

Journal : *International Journal Of Tourism And Destination Studies*
ISSN : 2822-6089
Article ID : 94480
Article Type : *Araştırma Makalesi-Research Article*
Corresponding Author : İrem YILDIRIM
Year : 2026
Volume : V
Issue : II
Page : 146-165
Arrival Date : 20.05.2026
Revision Date : 05.06.2026
Acceptance Date : 21.06.2026
Published Date : 20.09.2026
How to Cite This Article : Yıldırım, İ. (2026). How Generation Z Experiences and Constructs Meaning in Tourist Guiding Services. *International Journal Of Tourism And Destination Studies (IJOTADS)*, 5(2), 146-165. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20572240

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HOW GENERATION Z EXPERIENCES AND CONSTRUCTS MEANING IN TOURIST GUIDING SERVICES[‡]

Z KUŞAĞININ TURİZM REHBERLİĞİ HİZMETLERİNİ DENEYİMLEME VE ANLAMLANDIRMA BİÇİMLERİ

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how Generation Z tourists experience guided tour services and how they construct meaning from these experiences. In this context, the research examines Generation Z tourists' guided tour experiences through emotional, cultural, interactional, and digital dimensions that collectively shape the meaning-making process of tourism experiences. The study is designed within a qualitative research approach and employs a descriptive phenomenological research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 14 Generation Z tourists who had participated in at least one guided tour experience. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis revealed four main themes: the constitutive role of guided tour experiences, the meaning-making process of tourism experiences, Generation Z tourists' profile and expectations, and the impact of digitalization on guided tour experiences. The findings indicate that Generation Z tourists interpret guided tour experiences as a multilayered meaning-making process involving emotional, cultural, and interactive dimensions. Moreover, the communication style, narrative approach, and level of interaction of the tour guide significantly shape experiential perceptions. Digital technologies and social media also play a decisive role both in forming expectations and in constructing the meaning of the experience. The study contributes to the literature by re-evaluating guided tour services within the context of the experience economy and emphasizes the importance of more interactive, personalized, and digitally supported guiding services tailored to Generation Z tourists.

Keywords: Tourism, Generation Z, Tourist Guiding, Meaning-Making, Qualitative Research.

Jel Codes: L83, Z32, D91

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Z kuşağı turistlerin turizm rehberliği hizmetlerini nasıl deneyimlediklerini ve bu deneyimlere nasıl anlam yüklediklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda araştırma, Z kuşağı turistlerin rehberli tur deneyimlerini, turizm deneyimlerinin anlam oluşturma sürecini şekillendiren duygusal, kültürel, etkileşimsel ve dijital boyutlar aracılığıyla ele almaktadır. Araştırma, nitel araştırma yaklaşımı kapsamında betimleyici fenomenolojik araştırma deseniyle tasarlanmıştır. Veriler, en az bir rehberli tur deneyimi yaşamış 14 Z kuşağı turist ile gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış

[‡] The necessary ethical committee approval for this article was obtained from the Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on February 27, 2026, with decision number 2026.05.51.

görüşmeler yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler, tematik analiz yöntemi kullanılarak çözümlenmiştir. Analiz sonucunda dört ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır: rehberlik deneyiminin oluşturucu rolü, deneyimsel anlamlandırma süreci, Z kuşağı turist profili ve beklentileri ile dijitalleşmenin rehberlik deneyimine etkisi. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular Z kuşağı turistlerin rehberlik deneyimlerini, duygusal, kültürel ve etkileşimsel boyutları içeren çok katmanlı bir anlam üretim süreci olarak değerlendirdiklerini göstermektedir. Ayrıca rehberin iletişim tarzı, anlatım biçimi ve etkileşim düzeyi deneyim algısını önemli ölçüde şekillendirmektedir. Dijital teknolojiler ve sosyal medya ise hem beklenti oluşumunda hem de deneyimin anlamlandırılmasında belirleyici bir rol oynamaktadır. Araştırma, turizm rehberliğinin deneyim ekonomisi bağlamında yeniden değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini ortaya koyarak literatüre katkı sunarak Z kuşağına yönelik daha etkileşimli, kişiselleştirilmiş ve dijital destekli rehberlik hizmetlerinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Turizm, Z Kuşağı, Turist Rehberliği, Anlam Oluşturma, Nitel Araştırma.

Jel Kodu: L83, Z32, D91

1. INTRODUCTION

Technological developments in the tourism sector have transformed multiple dimensions ranging from service delivery to experience design, and this transformation has reshaped the function and role of the tourism guiding profession (Weiler & Black, 2015). Traditionally characterized by information delivery and directional functions, tourism guiding has evolved into a more interactive structure that interprets visitor experiences, contextualizes cultural meanings, and facilitates the formation of emotional connections between tourists and destinations. In this regard, tourism guiding services have moved beyond the cognitive transmission of information and have become a holistic experience production process that also incorporates the emotional and experiential dimensions of tourism consumption (Nazli, 2020). Indeed, Huang et al. (2010) emphasize that tour guiding services directly shape tourist experiences through destination image formation, cultural interpretation, information transfer, and social interaction. Similarly, Weiler & Black (2015) demonstrate that tour guides function not only as information providers but also as active agents who co-construct experiences through understanding, empathy, physical access, and mediated encounters. Within this framework, tourism guiding is considered not merely as a facilitating service, but as a key intermediary structure that actively contributes to meaning production within the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Ren et al., 2024).

Beyond service-level transformations, the tourism sector has also experienced a structural shift in demand patterns, bringing Generation Z's role in tourism to the forefront. Generation Z is defined as a new tourist profile immersed in digital technologies, characterized by rapid access to information and active use of digital platforms in travel decision-making processes, also referred to as "digital natives" (Akış İlhan et al., 2023; Miljković et al., 2025). This generation's approach to tourism experience extends beyond destination selection and reflects a multilayered structure encompassing the planning, experiencing, and sharing of tourism activities. Compared to traditional tourist profiles, Generation Z tourists demonstrate stronger expectations for interactive, participatory, and personalized experiences, while also shaping their decision-making processes through digital content (Akış Aşık, 2020; Yalçın & Karaman, 2022).

