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Systematic Review

A Systematic Review and Bibliometric Analysis of Studies on Generation Z and the Hotel Industry: Past, Present and Future Agenda

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Abstract

Generation Z is becoming a dominant market segment and an essential source of talent in the hospitality industry. Their digital fluency, sustainability expectations, and preference for meaningful and personalized experiences are increasingly reshaping service delivery, marketing strategies, and workforce management in the hotel industry. Following the PRISMA 2020 guideline, this review systematically analyzed 131 peer-reviewed studies published between 2011 and 2025. Performance analysis, science mapping through co-word and Leiden clustering, and trend analysis were conducted using VOSviewer (v1.6.20) and Biblioshiny in RStudio (v2025.09.2). The findings reveal a rapidly expanding but relatively young field, with key themes clustered around technology acceptance (AI, service robots), experiential and sustainable consumption, digital engagement (word-of-mouth, social media), workforce dynamics (person–environment fit, leadership, quiet quitting), and emerging topics such as experiential education, ethics, and self-efficacy. The study highlights the centrality of the Theory of Planned Behavior and technology acceptance models in explaining Gen Z's decision-making, while also identifying substantial gaps in cross-cultural, ethical, and experiential research. Practical implications call hoteliers to integrate seamless digital services, robust sustainability initiatives, and adaptive talent management system to meet Gen Z's evolving expectations.

Keywords: Generation Z; hotel industry; systematic analysis; accommodation

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1. Introduction

In Leiper's Tourism System framework [1], hotels are a core component of a larger tourism system, acting as a primary service provider for accommodation while also serving as an economic driver through job creation, supply chain linkages, and contributions to local revenue streams. As a system, it interacts with other parts of the tourism network, such as transportation, entertainment, tractions and local attractions, and uses technology to manage reservations and enhance guest experiences [2]. Contemporary hotels system are expected to deliver exceptional service management system, catering to guests' desires for a welcoming atmosphere and high-quality service that aligns with the purpose of their visit, whether for celebrations, business events, or other occasions [3]. While service quality,

personalized experiences, and strategic management have long been essential for competitiveness (e.g., [2,4–6]), the emergence of Generation Z (Gen Z) are reshaping demand and hospitality systems as both current consumers and the future hospitality workforce [7–11]. According to a recent industry report, air conditioning (68%) and flexible, 24 h check-in options (61%) have become non-negotiable amenities for Gen Z travelers. Moreover, nearly half are willing to pay extra for breakfast, and increasing numbers expect access to spa and wellness facilities such as luxuries for older generations but now baseline expectations for younger guests [12,13]. Indeed, Gen Z's distinct characteristics, including digital fluency, heightened environmental awareness, and demand for authenticity, are influencing hotel design, marketing systems, and operations on an unprecedented scale [3,14,15]. Their travel decisions are shaped not only by amenities and pricing but also by immersive, shareable experiences, sustainable practices, and opportunities for meaningful engagement [16].

Despite the growing recognition of Gen Z's significance, research on their specific relationship with the hotel industry remains fragmented [7,8]. Existing studies often focus on isolated aspects such as technology adoption [4,17,18] sustainability preferences [19–21], or workforce engagement [10,22–24], without offering an integrated understanding of how these elements intersect to define Gen Z's overall hotel experience. Furthermore, much of the scholarship is geographically siloed [2], methodologically narrow [25], or sectorally dispersed, making it difficult to discern the broader intellectual landscape of Gen Z–hotel research. As a result, there is limited clarity on the field's thematic clusters, research trajectories, and consensus points, as well as the areas where significant debate or neglect persists. This lack of synthesis constrains both scholarly advancement and practical application, leaving hoteliers without a comprehensive evidence base to design strategies that are simultaneously competitive, sustainable, and generationally relevant.

To address this gap, this study asks: How has academic research on Gen Z in the hotel industry evolved, and what thematic and methodological patterns can inform a future research agenda? This question is critical because mapping the intellectual structure of the field not only reveals overlooked topics and highlights emerging priorities but also provides practical insights for industry stakeholders seeking to align innovations in hospitality systems with the expectations of this generation. Guided by systematic review methods, we analyze the development of the literature, identify dominant thematic clusters, and trace research trajectories. The paper concludes by proposing a forward-looking agenda that positions digital transformation, sustainability, and experiential design as central pillars for advancing both academic inquiry and industry practice within hospitality systems.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gen Z and Generational Theory in Tourism and Hospitality System

The influence of generational cohorts on the hospitality system is profound, as each generation brings distinct preferences, values, and expectations that reshape service design, marketing strategies, and operational practices [17,26]. Understanding generational differences enables hoteliers to anticipate and respond to shifting consumer behaviors, from Baby Boomers' preference for comfort and reliability to Millennials' and Gen Z's demand for authenticity, personalization, and digital engagement [27].

Gen Z, the demographic cohort generally born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s, constitutes a significant portion of the global population, representing approximately 32% of the total [7,28,29]. Following Millennials (Generation Y) and preceding Generation Alpha, Gen Z is distinguished by its formative experiences in a digitally immersive environment, earning the label "digital natives" due to early exposure to internet technologies and smartphones [25,30]. However, the digital native characterization is not universal, as significant digital inequalities persist, particularly in the Global South,

where roughly one-third of the population remains offline [31]. These disparities, coupled with regional variations in internet access (e.g., over 95% penetration in Europe versus lower rates in Africa), address cautious cross-regional analyses when studying Gen Z's behaviors [8,29].

