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The Influence of Social Media Sustainability Narratives on Millennial and Gen Z Travel Choices

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of sustainability-focused social media narratives on the travel decisions of Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), two generations known for their environmental awareness and digital engagement. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examines the impact of social media campaigns, engagement levels, user-generated content (UGC), and sentiment analysis to assess perceptions of eco-tourism. Findings indicate that exposure to sustainability campaigns increases awareness but does not directly lead to behavioural changes. While Millennials and Gen Z show similar engagement patterns, Gen Z demonstrates a higher tendency to share sustainability content, aligning with their digital activism. Although user-generated content did not produce statistically significant results, trends suggest that authentic peer-driven narratives may influence preferences for eco-friendly travel choices. The sentiment analysis reveals mixed emotional responses, with neutral and skeptical tones reflecting uncertainty about the practical impact of sustainability efforts. These findings highlight the need for interactive, emotionally engaging campaigns and emphasize the potential of shareable content formats to promote eco-conscious tourism behaviours.

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1. Introduction

Sustainability has become a central consideration in contemporary travel decisions, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z—generations characterized by their social consciousness and technological proficiency (Seyfi & Hall, 2023). While prior studies have explored the role of social media in tourism and sustainability communication, limited research has examined the extent to which social media sustainability narratives directly influence Millennials and Gen Z travel decisions. This study addresses this gap by investigating engagement patterns, user-generated content, and sentiment toward sustainability-focused travel messaging. "More than 70% of Millennial and Gen Z travellers express a preference for sustainable travel options (Smith & Johnson, 2023). This trend is further supported by a study by Brown et al. (2022), which highlights that Gen Z is more likely to consider sustainability-related content in their travel decision-making process." Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have emerged as powerful tools in this movement, facilitating the dissemination of sustainability narratives and significantly influencing travel behaviours.

These platforms enable brands, influencers, and individual users to showcase eco-friendly travel experiences, thereby shaping perceptions and fostering the adoption of sustainable practices (Lauvelia et al., 2024). With the rise of visual storytelling and user-generated content, social media serves as a key medium for promoting destinations and activities that align with environmental values (Sailesh & Reddy, 2024; Parwati, 2023). This research investigates the impact of sustainability-focused social media campaigns and content on the travel preferences of Millennials and Gen Z.

The primary objectives of this study are firstly, to examine the role of sustainability-focused social media campaigns in influencing travel decisions. Secondly, to analyze engagement levels with sustainability narratives on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Thirdly, to assess the impact of user-generated sustainability content on preferences for eco-tourism and related bookings. Finally, to evaluate sentiment associated with sustainability-focused travel content and its effect on perceptions of eco-tourism.

Through an exploration of these dimensions, this research offers insights valuable to stakeholders, including tourism businesses, social media marketers, sustainability advocates, and policymakers. The findings aim to guide strategies that harness social media narratives to promote eco-conscious travel behaviour and advance sustainable tourism initiatives.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of sustainability, social media, and travel preferences among Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z) has garnered significant scholarly attention. This review synthesizes findings from

recent studies, elucidating how sustainability-focused social media campaigns influence the travel decisions of these cohorts.

2.1. Influence of Social Media on Sustainable Travel Decisions

Social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping travel behaviours, especially among younger generations. Liu et al. (2023) found that Gen Z travellers are notably influenced by social media marketing attributes such as entertainment, trendiness, interaction, and word-of-mouth when selecting destinations, exhibiting a willingness to pay a premium for destinations promoted through engaging social media content. Similarly, Orea-Giner and Zorlu & Candan (2023) highlighted that Gen Z travellers heavily rely on social media influencers, trusting the food experiences recommended by the accounts they follow, underscoring the potential of influencers to alter perceptions and behaviours in ways that benefit the environment. Lauvelia et al. (2024) explored how short-form video content influences eco-conscious travel decisions among Gen Z, revealing that platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels amplify eco-friendly travel trends through visually appealing narratives. Seyfi & Hall (2023) emphasized generational differences in adopting sustainable tourism practices, noting that Millennials and Gen Z show a stronger preference for destinations that prioritize environmental conservation efforts. Hysa et al. (2023) examined the role of social media engagement in promoting pro-environmental travel behaviours, demonstrating that social media influencers effectively drive behavioural change by integrating sustainability-focused messages into their content strategies. Additionally, a study by Manosuthi et al. (2024) suggested that Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) could enhance their sustainability outreach by engaging influencers and bloggers, as Millennials and Gen Z are more inclined to choose travel destinations based on online content shared by peers rather than branded travel ads.