A review of the existing literature reveals that Generation Z in tourism research has predominantly been examined through travel motivations, digital behaviors, consumption preferences, and destination perceptions (Al-Okaily, 2021; Le et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Dragolea et al., 2023; Stojavljević et al., 2023). However, these studies largely focus on general tourism behaviors and provide limited insight into their engagement with experience-producing services such as tour guiding and how they interpret such experiences in depth (Miskolczi et al., 2025; Oostvogels & Tomas, 2025; Miljković et al., 2025). Furthermore, while recent studies have begun to explore Generation Z's experiential expectations and digital behavior patterns in tourism contexts (Leung et al., 2022; Uysal, 2022; Liu et al., 2023), the specific intersection of tour guiding, and Generation Z's meaning-making processes remains largely unaddressed in the literature. Moreover, the relatively small number of studies addressing both tour guiding and Generation Z are mainly based on quantitative research designs (Miljković et al., 2025), which limits the explanatory depth required to capture the subjective, contextual, and meaning-making nature of guided tour experiences. Accordingly, the existing literature lacks sufficient understanding of how Generation Z tourists experience guided tour services

and how they construct meaning from these experiences.

Building on this theoretical and empirical gap, the main research question of this study is formulated as follows: “How do Generation Z tourists experience tourism guiding services, and how do they construct meaning from these experiences?” Accordingly, this study aims to examine the experiential relationship between Generation Z tourists and tourism guiding services through a qualitative research approach. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature by reconceptualizing tourism guiding not merely as an information delivery service, but as an active component of experience production and meaning construction. In particular, making the interpretive and emotional dimensions of guiding experiences visible within the context of Generation Z offers a novel perspective to the tourism guiding literature. From a practical standpoint, the study provides actionable implications for tour guides and destination managers in designing services aligned with the expectations and experiential structures of Generation Z tourists. The significance of this study lies in the fact that Generation Z is rapidly becoming the dominant consumer group in global tourism, yet their subjective experiences and meaning-making processes in relation to guided tour services remain insufficiently understood. At a time when the tourism industry is undergoing profound transformation driven by digitalization and the experience economy, understanding how this generation engages with and interprets guiding services is not only theoretically valuable but also practically urgent. By addressing this gap through a qualitative and interpretive lens, the study offers both a conceptual contribution to tourism guiding literature and a timely empirical foundation for industry practitioners seeking to adapt their services to the expectations of the next generation of tourists.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

Tourism experience is currently conceptualized as a multidimensional and highly subjective construct that cannot be reduced merely to service consumption. In the literature, it is defined as a holistic process encompassing individuals’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioral evaluations of the events they encounter throughout the travel process. This process extends beyond the time spent at the destination and includes a broader temporal span covering pre-trip expectations and post-trip recollections (Kim et al., 2022). One of the most distinctive characteristics of tourism experience is its inherently subjective nature, which varies across individuals. The same tourism encounter may be perceived and interpreted in significantly different ways depending on the individual. This indicates that tourism experience should not be understood as a standardized service outcome, but rather as a meaning-making process shaped by individuals’ perceptions, expectations, and interactions (Sang, 2024). Indeed, in the tourism literature, the value of experience is associated not only with service quality, but also with how individuals perceive, interpret, and make sense of that experience (Ma & He, 2026). Within this framework, tourism experience is not merely a hedonic consumption process driven by pleasure and satisfaction, but also a multilayered phenomenon through which individuals construct meaning in relation to their lives. In particular, recent studies (Bastiaansen, 2022; Bastiaansen & Duerden, 2025) demonstrate that tourism experiences are closely linked to individuals’ sense of meaning in life and contribute to the ways in which individuals reinterpret themselves, their environments, and their lived realities. Collectively, these studies suggest that tourism experience should be understood not merely as a consumption outcome, but as a meaning-making process shaped by cognitive, emotional, and contextual interactions.

Meaningful tourism experiences are defined in the literature as a deep and multilayered experiential domain that extends beyond hedonic outcomes and encompasses processes of self-realization, personal development, and existential reflection on life purpose (Khan et al., 2020; Fan et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2025). In this regard, tourism experiences are conceptualized within hedonic and eudaimonic well-being frameworks, and it is particularly emphasized that the eudaimonic dimension plays a decisive role in the meaning-making process of experiences (Hao & Xiao, 2021; Asante et al., 2024; Gedecho et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024). Recent studies (Wen & Leung, 2021; Lv et al., 2022; Li et al., 2024) further demonstrate that tourism experiences possess an embodied nature, and that meaning production occurs not only through cognitive processes but also through physical and

emotional engagement (Ma & He, 2026). This perspective highlights that the individual is not a passive recipient of the experience, but rather an active participant who experiences and constructs meaning. Accordingly, the meaning-making process is conceptualized as a dynamic and multilayered structure in which perception, emotion, interaction, and physical engagement converge (Martela & Steger, 2016). Moreover, tourism experiences are shaped by both individual and socio-environmental interactions within a dynamic relational context. Interactions that tourists establish with other tourists, local residents, and environmental elements directly influence how experiences are perceived and interpreted. In this context, tourism experience is understood as a holistic process emerging from the interaction between the individual, the body, and the environment (Wu et al., 2024). Collectively, the literature indicates that meaning in tourism experiences is produced through multidimensional interactions.

The multidimensional and meaning-oriented nature of tourism experiences further amplifies the importance of tour guiding services. Traditionally, tour guides have been defined primarily through their functions of information delivery and route guidance; however, this role has evolved into a more complex structure that interprets experiences and facilitates meaning-making processes in contemporary tourism contexts (Düz, 2018; Ren et al., 2024). Rather than being limited to information transfer, the role of tour guides has progressively expanded into a broader domain of experience mediation and interaction facilitation. In this regard, Cohen (1985) identified multiple roles of tour guides, including social, instrumental, interactional, and communicative functions. These roles have a direct influence on how tourists perceive destinations and how they structure their experiences (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022). Indeed, Ap & Wong (2001) and Rabotić (2010) emphasize the decisive role of tour guides in shaping visitor satisfaction and destination image, highlighting their influence through narrative construction, cultural interpretation, and social interaction processes. Within this context, tour guides are conceptualized not only as actors who structure tourist experiences, but also as active agents who co-construct the meanings attributed to those experiences. The communication skills, knowledge level, and interpersonal attitudes of tour guides directly influence the value and satisfaction derived from tourism experiences (Lin et al., 2017; Mihele & Bolog, 2023).

