic that closed the world for two years.

This paper investigates and analyzes the motivational factors of Generation Z when participating in conferences, and the results indicate that the most important motivational factors of this generation are mostly the program and content of the conference, and to a lesser extent the destination of the conference. work. In addition, important motivating factors of this generation when participating in conferences represent an opportunity for training and meeting with colleagues of similar interests.

The results of the research certainly represent a good basis for further research on this topic, as Generation Z is still insufficiently researched. Also, the results are a good source of information on the motivational factors of Generation Z for all conference organizers for Generation Z, in order to create conferences tailored to this specific generation, which will become the main driver of all industries in the future because of its technological development. striving for new experiences and the desire for constant learning and improvement.

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