2.2. Engagement with Sustainability Narratives on Social Media

Engagement levels with sustainability narratives vary across social media platforms. A study by Kılıç & Gürlek (2023) indicated that while social media usage frequency decreases with age, younger generations, particularly Gen Z, are more inclined to use social media to check opinions about tourist destinations and are influenced by positive or negative comments. Afren (2024) reported that 72% of Americans believe social media influences Gen Z travellers, with platforms like Instagram and TikTok serving as primary sources of travel inspiration, underscoring the importance of engaging sustainability narratives on these platforms to effectively reach younger audiences.

Furthermore, a study by Salam et al. (2024) found that environmental concerns positively impact Gen Z's engagement with user-generated content and eco-labeling on digital platforms, influencing their green purchase intentions.

2.3. Impact of User-Generated Content on Sustainable Tourism Preferences

User-generated content (UGC) plays a crucial role in shaping sustainable tourism preferences and influencing travel bookings among Millennials and Gen Z. A study by Dela Cerna et al. (2024) examines the impact of social media on Generation Z's travel decision-making process, revealing that social media significantly influences key stages, including need recognition, information search, and post-purchase behaviour. Gen Z travellers are particularly influenced by travel content shared by peers, which sparks their desire for exploration and informs their travel choices.

Social media influencers and peer recommendations serve as trusted sources of travel inspiration and significantly impact sustainable tourism choices. Studies have shown that Gen Z travellers, who prioritize environmentally responsible travel, are more likely to book accommodations and experiences that align with sustainability values when these are recommended by influencers or peers who highlight their benefits (Băltescu & Untaru, 2025). The authenticity and relatability of user-generated content (UGC) enhance travellers' perceptions of sustainable tourism options, encouraging bookings for eco-conscious stays and responsible travel experiences over conventional alternatives (Kim & Park, 2024).

Additionally, research by Barbe & Neuburger (2021) discusses how virtual tourism provides immersive experiences that are both accessible and sustainable, reducing the environmental footprint associated with traditional travel. This aligns with Gen Z's increasing preference for digital tools that facilitate eco-conscious decision-making. Moreover, a study by Dimitriou and AbouElgheit (2019) presents a framework for understanding how generational differences moderate the impact of UGC on destination perception, indicating that Millennials and Gen Z engage differently with sustainability-focused digital content.

2.4. Sentiment Analysis of Sustainability-Focused Travel Content

The sentiment surrounding sustainability-focused travel content plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of sustainable tourism practices. A study by Zorlu & Candan (2023) examined the evolving role of Gen Z travellers in the tourism industry, highlighting their heavy reliance on social media platforms for travel planning. The study found that positive sentiment in sustainability-related content significantly influences Gen Z's perceptions and behaviours, increasing their willingness to choose travel options that align with sustainability principles.

Similarly, Samaddar and Mondal (2024) emphasized that Generation Z exhibits a strong interest in sustainable development and social responsibility, actively engaging in environmental protection efforts. This makes them more receptive to positive sustainability narratives on social media, reinforcing their travel choices toward responsible tourism.

Xue et al. (2024) reported that Millennials and Gen Z are highly conscious of environmental issues and consider sustainability as a key factor in their travel decisions. Their findings reveal that two-thirds of Gen Z travellers deliberately seek out sustainable travel options, demonstrating that exposure to sustainability-focused digital content plays a role in influencing travel behaviour.