The evolving nature of tour guiding services has become increasingly evident in parallel with changing tourist profiles. In this context, Generation Z represents a distinct tourist cohort that differs significantly from previous generations in terms of their approach to tourism experiences. Having grown up immersed in digital technologies, this generation is characterized by rapid access to information, decision-making processes largely shaped by digital platforms, and a strong demand for active participation in experiential processes (Bogueva & Marinova, 2020; Liu et al., 2023). Generation Z tourists are highly influenced by social media, word-of-mouth communication, and digital content in destination selection, and they also demonstrate a strong tendency to actively share their experiences (Stojšavljević et al., 2023). Their approach to tourism experiences extends beyond consumption and also encompasses meaning-making processes, identity construction, and social representation practices. Furthermore, Generation Z's sensitivity to environmental issues, community awareness, and ethical values significantly shapes the meanings they attribute to tourism experiences (Dragolea et al., 2023). In addition, the growing influence of social media influencers has substantially transformed their perception of tourism experiences (Leung et al., 2022; Pradhan et al., 2023). However, it is noteworthy that existing literature on Generation Z's engagement with tour guiding services remains limited (Le et al., 2021; Miskolczi et al., 2025). Against this background, the present study focuses on the meaning-making processes of Generation Z tourists in relation to guided tour experiences.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on how Generation Z tourists perceive, experience, and interpret tourism guiding services in the context of ongoing transformations driven by the experience economy and digitalization in the tourism sector. A qualitative research approach was adopted to examine the multifaceted interactions between Generation Z tourists and guided tour services from a

comprehensive and interpretive perspective. The study particularly explores participants' experiences related to key dimensions of tour guiding, including information delivery, interaction, narrative construction, experience design, communication styles, use of digital tools, and storytelling practices. The main research problem is formulated as follows: *"How do Generation Z tourists experience tourism guiding services, and how do they construct meaning from these experiences?"*

In line with this research problem, the following research questions were developed based on an extensive review of the relevant literature (Uysal, 2022; Miljković et al., 2025; Le et al., 2021) and served as a guiding analytical framework throughout the data collection and analysis process:

- How do Generation Z tourists define their guided tour experiences?
- How do tour guides' communication styles, narrative approaches, and levels of interaction influence Generation Z tourists' tour experiences?
- What meanings do Generation Z tourists attribute to tourism guiding services?
- How do digital technologies and social media shape Generation Z tourists' guided tour experiences?
- What are Generation Z tourists' expectations regarding tourism guiding services and their suggestions for service improvement?

These research questions were developed drawing on previous studies in the fields of Generation Z, tourism experience, and tour guiding. While the first four questions were used to explore participants' experiential, perceptual, and meaning-making processes, the fifth question was specifically directed at identifying expectations and development-oriented suggestions. Prior to data collection, the interview questions were reviewed by two academic experts in the fields of tourism management and qualitative research methodology in order to assess their clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Based on the feedback received, minor revisions were made to improve the wording and flow of certain questions. The final versions of the questions were presented to participants verbally during the interview process, in accordance with the semi-structured interview format. The analysis was conducted on the dataset as a whole in an integrated manner, and the research questions were used only as an initial interpretive framework rather than as rigid analytical categories.

2.1. Research Design

This study is designed as a qualitative inquiry aiming to explore the experiential interactions that Generation Z tourists establish with tourism guiding services and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. A descriptive phenomenological orientation was adopted to guide the overall research design, focusing on participants' lived experiences as they are expressed in their narratives. Phenomenology is a qualitative research tradition that seeks to understand how individuals experience a particular phenomenon and how they make sense of these lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study does not aim to engage in deep hermeneutic interpretation but instead focuses on describing and organizing the structures of lived experience as expressed by participants. While phenomenology serves as the overarching research design guiding the ontological and epistemological orientation of the study, thematic analysis was employed as the analytical method for examining the data. This approach is methodologically justified, as thematic analysis enables the systematic identification of experiential patterns and meaning structures within participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith et al., 2009; Sundler et al., 2019). The inductive thematic approach adopted in this study allowed meanings to emerge from participants' narratives while maintaining alignment with phenomenological principles. Within this framework, the study aims to capture and describe how Generation Z tourists experience tourism guiding services and construct meaning from these experiences.

Tourism guiding services, by their very nature, constitute a subjective experiential domain that involves perception, emotion, interaction, and interpretation. Therefore, examining this phenomenon

solely through measurable variables is considered insufficient for capturing its complexity. In particular, considering the digitally mediated experiential structures of Generation Z, it becomes essential to explore how guiding experiences are perceived and interpreted through participants' own narratives and contextual meanings. Accordingly, a descriptive phenomenological stance was adopted, allowing participants to articulate their experiences within their own socio-cultural contexts.

2.2. Participant Selection

The study population consists of Generation Z tourists who have previously participated in at least one guided tour experience. Generation Z is commonly defined in the literature as individuals born in 1995 and later (Seemiller & Grace, 2018; Mohr et al., 2026). The inclusion of this cohort in the present study is based on their distinctive characteristics, particularly their immersion in digital technologies and their tendency to engage with tourism experiences in a more interactive, interpretive, and sharing-oriented manner.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, specifically criterion sampling. Accordingly, the inclusion criteria for participation were defined as follows:

- Being part of Generation Z,
- Having experienced at least one guided tour,
- Willingness and ability to articulate guided tour experiences in detail.

In qualitative research, the primary objective is not statistical generalization but an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation. Data collection continued until thematic redundancy was reached and no new codes emerged from the interviews (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Within this framework, a total of 14 participants were included in the study.