With a growing economic presence, particularly in the tourism and leisure sectors, Gen Z is increasingly influential, contributing to an estimated 40% of consumer markets and playing a pivotal role in family travel decisions [32]. Within the hospitality industry, segmentation by generational cohorts has emerged as a strategic approach to tailor services and enhance customer satisfaction [17,26]. Generational theory provides a structured lens for understanding how shared historical and socio-cultural experiences shape the values, behaviors, and consumption patterns of distinct age cohorts [29,33]. This framework is particularly relevant for the hotel industry, where understanding guest needs is critical for competitiveness in a crowded market [12,34,35]. As Sakdiyakorn et al. [33] noted, individuals of similar ages often share life experiences, symbols, and memories, resulting in comparable consumption patterns that hoteliers can leverage to design targeted offerings.

Taken together, these insights suggest that Gen Z not only defines a new segment of hospitality demand but also acts as a social force within the broader tourism system, influencing interactions between tourists, services, and destinations.

2.2. Characteristics of Gen Z as Consumer Within Hospitality Systems

Service, as the foundation of hospitality, operates as an integrated system that combines personal interactions, material aspects, and back-end processes. For Gen Z, the effectiveness of this hospitality system is critical for delivering consistent and memorable hotel experiences. Their travel behaviors and preferences are also reshaping hotel marketing strategies. Dimitriou and Abouelgheit [36] proposed a new decision-making model for Gen Z travelers, highlighting their reliance on social media and mobile apps for travel planning. Their study found that Gen Z seeks social recognition in their travel choices, moving away from traditional booking methods. Ma et al. [37] found that Gen Z has a generally positive attitude toward service robots in restaurants, though they emphasize the need for improved design and human-robot interaction. Similarly, research by Vitezić and Perić [38] asserted that Gen Z's willingness to adopt AI in hospitality services is strongly influenced by hedonic motivation, suggesting that enjoyment and emotional engagement are key drivers of technology acceptance. Similarly, Ayyıldız et al. [39] found that Gen Z and Millennials exhibit more positive attitudes toward service robots compared to older generations, though concerns about impersonal service remain. Wang et al. [40] (2024) analyzed Gen Z's satisfaction with smart homestays in China, demonstrating that perceived value in digital services (e.g., seamless check-in/check-out) enhances user experience. However, gaps in service quality and technological integration suggest room for improvement.

Sustainability and environmental consciousness are another critical factor for Gen Z travelers. Rasheed and Balakrishnan [27] examined green brand loyalty among Gen Z tourists in India, revealing that collectivism, brand prestige, and brand identification significantly influence their loyalty to eco-friendly hotels. This aligns with González-Pozo et al. [41], who found that Gen Z prioritizes sustainability when booking accommodations through online travel agencies (OTAs), particularly valuing Expedia's eco-friendly criteria. Ribeiro et al. [42] revealed that pro-environmental travel behavior among Gen Z is driven by biospheric values and green consumption attitudes. Hotels that adopt sustainable practices (e.g., energy efficiency, waste reduction) are more likely to attract this demographic. Additionally, Baltescu and Untaru [43] noted that travel influencers play a crucial role in promoting eco-friendly tourism, indicating that hotels should collaborate with sustainability-focused digital creators.

Gen Z relies heavily on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media for travel decisions [26]. Ngo et al. [44] found that information quality and credibility on platforms like Instagram significantly affect Gen Z's booking intentions. Similary, Liu et al. [45] demonstrated that social media marketing activities (SMMAs) particularly entertainment, trendiness, and interaction., strongly influence Gen Z's travel decisions, suggesting that hotels must enhance their digital engagement strategies. Meanwhile, Bilińska et al. [46] observed that virtual tourism (e.g., digital hotel tours) serves as a precursor to real-world travel, suggesting that hotels should invest in immersive online experiences. Technology integration is another key factor shaping Gen Z's hotel experiences. Marozzo et al. [47] examined AI-powered chatbots in hotels and found that perceived service quality positively influences Gen Z's booking intentions. This suggests that hotels should invest in seamless digital experiences, such as chatbot-assisted check-ins, to appeal to tech-savvy Gen Z travelers.

2.3. Gen Z as Employees Within Hospitality Systems

The employability of Gen Z constitutes a critical area of research for within hospitality systems, as the industry seeks to attract, retain, and leverage the potential of this new generation of digital-native employees. Studies have indicated that organizational socialization and workplace culture significantly influence Gen Z's career intentions. Within hospitality systems, employees are a central component linking front-stage guest interactions with backstage operational processes. Gen Z employees, with their digital skills, preference for flexibility, and value-driven approach, influence how these systems adapt to new technologies and evolving workplace expectations. For instance, Zhou et al. [48,49] found that person-environment fit mediates the relationship between organizational socialization and employee retention, with career commitment acting as a positive moderator. This suggests that hotels should invest in structured onboarding programs and career development opportunities to enhance retention among Gen Z workers.

Pantaruk et al. [50] emphasize the importance of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving in enhancing employability among Thai hospitality students. They found that internships serve as a crucial bridge between academic learning and industry demands, aligning students' skills with real-world expectations [50]. Similarly, Yordudom et al. [51] examined Thai Gen Z hospitality students and found that social skills and a hospitality mindset significantly improve internship performance, while financial literacy plays a secondary role. Haid et al. [52] applied the Job Characteristics Model to Gen Z hospitality workers, finding that job significance, feedback, and workplace appreciation are crucial for their job satisfaction. Their study suggests that fostering a positive organizational culture and strong supervisor relationships can mitigate turnover. Jayathilake et al. [53] also declared that reverse mentoring and intrapreneurship are effective strategies for retaining Gen Z employees, who prioritize career growth and workplace flexibility.