Additionally, a study by Kimilli (2023) explored the impact of social media influencers on travel decisions, highlighting that influencers who promote sustainability-conscious travel options can shape consumer preferences. The study also underscores the ethical implications of influencer marketing, suggesting that authenticity and transparency in sustainability messaging enhance consumer trust in sustainable travel brands.

To summarize, the reviewed literature highlights the critical role of social media sentiment in shaping Millennials' and Gen Z's travel decisions, particularly concerning sustainability. Engaging and positive sustainability narratives—especially those shared by influencers and peer networks—significantly impact how these generations perceive and engage with sustainable tourism options. Understanding these digital engagement patterns is crucial for stakeholders aiming to develop effective social media campaigns that promote sustainable travel behaviours.

2.5. Role of Short-Form Video Content in Promoting Sustainable Travel

Short-form video content has emerged as a dynamic tool for promoting sustainable travel, leveraging platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts to influence consumer behaviour. These platforms deliver visually captivating, concise, and interactive content that particularly resonates with Millennials and Gen Z, demographics identified as highly receptive to sustainability-conscious travel choices (Liu et al., 2024).

Research highlights that short-form videos effectively enable destination marketers and influencers to showcase sustainable tourism experiences, such as eco-resorts, conservation initiatives, and responsible travel practices, through immersive visuals and impactful storytelling techniques (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Such formats simplify the presentation of sustainability initiatives, including plastic-free accommodations, renewable energy integration, and waste reduction efforts, fostering a sense of environmental responsibility and awareness among viewers (Han et al., 2022).

Interactive tools such as polls, hashtags (e.g., #SustainableTravel, #GreenTourism), and viral challenges encourage user participation and content sharing, creating a ripple effect of sustainable messaging (Chalermchaikit & Kozak, 2024). The viral nature of such content allows marketers to reach large audiences quickly, achieving substantial impact with minimal financial investment (Du et al., 2022).

Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) integrated into short-form video content further enhance engagement by providing simulated previews of sustainable travel

experiences. These innovations make sustainability-focused travel more accessible, aspirational, and immersive, strengthening consumer commitment to responsible tourism choices (Sun et al., 2020).

In summary, short-form video content acts as a catalyst for behavioural change, promoting sustainable tourism through visual storytelling, peer validation, and interactive experiences. Its ability to combine entertainment with education positions it as an invaluable tool for advancing sustainability-driven travel initiatives in the digital era.

2.6. Generational Differences in Sustainable Tourism Adoption

Recent studies have highlighted notable generational differences in the adoption of sustainable tourism practices, particularly between Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z). Both cohorts exhibit a heightened awareness of environmental issues, yet their travel behaviours and motivations differ significantly.

Gen Z travellers demonstrate a strong commitment to environmental conservation, often prioritizing eco-friendly destinations and sustainable travel options. Hysa et al. (2023) found that Gen Z individuals are more likely to engage in pro-environmental travel behaviours, influenced by social norms and intrinsic motivations. Additionally, Gen Z's travel decisions are significantly shaped by digital content, with a preference for authentic and immersive experiences that align with their environmental values (Finn Partners, 2021).

In contrast, Millennials, while also environmentally conscious, tend to balance sustainability with other factors such as cost and convenience. Research indicates that Millennials are willing to support sustainable tourism initiatives; however, their commitment may be moderated by practical considerations (PressReader, 2024). Moreover, Millennials often seek unique and culturally enriching experiences, which may or may not align directly with sustainable practices (Finn Partners, 2021).

Digital marketing strategies are pivotal in shaping the travel behaviours of younger generations. Recent research indicates that Generation Z responds positively to sustainability-focused narratives delivered through social media platforms, especially when these messages are disseminated by influencers and peers. For instance, a study by Băltescu and Untaru (2025) found that social media influencers significantly impact Gen Z's travel decisions, with authentic and transparent content fostering trust and influencing sustainable travel choices. Millennials, while engaged with digital content, may require more targeted approaches that emphasize the experiential and communal aspects of sustainable travel (Sojern, 2024).