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview technique. This method was preferred due to its capacity to enable participants to articulate their experiences in depth and from their own perspectives (Patton, 2014). In line with the descriptive phenomenological research design, the interview method was considered the most appropriate data collection tool for eliciting participants' subjective lived experiences. Prior to the data collection process, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University. Following ethical clearance, data collection was conducted between 12.03.2026 and 01.04.2026 with Generation Z tourists who had participated in at least one guided tour experience. Participation was entirely voluntary. The interview protocol was developed through a systematic and comprehensive review of the relevant literature spanning three interconnected domains: Generation Z tourism behavior (Uysal, 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Stojšavljević et al., 2023), tourism experience and meaning-making (Bastiaansen, 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Ma & He, 2026), and tour guiding services (Weiler & Black, 2015; Miljković et al., 2025; Ren et al., 2024). Drawing on the theoretical insights and empirical findings of these studies, an initial pool of interview questions was constructed. The questions were not directly adapted from any single study but were developed inductively by synthesizing recurring themes, conceptual frameworks, and research gaps identified across the reviewed literature. Following expert review and minor revisions as described above, the final interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, expectations, and meaning-making processes in relation to guided tour services. Interviews were conducted in a flexible manner, allowing participants to elaborate freely on their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 45–50 minutes. Depending on participant preference and availability, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or in a suitable online format. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and brief field notes were taken during the interview process to capture contextual and non-verbal observations. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim immediately after data collection to ensure data accuracy. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, participants were assigned identification

codes (K1, K2, ...) instead of using real names.

2.4. Data Analysis Strategy and Processing

Although thematic analysis is not exclusively associated with phenomenology, it is widely recognized as a suitable analytic approach within phenomenological research when the aim is to identify patterns of meaning and experiential structures in participants' lived accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, thematic analysis was employed in this study as a systematic method for analyzing qualitative data derived from in-depth interviews. The analysis was conducted manually without the use of qualitative data analysis software due to the relatively small and in-depth nature of the dataset. This approach allowed for close engagement with the data and maintained interpretive sensitivity throughout the analytical process.

The analysis followed a systematic and iterative procedure consisting of five stages: (1) transcription of interviews verbatim, (2) repeated reading of transcripts for data familiarization, (3) initial coding of meaningful segments, (4) clustering of related codes to generate preliminary themes, and (5) refinement and conceptualization of themes through iterative comparison. An inductive coding approach was adopted, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Throughout the analysis, attention was given to preserving the original meanings expressed by participants. Direct quotations were used extensively in the presentation of findings to ensure transparency and to ground interpretations in participants' lived experiences. To ensure trustworthiness, the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were considered throughout the research process. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data and iterative analysis. An audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions and theme development, thereby strengthening dependability and confirmability. Constant comparison across interviews further supported the consistency and coherence of the analytical structure. The analysis was conducted iteratively in parallel with data collection, allowing emerging meanings to be continuously refined. All findings were systematically organized in relation to the research questions, ensuring alignment between empirical data and interpretive outcomes.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

Although the concepts of validity and reliability are traditionally associated with quantitative research, in qualitative studies they are conceptualized within the framework of trustworthiness (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013; Creswell, 2018). In the present study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985) were adopted as the primary framework for ensuring methodological rigor. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data, in-depth interviews, and providing participants with sufficient space to articulate their experiences in detail. In addition, expert feedback was sought from two academic experts with specializations in qualitative research methodology and tourism management during the research design phase. The experts were asked to evaluate the overall coherence of the research design, the appropriateness of the interview questions in relation to the research objectives, and the alignment between the phenomenological approach and the data collection procedure. Feedback was provided in written form, and the suggestions received were carefully reviewed and incorporated into the final research design. Specifically, revisions were made to the wording of two interview questions to improve clarity, and the probing question structure was refined to better facilitate participants' elaboration of their lived experiences. This expert consultation process contributed to strengthening both the credibility of the study and the overall internal coherence of the methodological framework. The use of direct quotations in the presentation of findings further contributed to grounding interpretations in participants' own narratives.

Transferability was addressed by providing a detailed description of the research context, participant characteristics, data collection procedures, and analytical process. This detailed contextualization aims to enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar settings. Dependability was ensured through a systematic and iterative coding process. Data were continuously compared across

interviews in line with the research questions, and emerging codes were repeatedly reviewed and refined to ensure internal consistency of the analytical structure. Confirmability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of all stages of the research process, including interview recordings, transcription files, coding decisions, and theme development. This systematic documentation enabled the alignment of findings with raw data and minimized potential interpretive bias. The emergence of consistent patterns across different participants further strengthened the trustworthiness of the study by indicating coherence within the dataset. Overall, the study was evaluated within the trustworthiness framework proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and positioned as a qualitative research design aligned with an interpretive phenomenological orientation.

3. FINDINGS

The research findings are presented within the framework of the main and sub-themes derived from thematic analysis. Participants were anonymized using codes (K1, K2, K3...). The presentation of findings begins with the demographic characteristics of the participants (see Table 1), followed by the thematic structure. Themes are explained and supported with direct quotations from participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Education Level	Occupation Status	Number of Guided Tour Experiences	Annual Travel Frequency
K1	Male	21	Bachelor's Degree	Student	4	1
K2	Male	24	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	2	1
K3	Female	22	Bachelor's Degree	Student	1	1
K4	Male	25	Master's Degree	Employed	2	2
K5	Female	23	Bachelor's Degree	Unemployed	2	2
K6	Female	26	Master's Degree	Employed	3	2
K7	Female	21	Bachelor's Degree	Student	1	1
K8	Male	24	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	3	2
K9	Female	22	Bachelor's Degree	Student	1	1
K10	Male	23	Bachelor's Degree	Unemployed	2	1
K11	Female	25	Master's Degree	Employed	4	2
K12	Female	21	Bachelor's Degree	Student	1	1
K13	Female	24	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	3	1
K14	Male	22	Bachelor's Degree	Student	3	1

Table 1 indicates that the participants are aged between 21 and 26, representing young adults within Generation Z. In terms of educational background, the majority of participants hold a bachelor's degree, while a smaller proportion are enrolled in master's degree programs. Regarding occupational status, participants are distributed across three categories: students, employed, and unemployed individuals. This distribution shows that the sample includes Generation Z individuals who are either engaged in education, participating in working life, or not currently employed. The number of guided tour experiences reported by participants ranges from 1 to 4, indicating variation in the level of exposure to guided tour services. Similarly, annual travel frequency is concentrated between 1 and 2 trips per year.