Additionally, leadership styles play a crucial role in engaging Gen Z employees. Sigaeva et al. [54] compared servant leadership and authentic leadership and found that authentic leadership has a stronger impact on psychological capital and work engagement. This echoes that Gen Z employees respond better to transparent, values-driven leadership that fosters trust and autonomy. Katsaros [55] examined Greek luxury hotel employees and found that transformational, inclusive, and adaptive leadership positively affect Gen Z's adaptive performance, with promotive voice behavior acting as a key mediator. This suggests that human-centered leadership approaches can enhance Gen Z's engagement in the hospitality sector.

However, attracting Gen Z to hospitality careers remains a challenge. Walmsley et al. [56] found that only a small percentage of UK youth view hospitality as an attractive ca-

reer, citing negative perceptions and lack of awareness. They argue that industry-education partnerships are essential to rebranding hospitality as a viable career path. Additionally, Tang et al. [57] explored Chinese Gen Z interns' subjective well-being in the hospitality sector, noting that cultural values, particularly attitudes toward work and job-related face values, play a significant role in their career intentions. This implies that aligning workplace policies with Gen Z's cultural and motivational drivers can enhance retention. Another critical factor is Gen Z's interaction with technology in the workplace. Ali et al. [58] explored Gen Z's willingness to work with service robots, finding that while utilitarian and hedonic motivations positively influence acceptance, perceived barriers such as insecurity and technical difficulties can hinder adoption. Hotels must balance automation with human interaction to align with Gen Z's preferences.

Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics and behaviors of Gen Z in the hotel industry, both as consumers and as members of the workforce.

Table 1. Gen Z's characteristics and behaviors in the hotel industry as both consumer and workforce.

Category	Gen Z Characteristic/Behavior	Key Insights & Evidence
Accommodation Preferences	Tech-enabled, value-driven, and flexible; favor unique experiences and affordability over traditional luxury.	Gen Z prefers digital booking, affordable stays, and unique or local experiences over traditional hotels. They are open to extended-stay and flexible lodging options. Cleanliness, security, and sustainability are critical in decision-making.
Sustainability & Ethics	Environmentally conscious but exhibit an "attitude-behavior gap"; value brands with visible green practices.	Gen Z is willing to pay more for eco-friendly accommodations. They seek pro-ecological practices, but actual sustainable behavior is sometimes inconsistent due to cost/convenience. Corporate social responsibility (CRS) and practical sustainability messaging are influential.
Technology Adoption	Digital natives; value seamless tech integration (mobile apps, AI, smart hotels, chatbots, social media).	Gen Z expects digital-first experiences, e.g., facial recognition check-ins, mobile bookings, and smart room features. They are receptive to RFID and AI, with privacy and security concerns as limiting factors.
Social media & Digital Influence	Rely heavily on UGC, influencer content, and peer reviews for travel decisions; seek authenticity and engagement.	Social media and eWOM are primary sources of information; influencer-driven marketing is more effective than traditional ads. Gen Z values interactive, visually driven platforms and authentic peer experiences over brand-generated content.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Category	Gen Z Characteristic/Behavior	Key Insights & Evidence
Workforce Values & Expectations	Seek flexibility, meaningful work, career growth, and positive workplace culture; sensitive to job insecurity and unethical practices.	Gen Z values supportive environments, experiential learning, and work-life balance. Negative experiences (e.g., hazing, burnout) lead to "quiet quitting" or disengagement. Leadership style and CSR initiatives significantly impact job attraction/retention.
Leadership & Workplace Dynamics	Prefer transparent, authentic, and supportive leadership; value feedback and open communication.	Authentic leadership increases engagement and psychological capital; transformational leadership and CSR practices are critical for retaining Gen Z talent. Gen Z expects regular feedback, autonomy, and opportunities for skill development.
Innovation & Gamification	Respond well to gamified training and interactive, tech-driven development programs.	Gamified internship systems and interactive experiential learning increase engagement, skill development, and retention among Gen Z staff. Innovative approaches to training and development align with Gen Z's learning preferences.
Sharing Economy & P2P Services	Comfortable with sharing economy models (e.g., Airbnb, Uber), valuing flexibility and social interaction.	Gen Z is more open than older generations to sharing accommodations with strangers, driven by trust and intrinsic motivations. Hotels must enhance trust-building and offer hybrid models to compete.
Resilience & Adaptability	Demonstrated resilience during crises (e.g., COVID-19); motivated by meaningful work and social contribution.	Gen Z employees in quarantine hotels were motivated by the opportunity to serve the public and find meaning in challenging circumstances. They adapt quickly to new technologies and workplace changes but require support and recognition.
Entrepreneurship & Innovation	Show strong entrepreneurial intentions, especially in tourism and hospitality, resilient even in economic downturns.	Work experience and gender influence entrepreneurial intentions more than external crises. Gen Z is willing to innovate within and outside traditional hotel models, driving new business concepts.