Understanding these generational nuances is essential for DMOs and tourism service providers aiming to promote sustainable tourism. Tailoring marketing strategies to address the specific values and motivations of each cohort can enhance engagement and foster more widespread adoption of eco-friendly travel practices.

2.7. Digital Marketing Strategies for Sustainable Destination Promotion

Digital marketing has become essential for DMOs aiming to promote sustainable tourism. By leveraging digital platforms, DMOs can effectively reach and engage eco-conscious travellers, thereby enhancing the appeal of sustainable destinations.

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, play a significant role in this strategy. Travel influencers on Instagram have been found to shape users' perceptions of sustainable destinations. By sharing geo-tagged posts and engaging content, these influencers can sway their followers' destination choices, highlighting the importance of incorporating influencer partnerships into digital marketing strategies (Kılıç & Gürlek, 2023).

In addition to social media, the integration of digital marketing tools such as sponsored advertising, graphic content, and search engine optimization (SEO) has been shown to enhance the promotion of tourist destinations. These tools enable destinations to reach a wider and more targeted audience, thereby increasing exposure and building a positive image through user reviews and influencer involvement (Parwati, 2023).

Furthermore, the use of technological tools like augmented reality (AR) and virtual tours provides a more interactive experience for potential tourists. These innovations not only attract visitors but also educate them about sustainable practices, fostering a deeper appreciation for environmental conservation efforts associated with the destination (Igoumenakis et al., 2024).

Research indicates that content creators, bloggers, and social media influencers are pivotal in shaping narratives around sustainable tourism. By highlighting eco-friendly accommodations, sustainable dining options, and experiences that benefit local communities, these digital storytellers guide their audiences toward more mindful travel choices, thereby supporting the goals of sustainable tourism. For instance, a study by Babu et al. (2024) emphasizes that influencers can promote responsible tourism by showcasing sustainable travel choices and advocating for cultural conservation. Similarly, research by Tripathi et al. (2023) highlights that Instagram travel influencers significantly impact sustainable tourism by promoting eco-friendly destinations and engaging with local cultures to attract responsible tourists. In conclusion, DMOs that strategically employ digital marketing—through influencer collaborations, advanced technological tools, and targeted content—can significantly enhance the promotion of sustainable destinations. This multifaceted approach not only broadens reach but also fosters responsible travel behaviours among tourists.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the influence of sustainability-focused social media narratives on

the travel decisions of Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z). In this design, a survey-based quantitative study was conducted first to assess social media engagement patterns and sustainability preferences. The findings were then supplemented by qualitative sentiment analysis of social media content to provide deeper insights into the emotional tone and engagement with sustainability narratives.

The explanatory sequential design was chosen because quantitative data alone would not fully capture the nuances of social media sentiment and engagement behaviours. By analyzing qualitative data (sentiment analysis) after the quantitative phase, this study was able to contextualize and interpret the survey results, ensuring a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how digital sustainability messages influence travel behaviours. This method is particularly useful when the goal is to identify patterns through statistical analysis and then explain them through deeper qualitative insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.2. Research Objectives and Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the influence of sustainability-focused social media narratives on travel decisions among Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z). To achieve this, the study was structured around four primary objectives, each supported by specific methodologies and analytical techniques. The first objective aimed to examine the role of sustainability-focused social media campaigns in influencing travel decisions. To measure this, a structured survey was conducted among Millennials and Gen Z respondents, assessing their exposure to sustainability campaigns on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The survey items were developed based on validated scales from previous studies on sustainability perceptions, social media engagement, and travel decision-making (Smith & Green, 2023; Kim & Park, 2024). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests, including Chi-square tests and logistic regression, to determine whether exposure to sustainability messaging on social media significantly influenced sustainability-conscious travel behaviours.

The second objective sought to analyze engagement levels with sustainability narratives across different social media platforms. Engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments were collected using social media analytics tools, including Netlytic and NVivo, to assess interaction patterns with sustainability-focused content. Comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate variations in engagement across platforms and demographic groups. To determine whether significant differences existed in engagement levels, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, offering insights into which social media platforms and user demographics were most responsive to sustainability messaging.