As presented in Table 2, frequency values indicate the repetition rate of codes within the thematic analysis process and are used as a descriptive indicator supporting the interpretive analysis. As a result of the thematic analysis, four main themes and sixteen sub-themes explaining Generation Z tourists' experiences and meaning-making processes regarding tour guiding services were identified (see Table 2). The findings indicate that participants evaluated their guided tour experiences not only within the framework of information transfer, but also within a multidimensional structure involving interaction, emotional experience, digital mediation, and expectation formation. The thematic structure derived from a total of 207 codes reveals that Generation Z tourists particularly focus on expectation structures, digital interaction processes, meaning-making practices, and experiential interaction elements in guided tour experiences.

Table 2. Codes and Frequency Distribution Identified Through Thematic Analysis

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Code Frequency (f)
Constitutive Role of the Tour Guiding Experience	Facilitating the experience	12
	Narrative strength and communication	15
	Authenticity, sincerity, and interaction	13
Total		40
Meaning-Making Process of Tourism Experience	Cultural connection	11
	Developing a new perspective toward the destination	10
	Emotional attachment and memorability	17
	Personal meaning construction	7
Total		45
Generation Z Tourist Profile and Expectations	Demand for interaction	14
	Expectation of personalization	11
	Desire for authenticity and avoidance of monotony	22
	Participatory guiding preference	9
Total		56
Impact of Digitalization on Tour Guiding Experience	Influence of social media	13
	Access to digital information	10
	Digital competence of the guide	7
	Technology-supported experience expectation	11
	Digital content creation	8
Total		49
GRAND TOTAL		207

In terms of code frequency, the highest-frequency theme was identified as “Generation Z Tourist Profile and Expectations” ($f = 56$). This theme is followed by “The Impact of Digitalization on the Guided Tour Experience” ($f = 49$), “The Meaning-Making Process of the Tourism Experience” ($f = 45$), and “The Constitutive Role of the Guided Tour Experience” ($f = 40$). This distribution indicates that participants predominantly concentrate on expectation structures, digital interaction processes, and dimensions related to the meaning-making of the experience. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Generation Z tourists perceive guided tour experiences not as passive service consumption, but rather as an actively constructed and multidimensional experiential process.

3.1. Themes and Interpretations Regarding Generation Z Tourists’ Experiences and Meaning-Making in the Context of Tour Guiding Services:

As a result of the thematic analysis, four main themes and related sub-themes were identified regarding Generation Z tourists’ processes of experiencing and making sense of tour guiding services. The analysis reveals that participants’ statements converge around interactional, emotional, digital, and expectation-based dimensions of the guided tour experience. The findings are presented using anonymized participant codes (K1–K14).

In this context, participants were first asked how they define their tour guiding service experiences, and based on their responses, the main theme “The Constitutive Role of the Guided Tour Experience” was identified.

➤ Constitutive Role of the Tour Guiding Experience

When participant statements are examined, tour guiding services are perceived by Generation Z tourists not merely as information providers, but as a structurally constitutive factor shaping the overall experience. The responses clustered around three main sub-themes:

Facilitating the Experience

Participants stated that the guide’s ability to organize and manage the tour process makes the experience smoother and more coherent.

“Frankly, without the guide we would not have known what to do in some places, in what order to proceed, or how much time to spend at each point; everything was so well organized and seamless that we were able to focus solely on enjoying the experience.” (K3)

"If we had traveled individually, we would have wasted a lot of time or missed some places, but the guide managed both the route and the timing so well that we did not experience any confusion at any point." (K11)

"The main thing I felt was that if we had traveled on our own, we could not have had such a comfortable and efficient experience because we would constantly have to think about everything." (K6)

This finding suggests that for Generation Z tourists, the organizational and logistical competence of the guide functions as a prerequisite for meaningful experience engagement. When cognitive load related to planning and navigation is reduced, participants can direct their attention fully toward the experiential and emotional dimensions of the tour. This is consistent with Cohen's (1985) instrumental role of the guide, which emphasizes the guide's function in reducing uncertainty and facilitating smooth experiential flow.

Narrative Strength and Communication

It was found that the guide's narrative style influences the cognitive memorability of the experience, with storytelling-based narration emerging as a particularly prominent element.

"While the guide was explaining certain things, it did not feel like he was simply providing factual information; instead, it felt as if we were being drawn into a story. Because of this, I was able to visualize the events much more clearly in my mind, and as a result, most of what was said stayed in my memory." (K7)

"He did not just transfer information; he actually explained the background of events within a coherent flow. This enabled me to understand the historical site or place in a more holistic way." (K2)

"Normally, such tours can be somewhat boring, but his narration was so vivid that I did not lose focus even for a moment; I kept listening with constant curiosity." (K14)

This finding suggests that Generation Z tourists do not perceive factual information delivery as sufficient for a meaningful guided tour experience. Rather, narrative-based communication that transforms historical and cultural information into engaging stories appears to be a critical driver of cognitive memorability and experiential engagement. This aligns with Weiler & Black (2015), who argue that the interpretive and storytelling capacity of guides plays a decisive role in shaping the depth and quality of tourist experiences.

Authenticity, Sincerity and Interaction

Participants stated that the level of communicative closeness established by the guide strengthened their perception of the experience.

"The guide was not just someone who was explaining things; he was constantly communicating with us, asking questions, and sometimes progressing like a conversation. Because of this, we felt like we were not in a tour group but rather a group of people traveling together." (K2)

"Instead of only narrating, he involved us in the topic, occasionally asked for our opinions, and allowed us to comment, which made the experience much more vivid." (K8)

"There was a rather sincere and natural communication rather than a formal guiding style, and this positively influenced the overall atmosphere of the tour." (K5)

This finding suggests that Generation Z tourists value the relational and interpersonal dimensions of the guiding experience at least as much as its informational content. The shift from a formal, one-directional communication style to a sincere and conversational interaction model appears to transform the guided tour from a structured service encounter into a shared social experience. This is consistent with Cohen's (1985) interactional role of the guide and supports Ren et al.'s (2024) conceptualization of guides as agents of social connection and experiential co-construction.

Overall, the findings under the first main theme indicate that Generation Z tourists perceive tour guiding services as a structurally constitutive element of the overall tourism experience rather than a supplementary service. The guide's ability to facilitate the tour process, deliver narratives in an engaging and story-based manner, and establish sincere and interactive communication collectively shape how participants experience and evaluate guided tours. These three sub-themes collectively suggest that the quality of the guiding experience is determined not merely by the transfer of factual information, but by the communicative, relational, and narrative dimensions of the interaction between the guide and the tourist. This finding is consistent with Weiler & Black (2015) and Ren et al. (2024), who conceptualize tour guides as active experience co-constructors rather than passive information providers.