2.4. Gen Z and Systematic Studies

Given the growing academic interest in Gen Z, systematic and bibliometric reviews on this topic have recently become a significant trend in scholarly research. These studies aim to map the intellectual landscape, identify thematic clusters, and clarify how Gen Z's distinct characteristics influence various fields, including business management, tourism, and hospitality.

Malik et al. [59] conducted a cross-disciplinary analysis revealing that the most frequently used terms associated with Gen Z include digital natives and social media, reflecting a convergence between technological engagement and identity formation. Their study also showed that Gen Z research spans multiple disciplines such as business and management, social sciences, computer science, and the arts while emphasizing strong international collaborations led by the United States, China, and the United Kingdom, and a persistent underrepresentation of African scholarship. This imbalance underscores the geographically uneven development of Gen Z research and the need for broader global inclusivity in hospitality and tourism contexts.

Li and Hassan [60], through a bibliometric analysis of 638 Scopus-indexed publications, visualized the intellectual structure of Gen Z purchasing behavior and identified four dominant thematic clusters: (1) drivers of consumption, (2) cross-generational comparisons, (3) demographic perspectives, and (4) sustainable consumption. Their findings highlight that social media engagement and sustainability are central yet insufficiently integrated dimensions in the current body of Gen Z research.

Complementing these insights, Ivasciuc et al. [25] systematically analyzed 217 tourism-related studies (2018–2024) and demonstrated that Gen Z–focused tourism scholarship is still emergent but rapidly expanding. Their results reveal that social media marketing communication, Gen Z tourism experiences, and value-based travel attitudes constitute the main research frontiers. Addressing these developments, the present study offers a comprehensive synthesis focused on the hotel and accommodation industry, extending the scope of prior systematic analyses and consolidating fragmented insights into a coherent theoretical and managerial framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. The PRISMA 2020 Guideline

While systematic analysis has gained traction in recent studies for gaining deeper insights into current trends and future developments [61,62], its application remains relatively limited in tourism and hospitality research [25]. Therefore, this paper adopts a systematic method to examine relevant literature on Gen Z and the hotel industry from 2011 to 2025. This review followed the PRISMA 2020 (Please refer to the Supplementary Material for the PRISMA checklist) [63] guideline to ensure transparent identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies [2,58]. PRISMA is widely adopted in tourism and hospitality to standardize selection procedures and enhance replicability [28,63]. Two multidisciplinary citation databases including Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) were selected due to their broad coverage, rigorous indexing standards, and widespread use in evidence synthesis [64,65]. The search was conducted in July 2025 across titles, abstracts, and keywords using Boolean operators to capture the Gen Z–hospitality/accommodation nexus: (“Gen Z” OR “Gen Z’s” OR “Generation Z” OR Zoomers) AND (accommodation OR hotel OR Airbnb OR hospitality OR homestay OR “online platform” OR “home stay” OR apartment OR “peer to peer” OR hostel OR lodging OR guest OR booking OR P2P). This approach enabled the inclusion of studies addressing Gen Z’s behaviors, experiences, and roles as both consumers and employees within hotel and accommodation contexts, while excluding unrelated research from broader tourism or generational studies.

3.2. Eligibility Criteria and Screening

At the eligibility stage, studies that did not meet the a priori inclusion and exclusion criteria were excluded. Abstracts were examined in detail, and when scope ambiguity persisted. For example, when it was unclear whether the paper focused specifically on hotels and Gen Z in a generalized manner, full texts were retrieved and assessed to adjudi-

cate eligibility for the final synthesis [2]. To ensure the corpus comprised scientific journal articles of relevance, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were explicitly defined in advance and applied systematically.

Inclusion criteria were three main merits: (a) peer-reviewed publications; (b) English language; (c) direct relevance to the defined keywords (Gen Z and hotel/accommodation contexts). Inclusion criteria were three main merits: peer-reviewed publications; English language; direct relevance to the defined keywords (Gen Z and hospitality/accommodation contexts). Exclusion criteria were non–peer-reviewed items (e.g., book chapters, conference proceedings, editorials, editorial materials) and studies not meeting inclusion criteria.

The search retrieved 637 records (Scopus = 219; WoS = 418). An open-ended search (i.e., no restrictions on time span, geography, or document type) was initially applied to maximize recall, followed by eligibility filtering. After de-duplication, 512 unique records remained. First, duplicate items were removed. Following, records not meeting the inclusion criteria (e.g., non-English language publications, incomplete records, and non-peer-reviewed sources) were excluded. Following cross-checking by the authors to minimize selection bias, 131 peer-reviewed journal articles were retained for analysis (Figure 1). We focused on journal publications to ensure quality and reliability through rigorous peer review, consistent with prior systematic work [25,61,66]. For each included article, bibliographic and contextual metadata were extracted (title, authors, keywords, abstract, source, organization/affiliation, country, year). Data were organized in Microsoft Excel for quality control and subsequent import into analysis tools.