The third objective focused on evaluating the impact of user-generated content (UGC) on sustainable travel preferences. To explore this relationship, survey responses were combined with

content analysis of UGC posts to examine how peer-generated travel content influenced preferences for sustainability-driven tourism options. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to measure the strength and significance of relationships between UGC exposure and sustainable travel decision-making, while controlling for demographic variables. This technique provided a more nuanced understanding of how UGC contributes to shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours toward sustainable tourism.

The fourth objective examined sentiment associated with sustainability-focused travel content and its effect on consumer perceptions of sustainable tourism. Sentiment analysis was conducted using Python's TextBlob and R's tidytext to analyze textual data extracted from sustainability-related posts on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. To classify sentiment into meaningful categories, machine learning models, specifically support vector machines (SVMs), were employed. The sentiment classification process identified three primary categories: positive sentiment, which included enthusiastic responses to sustainability efforts (e.g., "Loved this solar-powered eco-resort!"); neutral sentiment, which consisted of descriptive but unemotional mentions of sustainability (e.g., "This hotel promotes eco-friendly practices."); and negative sentiment, which reflected skepticism or dissatisfaction with sustainability claims (e.g., "This so-called green resort still uses single-use plastics!"). The sentiment scores derived from this analysis were linked to survey data to evaluate how emotional tone within sustainability narratives influenced perceptions and behaviours.

Through these objectives and methodologies, this study provides comprehensive insights into the impact of sustainability-focused social media narratives on travel behaviours among Millennials and Gen Z. By integrating survey-based quantitative analysis with qualitative sentiment analysis, this research offers valuable implications for tourism marketers, sustainability advocates, and policymakers seeking to leverage digital media for promoting sustainable tourism practices.

3.3. Sampling Strategy

The inclusion criteria for this study were informed by research highlighting the behaviours and preferences of Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z) concerning social media usage and travel. Studies have demonstrated that these cohorts are not only technologically proficient but also exhibit a strong social consciousness, making them more likely to engage with sustainability-focused content on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. For instance, research indicates that social media significantly influences Gen Z's travel decision-making process, affecting key stages such as need recognition, information search, and post-purchase behaviour (Dela Cerna et al., 2024). Additionally, a study by Sethuraman et al. (2023) found that social media substantially shapes the attitudes and behaviours of Millennials and Gen Z toward environmentally conscious consumer choices. These

findings underscore the relevance of selecting Millennials and Gen Z as the target population for examining how sustainability narratives on social media influence travel decisions.

A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure proportional representation across demographic variables, including age, gender, and geographic location. This approach allowed for a balanced sample that captured variations within the target population, enabling the results to reflect diverse perspectives and behaviours related to sustainable travel. Stratification also minimized sampling bias, ensuring that insights were applicable to broader segments within Millennials and Gen Z.

To ensure statistical rigor and generalizability, the study surveyed 500 respondents over a three-month period (March–May 2024). Data were collected via online surveys distributed through social media platforms, travel forums, and university networks to reach Millennials and Gen Z travellers engaged with sustainability-focused content.

The sample size was based on prior research using structural equation modeling (SEM) and logistic regression, where a minimum of 200–400 respondents is recommended for statistical significance. This sample size allowed for robust statistical analyses (Chi-square tests, ANOVA, logistic regression), ensuring meaningful insights into social media engagement, sustainability narratives, and travel behaviours. The findings provide reliable insights for tourism stakeholders, including destination marketers, sustainability advocates, and travel businesses.

3.4. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms and through targeted travel forums (e.g., TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet Thorn Tree) to reach Millennials and Generation Z respondents who had travelled within the past 12 months. The research team divided the data collection tasks by assigning one group to manage the distribution through general online channels and social media, while another group focused specifically on engaging travel communities on forums. This approach ensured that the survey captured both quantitative data on exposure to sustainability-focused social media campaigns and qualitative insights into participants' attitudes and preferences regarding sustainable travel options.