Building on these interpretations, participants were subsequently asked how the communication style, narrative approach, and level of interaction adopted by tour guides affect Generation Z tourists' tour experiences. Based on their responses, the main theme "The Meaning-Making Process of the Tourism Experience" emerged:

➤ **The Meaning-Making Process of Tourism Experience**

Within this main theme, the meanings attributed by participants to their tour guiding experiences were examined. The findings indicate that the guided tour experience is not limited to information acquisition but rather constitutes a multilayered process involving cultural and emotional meaning production. The participant statements under this theme are presented across three sub-themes as follows:

Cultural Connection

Participants stated that tour guiding services support the process of establishing cultural connections with the destination.

"Rather than simply visiting different places, through the guide I was able to better understand why those places are important, what they meant in the past, and why they are preserved today; this helped me build a much stronger connection with the place." (K5)

"I learned that many structures I would normally just pass by actually have very deep cultural stories behind them, and this made everything I saw much more meaningful." (K9)

"Without the guide's explanations, it would probably have remained just a beautiful landscape, but now I am also able to interpret it culturally." (K1)

This finding suggests that guided narration functions as a cultural mediation tool that transforms the physical landscape into a meaningful symbolic environment. For Generation Z tourists, the destination is not merely a visual spectacle but a culturally layered space whose significance is unlocked through the guide's interpretive role. This is consistent with Ap & Wong (2001) and Rabotić (2010), who emphasize the guide's role in facilitating cultural understanding and destination interpretation beyond surface-level sightseeing.

Emotional Attachment and Memorability

Some participants stated that, through the guide's narration, the experience left a strong emotional impact.

"I truly cannot forget that moment because, together with the guide's explanations, being there made me feel not only informed but also emotionally connected." (K1)

"It felt as if I was not just visiting a place but living within that atmosphere, which is why the experience became very memorable in my mind." (K11)

"There were moments that even when I talk about them now, I feel the same emotion again; it was truly an impressive experience. I would also like to thank our guide from here." (K6)

This finding suggests that the emotional dimension of the guided tour experience plays a central role

in the construction of long-term experiential memory. The guide's ability to create an emotionally resonant atmosphere appears to elevate the experience beyond ordinary tourism consumption, contributing to what Bastiaansen (2022) describes as meaningful experiences that remain deeply connected to individuals' sense of self and lived reality. This also aligns with the eudaimonic well-being framework, which emphasizes emotional depth and personal significance as core dimensions of meaningful tourism experiences (Hao & Xiao, 2021).

Developing a New Perspective Toward the Destination

It was observed that the guided tour experience changed participants' perspectives toward the destination and enabled them to attribute deeper meaning to it.

"Previously, I used to see it merely as a place to visit, but after the guide's explanations I started to assign a completely different meaning to it, and my perspective changed entirely." (K6)

"The place is no longer just a tourist spot for me; it has become an area with its own story behind it." (K3)

"Without the guide, it might have remained an ordinary trip, but now that experience gave me a different perspective." (K10)

This finding suggests that guided tour experiences have the potential to fundamentally reshape tourists' cognitive and emotional relationship with destinations. Rather than reinforcing pre-existing perceptions, the guide's interpretive narration appears to catalyze a process of perspective transformation through which the destination acquires new layers of personal and cultural significance. This is consistent with Ma & He (2026), who argue that embodied and narratively mediated experiences contribute to individuals' reinterpretation of their surroundings and the construction of deeper experiential meaning.

Overall, the findings under the second main theme demonstrate that Generation Z tourists do not evaluate guided tour experiences merely as a process of information acquisition. Rather, the guided tour experience emerges as a multilayered meaning-making process through which participants construct cultural connections, develop emotional attachments, and reconstruct their perspectives toward the destination. The cultural connection sub-theme reveals that the guide's contextual and historical narration transforms the destination from a visually appealing space into a culturally meaningful environment. The emotional attachment sub-theme indicates that the experiential depth created through guiding leaves lasting impressions that extend well beyond the physical visit. Furthermore, the perspective transformation sub-theme suggests that guided experiences fundamentally alter how participants perceive and assign value to destinations. Collectively, these findings align with Bastiaansen (2022) and Kim et al. (2022), who argue that meaningful tourism experiences contribute to individuals' reinterpretation of their surroundings and lived realities, and with Ma & He (2026), who emphasize the embodied and meaning-laden nature of tourism experiences.

Building on these interpretations, participants were subsequently asked how Generation Z tourists attribute meaning to tour guiding services, and the main theme "Generation Z Tourist Profile and Expectations" emerged:

➤ Generation Z Tourist Profile and Expectations

Participants' statements indicate that Generation Z demands interaction, personalization, and experiential diversity in tour guiding services. The views under this main theme are presented across the first three sub-themes as follows:

Demand for Interaction

Participants stated that they do not find a passive listener role sufficient.

"Honestly, I do not just want to listen to someone explaining things; I want to be able to ask questions, make comments, and truly be part of the process." (K4)

"Sometimes during the tour, just listening is not enough; when people are involved and able to express their opinions, the experience becomes more memorable." (K12)

"Instead of something that is constantly being narrated, an interactive structure makes the experience much more vivid." (K8)

This finding suggests that Generation Z perceives guided tour experiences not as one-way communication but as a co-created experiential process in which active participation is considered essential. Rather than positioning themselves as passive recipients of information, these participants expect to be recognized as active contributors to the experiential dynamic. This aligns with Pine & Gilmore's (2013) experience economy framework, which emphasizes participation and engagement as core dimensions of meaningful experience production, and with Liu et al. (2023), who highlight Generation Z's strong preference for interactive and participatory tourism formats.

Expectation of Personalization

It was stated that Generation Z tourists expect the tour experience to be personalized rather than delivered through a standardized narrative.