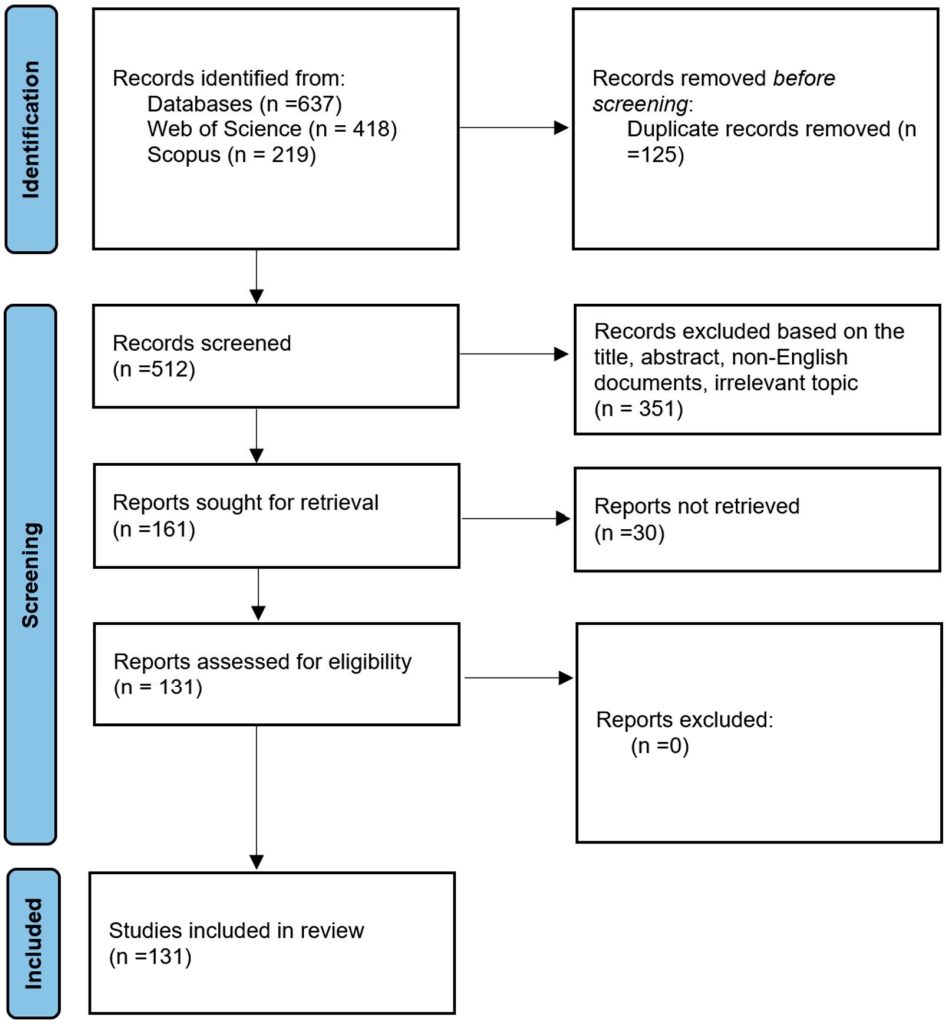


Figure 1. Study selection process.

3.3. Data Cleaning and Analytical Tools

Since systematic analyses operate on metadata rather than primary findings, we undertook systematic "data disambiguation" to improve accuracy [67]. Specifically, we harmonized variant forms of keywords and author/venue names (e.g., "Generation Z," "Gen Z's"; "hotel," "hotels") by creating a VOSviewer and Biblioshiny thesaurus file to unify synonyms and merge duplicates before mapping [58,68]. We followed best-practice guidance for combining and cleaning systematic data [69] and for keyword standardization to avoid fragmentation of co-word networks [70].

We combined performance analysis with science mapping to triangulate insights into productivity, influence, and intellectual structure [58,71]. VOSviewer (v1.6.20) was used for network construction and visualization, including keyword co-occurrence maps with association-strength normalization [72]. Biblioshiny (bibliometrix in RStudio) supported the computation of performance indicators (annual production, sources, authors, affiliations, countries), trend topic analysis, and thematic mapping based on centrality–density quadrants [71]. Microsoft Excel was employed for data curation, maintenance of cleaning logs, and descriptive statistics.

4. Results

The analysis covers 131 research articles on Gen Z and the hotel industry published between 2011 and 2025. The dataset includes contributions from 377 authors, with an average of 3.21 co-authors per document, reflecting a strong emphasis on collaborative research. Only nine documents are single-authored, and the collection features a single review article. International co-authorship accounts for 9.16% of the publications, indicating a moderate level of cross-border collaboration. The average age of documents is 1.86 years, highlighting the recency of research in this domain. Additionally, the average number of citations per document is 18.75, suggesting a growing academic impact. The dataset incorporates 302 Keywords Plus, providing a broad thematic scope for the analysis.

4.1. Performance Analysis

4.1.1. Publications by Year

Figure 2 shows the yearly publication trends from 2011 to 2025, with no time limitations applied in the search strategy. The distribution of articles over time reveals a significant growth in scientific production related to Gen Z and the hotel industry. After a single publication in 2011 and no significant attention to Gen Z consumer from 2012 to 2017, research activity began to accelerate, with five articles published in 2018 and three in 2019. This upward trend continued, reaching five articles in 2020 and eight in 2021. The field saw a notable grow in recent years, with 15 articles in 2022, followed by 18 in 2023. The highest levels of productivity were recorded in 2024 and 2025, with 39 and 37 articles published, respectively. This pattern highlights the rapidly increasing scholarly interest and growing momentum in research on Gen Z within the hotel industry, particularly over the past three years.