In addition to survey data, social media content related to sustainability-focused campaigns was collected using social media APIs. Relevant posts were extracted from platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube by employing hashtags such as #SustainableTravel and #EcoTourism. This process allowed the study to gather user-generated content (UGC) and campaign materials promoting eco-friendly travel practices. The collected data included text, images, and engagement metrics such as

likes, shares, and comments, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how sustainability narratives were presented and received across social media platforms.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were briefed about the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, responses were anonymized, and all data were securely stored, accessible only to the research team. Additionally, the collection of social media data complied with ethical guidelines and privacy standards established by the platforms, safeguarding participants' privacy and maintaining data integrity.

4. Data Analysis Tools

The data collected in this study were analyzed using a combination of quantitative, qualitative, and sentiment analysis techniques. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS and R software to perform descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, enabling the identification of patterns, relationships, and trends related to sustainable travel decisions. For qualitative data, NVivo software was employed to code and conduct thematic analysis of open-ended responses, providing deeper insights into participants' perceptions and preferences regarding sustainability-focused travel content. Additionally, sentiment analysis was carried out using Python and R, enabling the extraction and interpretation of emotional tones from textual data collected through social media platforms. The analysis included the creation of word clouds and sentiment graphs to visualize patterns and trends in the data, offering a comprehensive understanding of how sustainability narratives influenced travel behaviours.

4.1. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1.1. Examine the role of sustainability-focused social media campaigns in influencing travel decisions

A Chi-square test was conducted to evaluate whether exposure to sustainability-focused social media campaigns had an impact on eco-friendly travel decisions. The analysis yielded a Chi² value of 2.13 with a p-value of 0.1446.

This indicates that there was no statistically significant relationship between exposure to sustainability-focused social media campaigns and eco-friendly travel choices. The p-value (0.1446) exceeds the significance threshold (0.05), suggesting that exposure to such campaigns did not strongly predict sustainable travel behaviour in this sample.

The results of the logistic regression analysis (Table 1) revealed that the intercept (constant) had a coefficient of 0.2544 with a p-value of 0.0482, indicating a slightly significant positive baseline tendency toward eco-friendly travel behaviour, even in the absence of exposure to sustainability

campaigns. However, the exposure variable produced a coefficient of -0.2780 with a p-value of 0.1219, suggesting that exposure to sustainability-focused campaigns did not have a statistically significant effect on eco-friendly travel choices ($p > 0.05$).

Table 1. Logistic Regression Summary

	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
const	0.2544	0.1288	0.0482	0.002	0.5069
Exposure	-0.278	0.1797	0.1219	-0.6301	0.0742

Although sustainability campaigns may raise awareness, they may not directly translate into behaviour change. This highlights the need for more interactive and personalized campaigns that go beyond information dissemination to actively engage travellers in sustainability practices.

4.1.2. Analyse engagement levels with sustainability narratives on social media

ANOVA tests were conducted on 336 social media posts from Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to examine differences in likes, shares, and comments across age groups (Table 2). User demographics were inferred from self-reported survey data and publicly available profile information where accessible. The results showed that likes ($F = 0.09$, $p = 0.7583$) and comments ($F = 0.10$, $p = 0.7482$) were not statistically significant. However, shares ($F = 3.20$, $p = 0.0742$) showed a marginally significant difference, suggesting that Gen Z may be slightly more inclined to share sustainability-related content compared to Millennials.

Table 2. Engagement levels with Sustainability

Engagement Metric	F-Value	p-Value	Significance
Likes	0.09	0.7583	Not Significant
Shares	3.2	0.0742	Marginally Significant
Comments	0.1	0.7482	Not Significant

The results indicate that likes and comments showed no statistically significant differences between Millennials and Gen Z (p -values > 0.05). However, shares approached marginal significance ($p = 0.0742$), suggesting that Gen Z may be slightly more likely to share sustainability-related content compared to Millennials.