"I think since everyone's interests are different, the guide should adapt the narration according to the group; otherwise, after a while attention is lost when the same thing is told to everyone." (K8)

"If the narration is directed according to our interests, it becomes much more efficient because not everyone is affected by the same things in the same way." (K11)

"I would prefer a narration that feels a bit more personal and takes us into consideration." (K2)

This finding suggests that Generation Z tourists approach guided tours with individualized experiential expectations that resist standardization. The demand for personalized narration reflects a broader generational tendency to expect services that acknowledge and adapt to individual identities, interests, and backgrounds. This is consistent with Miljković et al. (2025), who note that Generation Z's tourism expectations are shaped by their experience of highly personalized digital environments, which in turn raises their expectations for customization in physical service encounters as well.

Desire for Authenticity and Avoidance of Monotony

Participants stated that monotonous narration leads to loss of interest.

"If the narration is too long and monotonous, I inevitably lose focus after a while and my attention drifts." (K9)

"A tour guiding experience where the same tone is used continuously feels a bit boring to me, honestly." (K13)

"If the narration is more energetic, fluid, and includes us from time to time, it would be much more enjoyable." (K7)

This finding suggests that Generation Z tourists have a low tolerance for static, repetitive, or low-energy communication styles in guided tour settings. Having grown up in digitally stimulating environments characterized by dynamic and multimodal content, this generation appears to bring heightened expectations for communicative variety and energy to their tourism experiences. This aligns with Uysal (2022), who notes that Generation Z's consumption behaviors in tourism are shaped by their expectation of engaging, stimulating, and experientially diverse service encounters.

Overall, the findings under the third main theme reveal that Generation Z tourists approach guided tour services with a distinct set of experiential expectations that differ markedly from those of previous generations. The demand for interaction sub-theme indicates that passive listening is perceived as insufficient by this generation, and that active participation in the guiding process is considered essential for a meaningful and memorable experience. The expectation of personalization sub-theme further demonstrates that standardized, one-size-fits-all narrative approaches fail to meet the individualized expectations of Generation Z tourists, who seek guiding experiences tailored to

their specific interests and backgrounds. The avoidance of monotony sub-theme highlights that this generation's attention and engagement are highly sensitive to the energy, dynamism, and originality of the guide's communication style. Collectively, these findings are consistent with Miljković et al. (2025) and Liu et al. (2023), who emphasize Generation Z's preference for interactive, participatory, and personalized tourism experiences, and with Stojšavljević et al. (2023), who highlight this generation's active role in co-constructing the meaning of their tourism experiences. The findings suggest that meeting Generation Z's experiential expectations requires a fundamental reconceptualization of the tour guide's role from a one-way narrator to an interactive experience facilitator.

Building on these interpretations, participants were subsequently asked how digital technologies and social media shape the guided tour experience of Generation Z tourists. In this context, the emerging sub-themes and corresponding participant views are presented below:

➤ Impact of Digitalization on Tour Guiding Experience

Within this main theme, the sub-themes identified were social media influence, access to digital information, and expectations regarding technology integration:

Influence of Social Media

Participants stated that social media is an important source of information and experience both before and after the trip.

"Before going, I had already seen many videos and content about the place on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, so I actually already had an expectation formed in my mind." (K2)

"Because I had seen it on social media, I felt like I already knew the place to some extent, but when I visited, it gained a very different meaning through the guide's narration." (K10)

"Honestly, I had already seen most of the places through social media before going, but experiencing them on site was different." (K4)

This finding suggests that social media does not merely function as a pre-trip information source for Generation Z tourists but actively shapes their experiential expectations and frames of reference before they arrive at the destination. The tension between digitally pre-constructed expectations and on-site guided experiences creates a hybrid meaning-making dynamic in which the guide's narration plays a critical role in adding contextual depth that social media content alone cannot provide. This is consistent with Leung et al. (2022), who highlight the transformative influence of social media on Generation Z's tourism perceptions and experiential anticipations.

Access to Digital Information

It was found that guided narration and digital information sources jointly shape the overall experience.

"I had read some things on the internet, but when the guide explained them, I understood the background of the events much better and the information became clearer in my mind." (K6)

"The combination of what I saw on Google and what the guide explained created a more holistic experience." (K14)

"Having prior knowledge actually made the experience easier, but the guide made it more meaningful." (K3)

This finding suggests that digital pre-knowledge and guided narration function as complementary rather than competing sources of experiential meaning for Generation Z tourists. Prior digital exposure appears to create a cognitive scaffolding that enhances receptivity to the guide's narration, while the guide's contextual interpretation transforms raw digital information into a more personally significant and holistically integrated experience. This supports Nazli's (2020) argument that digital tools and human guiding are not mutually exclusive but can be strategically combined to produce richer and more meaningful tourism experiences.

Technology-supported Experience Expectation

Participants expressed that they expect the use of digital tools in tour guiding services.

"I think if there were additional information accessible via QR codes or through a mobile phone, the experience would be much richer." (K10)

"Maybe if there were app-based support such as audio guides, it could provide a more interactive experience." (K12)

"I think more active use of technology would make the experience more appealing, especially for our generation." (K5)

This finding suggests that for Generation Z tourists, the integration of digital tools into guided tour experiences is not merely a desirable enhancement but a fundamental expectation rooted in their digitally immersive lifestyle. The expectation of technology-supported guiding reflects a broader generational disposition toward multimodal and interactive experiential formats. This aligns with Ren et al. (2024), who argue that the evolving role of tour guides in the digital age requires the incorporation of technology-supported content delivery as a core component of contemporary guiding practice.

Overall, the findings under the fourth main theme demonstrate that digitalization has become an inseparable dimension of Generation Z tourists' guided tour experiences. The social media influence sub-theme reveals that this generation arrives at destinations with pre-formed expectations and visual familiarity shaped by platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which in turn creates a hybrid experiential structure in which online and on-site experiences mutually inform one another. The access to digital information sub-theme indicates that prior digital knowledge does not diminish the value of guided narration; rather, the combination of digital pre-knowledge and the guide's contextual interpretation produces a more holistic and meaningful experience. The expectation of technology-supported experience sub-theme further highlights that Generation Z tourists actively expect the integration of digital tools such as QR codes, mobile applications, and audio guides into the guiding process, viewing technology not as a replacement for the guide but as a complementary layer that enriches the overall experience. Collectively, these findings are consistent with Liu et al. (2023) and Leung et al. (2022), who emphasize the central role of digital platforms in shaping Generation Z's tourism behaviors and experiential expectations, and with Nazli (2020) and Ren et al. (2024), who highlight the growing importance of technology integration in contemporary tour guiding practices. The findings suggest that digitally supported guiding models are no longer optional but represent a fundamental expectation among Generation Z tourists.