4.1.2. Most Active Journals

The research on Gen Z and the hotel industry is concentrated in a set of influential journals (Figure 3). International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality and the Sustainability (Switzerland) Management are the most active outlets, each publishing 10 articles on the topic. The International Journal of Hospitality Management follows with eight articles. The Journal of Sustainable Tourism has contributed six articles, while the Journal of Tourism Futures accounts for five. Tourism Review and the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights each report four publications, and both the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism

Management and the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology have three articles apiece. This distribution points to a strong focus on hospitality management, tourism, technology, and sustainability, underscoring the interdisciplinary scope and growing scholarly attention to Gen Z's influence on the hotel sector.

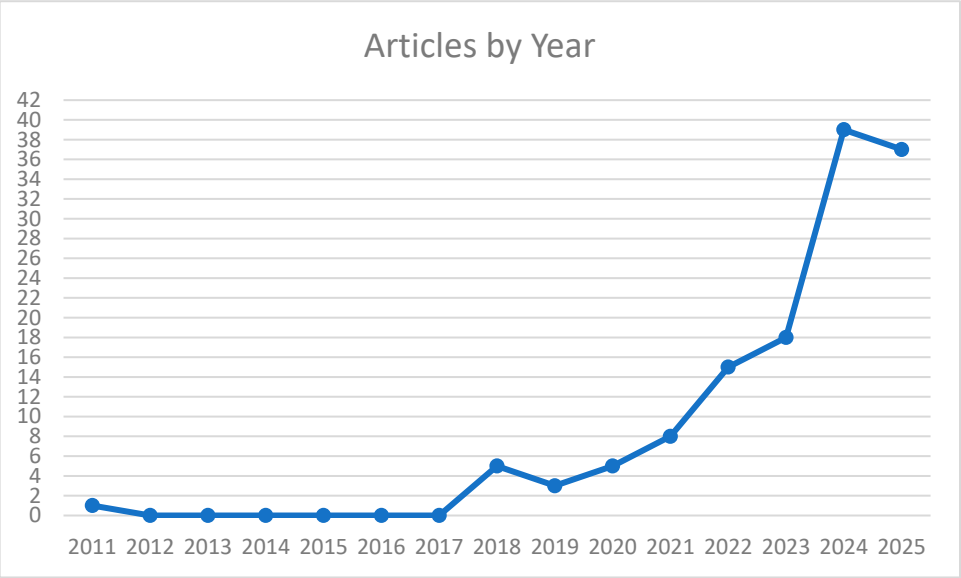


Figure 2. Annual scientific production. Source: authors' processing in bibliometrix, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

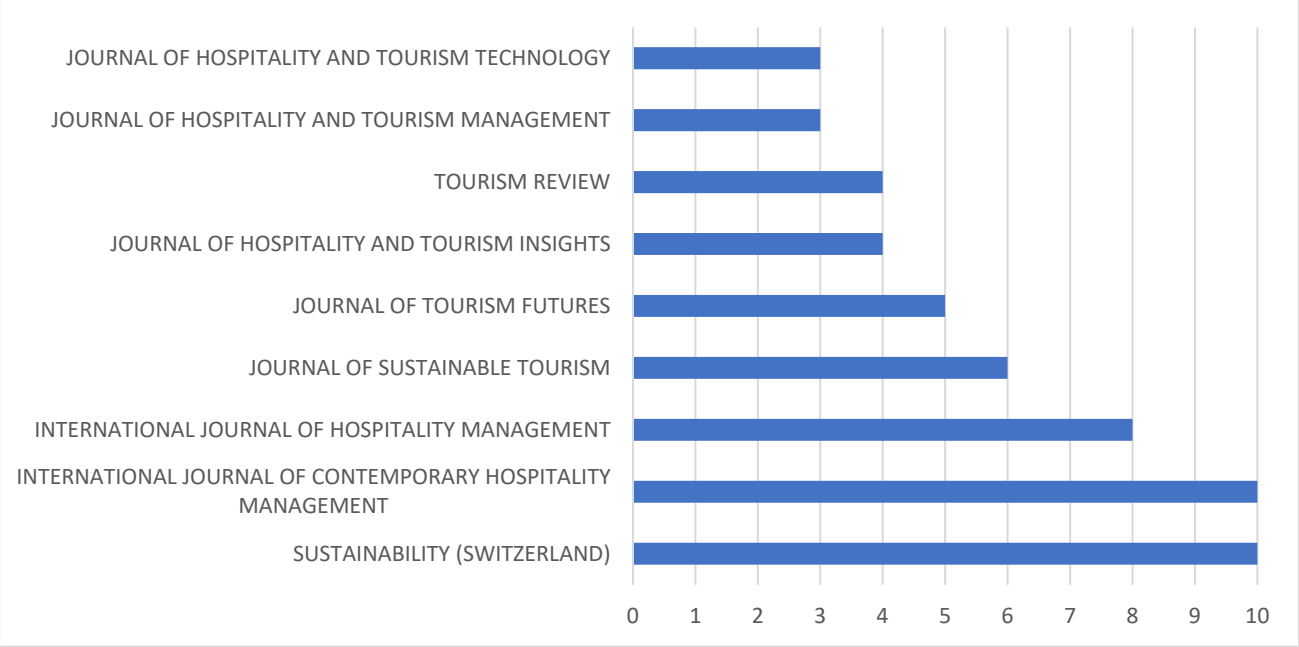


Figure 3. Journals and number of publications. Source: authors' processing in bibliometrix, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