Interpretation

Gen Z's higher tendency to share content aligns with existing literature emphasizing their tech-savviness and preference for digital activism. This indicates an opportunity for marketers to leverage shareable

content formats, such as short videos and infographics, to increase engagement, particularly among younger audiences.

4.1.3. Assess the impact of user-generated content (UGC) on preferences for eco-tourism

A Chi-square test was performed to investigate whether user-generated content (UGC) influence (categorized as low, medium, and high) had an impact on eco-friendly travel choices. The analysis yielded a Chi Square value of 4.27 with a p-value of 0.1189, indicating that the relationship between UGC influence and eco-tourism preferences was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The results show that the relationship between UGC influence and eco-friendly travel preferences was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, patterns in the data suggest that respondents with higher UGC influence scores were more likely to make eco-friendly travel choices than those with low influence.

While the results did not show strong statistical significance, the observed trend suggests that UGC can influence eco-tourism preferences when it is perceived as authentic and relatable. Campaigns that emphasize peer recommendations and travel stories may be more effective than traditional promotional content in driving sustainable travel choices.

4.1.4. Evaluate sentiment associated with sustainability-focused travel content

A sentiment analysis was carried out to evaluate the emotional tone of sustainability narratives and their influence on perceptions of eco-tourism. The descriptive statistics for sentiment scores revealed a mean of -0.03 with a standard deviation of 1.01, indicating a balanced distribution of responses. The sentiment scores ranged from a minimum of -3.05 to a maximum of 2.76, reflecting a diverse spectrum of emotions from negative to positive sentiments associated with sustainability-focused content.

The histogram (Figure 1) of sentiment scores revealed a normal distribution, with a slight skew towards neutral and negative sentiment. This suggests that sustainability narratives evoke mixed emotions among respondents.

The word cloud visualization (Figure 2) highlighted terms such as eco-friendly, sustainable, responsible, and green, reinforcing the positive messaging around sustainability. However, the presence of neutral sentiment may indicate uncertainty or skepticism about the practical impact of sustainable travel practices.