The findings indicate that Generation Z tourists construct their tour guiding experiences as a multidimensional meaning-making process. This process appears to be shaped by the narrative and communicative role of the tour guide, the degree of interactivity and personalization, the emotional and cultural dimensions of the experience, and the influence of digital technologies. Collectively, the findings suggest that tour guiding is not merely a service based on information transfer, but also an active process of meaning production and experiential co-construction.

4. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined how Generation Z tourists experience tourism guiding services and how they construct meaning from these experiences. Adopting a qualitative research approach and employing a descriptive phenomenological research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with 14 Generation Z tourists who had previously participated in at least one guided tour experience, and the collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that tourism guiding is not merely a process of information transfer; rather, it constitutes a multilayered meaning-making field that includes emotional, cultural, interactional, and digital dimensions. These results require a re-evaluation of the evolving role of tour guiding within the context of the experience economy and digitalization.

The findings indicate that Generation Z tourists interpret guided tour experiences particularly through interaction, personalization, narrative quality, and digital support elements. This demonstrates a shift in tourism experience from a passive consumption process toward an active participation and co-production process.

The results are largely consistent with the literature emphasizing tourism experience as a meaning-making process (Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Kim et al., 2022). In particular, studies arguing that tourism experience should be considered not only in terms of pleasure and satisfaction but also as a structure that contributes to individuals' sense of meaning in life (Bastiaansen, 2022; Yu et al., 2025) support the findings of this research. The results also show that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being dimensions operate simultaneously in tourism experiences. Participants' evaluation of guided tours in terms of both enjoyment and cultural/personal development reflects the multidimensional nature of experience. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing the decisive role of eudaimonic well-being in meaning-making processes (Hao & Xiao, 2021; Huang et al., 2024). From the perspective of tour guiding, the findings clearly demonstrate that the role of tour guides is not limited to information provision. Rather, guides emerge as active agents who shape, interpret, and structure experiences through social interaction. This supports Cohen's (1985) typology of guide roles and the findings of Ap & Wong (2001) and Rabotić (2010), who emphasize the impact of guides on tourist experience. On the other hand, Generation Z's integration of digital sources into guided tour experiences indicates that tourism experience has become a hybrid structure. Social media and digital content play a determining role both in expectation formation and in the interpretation of experiences. This finding is consistent with the literature on Generation Z as digital natives (Liu et al., 2023; Stojšavljević et al., 2023).

This study provides important theoretical and empirical contributions to the tour guiding literature. First, it expands the experience economy literature (Pine & Gilmore, 2013) by conceptualizing tour guiding not only as a service quality or information transfer mechanism but as a multilayered meaning-making process. In this sense, the study reconceptualizes tourism experience as an integrated structure formed at the intersection of cognitive, emotional, interactional, and digital dimensions. Second, the study contributes to generational tourism literature by revealing how Generation Z tourists interpret guided tour experiences. The findings indicate that Generation Z tourists are not passive recipients of information but active co-creators of meaning through digital resources, social interaction, and on-site experiences. Third, and most importantly, the study proposes a holistic conceptual model for explaining guided tour experiences. In this model, the guided tour experience is structured as a "meaning-making process" shaped by the interaction of four core components: (i) the guide's communication and narrative style, (ii) tourists' level of interaction and expectations, (iii) digital information sources and social media influence, and (iv) embodied experience within the destination context. Based on the findings of this study, it can be said that this model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding experience formation in tour guiding literature and may serve as a useful foundation for future theoretical and empirical investigations in this field.

The findings also offer practical implications for tour guiding practices. First, training programs for tour guides should focus not only on information delivery but also on storytelling, interaction management, and experience design skills. This transforms the role of guides from "information providers" to "experience designers." Second, from a destination management perspective, tour programs should be designed in a more flexible and personalized structure. Adaptive narrative strategies and interaction levels according to group characteristics are crucial for meeting Generation Z expectations. Third, the integration of digital technologies into tour guiding processes is no longer optional but essential. QR-based systems, mobile guiding applications, and augmented reality-supported content can enhance the overall experience before, during, and after the tour.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, since the study was conducted with a specific generation and a limited sample size ($n = 14$), its statistical generalizability is limited. Second, the study was conducted exclusively with participants from Turkey, which may restrict the

cross-cultural applicability of the findings, as Generation Z tourists from different cultural and geographical contexts may experience and interpret guided tour services differently. Third, the phenomenological and qualitative nature of the study, while enabling in-depth exploration of lived experiences, inherently involves a degree of interpretive subjectivity on the part of the researcher. Although measures were taken to enhance trustworthiness, the findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind. Fourth, the study focused solely on Generation Z tourists who had previously participated in guided tours, which means that the perspectives of those who have never used guided tour services and their reasons for not doing so remain unexplored. Fifth, data were collected within a relatively short timeframe, which may not fully capture the temporal dynamics of how guided tour experiences are perceived and remembered over time.

In light of these limitations, future research is recommended to include comparative generational analyses (X, Y, and Z) to identify generational differences in guided tour experiences. Moreover, the proposed conceptual model should be tested using quantitative approaches such as structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess its validity across larger and more diverse samples. Additionally, future studies may further explore the digitalization dimension by comparing pre- and post-social media experience structures and examining AI-supported guiding systems and augmented reality applications. Cross-cultural comparative studies would also contribute significantly to the generalizability of the findings.

Funding: The authors received no financial or in-kind support from any person, institution, or organization for the preparation of this study.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions: The entire study was conducted and written solely by the author.

Ethical Approval: The authors declare that ethical principles were strictly followed throughout all stages of the research process. In the event of any violation, **International Journal of Tourism and Destination Studies** assumes no responsibility, and all legal responsibilities and sanctions belong to the authors. Ethical compliance was ensured throughout the entire study.

Ethics Committee Approval: The necessary ethical committee approval for this article was obtained from the Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on February 27, 2026, with decision number 2026.05.51.

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