4.1.3. Most Active Contributors: The Authors and Intuitions

To identify the leading contributors in the field of Gen Z and the hotel industry, a systematic analysis of publication records was conducted. The 131 papers included in the analysis were authored by 377 researchers. This analysis aimed to highlight both the most prolific authors and the institutions playing a pivotal role in shaping research trends within this area. Table 2 displays the top 10 authors, ranked by their total number of publications,

underscoring those who are actively advancing scholarship on Gen Z in hospitality. The findings indicate that Goh E and Nguyen are the most prominent contributors, each with five publications focused on Gen Z and hotels. Their substantial output suggests a strong, ongoing commitment to expanding knowledge in this domain. Seyfi S follows closely with four publications, demonstrating significant engagement with the topic. Authors such as Aujirapongpan S, Imjai N, Liu J, and Sun J have each produced three articles, further reflecting the growing scholarly interest in this area. Additionally, Balakrishnan J, Baum T, and Chang J have made notable contributions with two publications each. Collectively, these leading authors exemplify the expanding academic focus on Gen Z's role and experiences within the hotel industry.

Table 2. Top 10 authors, ranked by their total number of publications.

Authors	Articles
Goh E	5
Nguyen T	5
Seyfi S	4
Aujirapongpan S	3
Imjai N	3
Liu J	3
Sun J	3
Balakrishnan J	2
Baum T	2
Chang J	2

Source: authors' processing.

Table 3 presents the top 10 academic institutions, ranked by their total number of relevant publications. The most active affiliations in research on Gen Z and the hotel industry reflect a diverse and international academic landscape. Edith Cowan University, UCSI University, and the University of Central Florida lead with five publications each, indicating strong institutional engagement. Close behind, Macau University of Science and Technology, Purdue University, the University of Johannesburg, the University of Nevada Las Vegas, and the University of Oulu each contributed four articles. Additionally, California State Polytechnic University and Khmelnytskyi Cooperative Trade and Economic Institute have three publications apiece. This range of affiliations highlights the global collaboration and multidisciplinary interest in exploring Gen Z's influence on the hotel sector.

Table 3. Top 10 affiliated institutes.

Affiliation	Articles
Edith Cowan University	5
Ucsi University	5
University of Central Florida	5
Macau University of Science and Technology	4
Purdue University	4
University of Johannesburg	4
University of Nevada Las Vegas	4
University of Oulu	4
California State Polytechnic University	3
Khmelnytskyi Cooperative Trade and Economic Institute	3

Source: authors' processing.

4.1.4. Corresponding Author's Countries

The distribution of corresponding author countries demonstrates both national focus and international collaboration in research on Gen Z and the hotel industry (Figure 4). China leads with 17 articles (13% of the total), primarily through single country production (SCP = 15) but also contributing to international collaborations (MCP = 2; 11.8% MCP). The USA follows with 16 articles (12.2%), almost all being single country productions (SCP = 15, MCP = 1; 6.3% MCP). India and Australia are also significant contributors, each publishing exclusively within their own countries (SCP = 9 and 7, respectively, with no MCP). Malaysia and Korea show moderate international engagement, with Malaysia's MCP at 14.3% and Korea's at 20%. In contrast, the United Kingdom and Finland stand out for their high rates of international collaboration, with 50% and 66.7% of their articles, respectively, resulting from multiple country production. Indonesia also demonstrates a notable MCP share (33.3%). These patterns reveal that while most research output is nationally focused, several countries, particularly in Europe and Southeast Asia are driving forward international partnerships, reflecting a dynamic and increasingly global research landscape.