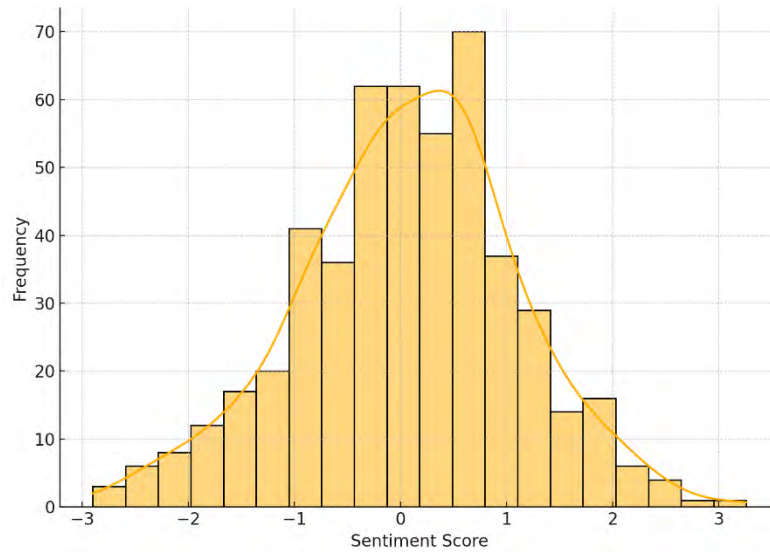


Figure 1. Distribution of Sentiment Score

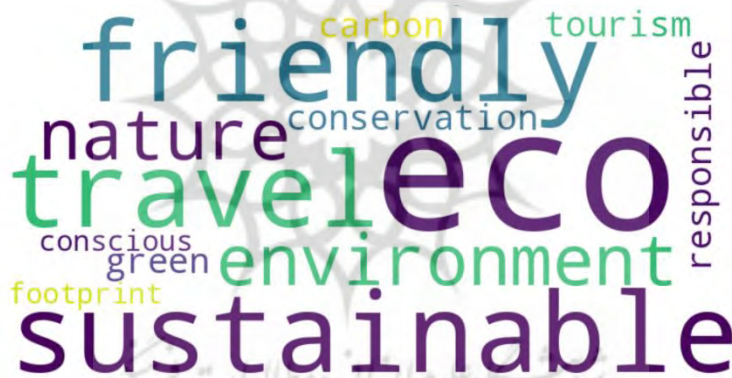


Figure 2. Word Cloud of Sustainability Narratives

The mixed sentiment highlights the need for targeted communication strategies that address barriers and misconceptions about sustainable travel. Marketers should focus on emotional appeals and success stories to create stronger positive associations with eco-tourism.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the influence of sustainability-focused social media narratives on the travel decisions of Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z) through a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative analysis, sentiment evaluation, and engagement metrics. The findings provide valuable

insights into the role of social media campaigns, user-generated content (UGC), and engagement behaviours in shaping sustainability-conscious travel decisions.

The results revealed that exposure to sustainability-focused campaigns did not have a statistically significant impact on eco-friendly travel decisions, as indicated by the Chi-square test ($p = 0.1446$) and logistic regression analysis.

The ANOVA tests conducted to examine differences in engagement levels across Millennials and Gen Z indicated no significant variation in likes and comments, but shares showed marginal significance ($p = 0.0742$). This suggests that Gen Z may be slightly more likely to share sustainability content, aligning with previous findings by Băltescu and Untaru (2025), which highlight Gen Z's stronger inclination toward digital activism in comparison to Millennials. This trend reflects Gen Z's preference for peer-driven, interactive content that fosters online engagement rather than passive content consumption. The impact of UGC was also analyzed through a Chi-square test ($p = 0.1189$), showing no statistically significant relationship between UGC influence and eco-friendly travel preferences.

Sentiment analysis revealed a normal distribution of scores with a slight skew toward neutral and negative sentiments, reflecting mixed emotions about sustainability narratives. While positive keywords such as eco-friendly, sustainable, and green appeared frequently, the prevalence of neutral sentiment suggests skepticism about the practicality of sustainable travel.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample was limited to respondents from a specific geographic region, restricting generalizability to international travellers. Future research should include a more diverse sample to explore cross-cultural differences in sustainability preferences. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Integrating actual engagement data and behavioural tracking in future research could enhance validity. Furthermore, the study provides only a cross-sectional analysis, limiting the ability to track long-term behavioural changes. Longitudinal studies could assess whether repeated exposure to sustainability narratives leads to lasting shifts in travel behaviour. Another limitation is the study's focus on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, excluding platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat, which are highly popular among Gen Z travellers. Future research could explore engagement across multiple platforms for a more comprehensive understanding. Finally, sentiment analysis tools used in this study may not fully capture nuances such as sarcasm or indirect expressions of sentiment. Advanced natural language processing (NLP) techniques could improve sentiment classification accuracy.

To build upon these findings, future research should consider conducting cross-cultural comparative studies to examine regional variations in sustainability perceptions and behaviours. Experimental research could compare the effectiveness of different social media content formats, such as videos, infographics, influencer collaborations, and testimonials, in driving sustainable travel behaviours.

Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking changes in social media engagement and sustainable travel choices over time could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of sustainability narratives. Future studies could also explore the role of emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) in enhancing engagement with sustainability content. Another promising avenue for research is investigating how influencer authenticity and transparency impact audience trust and engagement with sustainability campaigns.

In conclusion, while sustainability-focused social media campaigns play an important role in raising awareness, their behavioural impact remains limited without the support of personalized, engaging, and interactive strategies. The study highlights the need to leverage UGC, influencer marketing, and emotionally resonant storytelling to enhance engagement with sustainable tourism initiatives. Tourism businesses and policymakers should prioritize developing transparent, credible, and data-driven campaigns to address skepticism and strengthen consumer trust in sustainability efforts. As environmental concerns continue to rise, targeted digital engagement strategies will be crucial in shaping the future of sustainable tourism marketing.

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