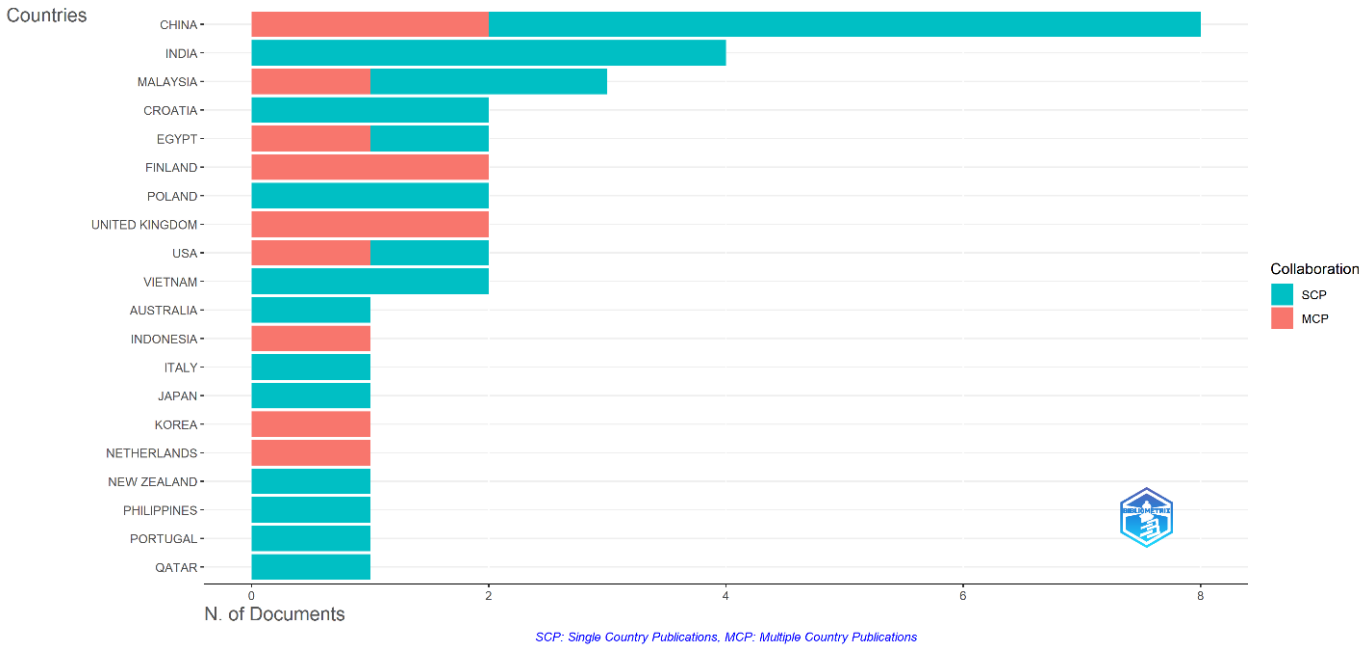


Figure 4. The distribution of corresponding author countries. Source: authors' processing in bibliometrix, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

4.1.5. Countries' Scientific Production

The analysis of countries' scientific production on Gen Z and the hotel industry, as presented in Figure 5, identifies China as the leading contributor with 31 publications, followed by the United States with 23, reflecting both nations' growing academic interest in the intersection of youth behavior and hospitality management. Malaysia and India also show strong engagement with 16 and 14 publications, respectively, while Australia contributes nine. European and Asian countries such as Croatia, South Korea, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Indonesia have each produced between five and seven studies, indicating a widespread academic presence.

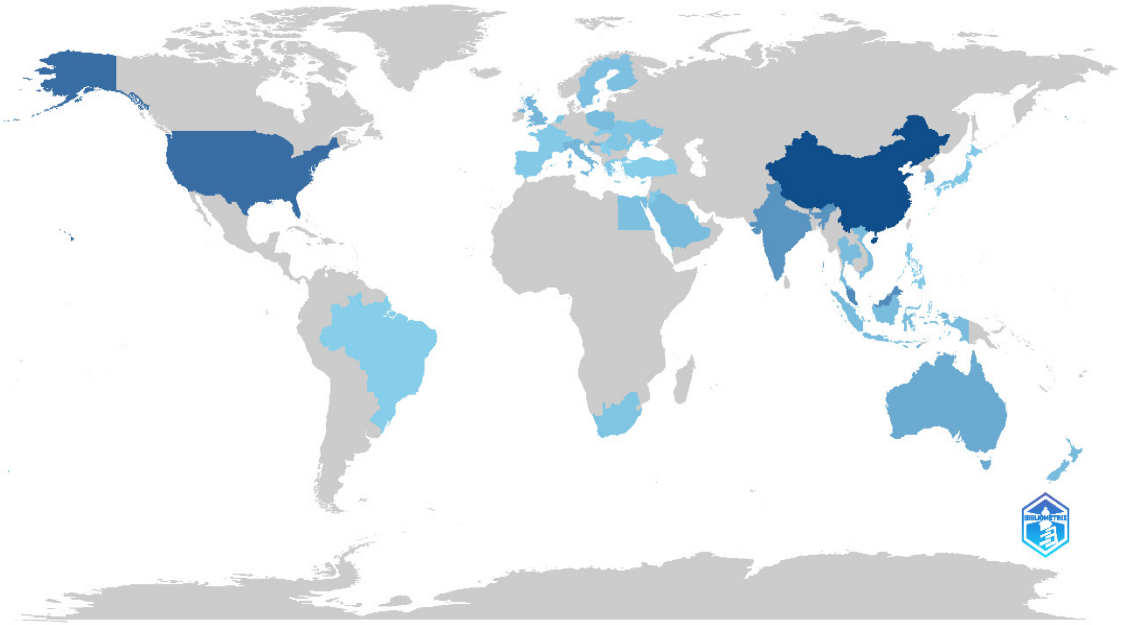


Figure 5. The distribution of countries' scientific production. Source: authors' processing in bibliometrix, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

This distribution reveals not only a geographically diverse research landscape but also the increasing global recognition of Gen Z as a transformative force shaping the future of hospitality. The strong representation from emerging and developed economies alike suggests an expanding awareness of generational shifts in tourism preferences, technological engagement, and service expectations, reinforcing the relevance of cross-cultural and comparative studies in this evolving field.

4.1.6. Key Readings Informed by Highly Cited Research

The most globally cited documents in the field of Gen Z and the hotel and hospitality industry demonstrate significant scholarly impact, with several articles receiving high citation counts (Table 4). The top-cited paper by Goh and Lee [23], which has garnered 264 citations, underscores the industry's recognition of Gen Z employees as a "workforce to be reckoned with," drawing attention to their emerging influence within hospitality organizations.

Table 4. Most impactful articles.

Rank	Author(s) and Year	Article Title	Journal Title	Total Citations	TC * per Year	Normalized TC
1	Goh & Lee [23]	A workforce to be reckoned with: The emerging pivotal Gen Z hospitality workforce	International Journal of Hospitality Management	264	33	3.14
2	Goh & Jie [73]	To waste or not to waste: Exploring motivational factors of Gen Z hospitality employees towards food wastage in the hospitality industry	International Journal of Hospitality Management	151	21.57	1.46
3	Goh & Okumus [24]	Avoiding the hospitality workforce bubble: Strategies to attract and retain Gen Z talent in the hospitality workforce	Tourism Management Perspectives	151	25.17	3.30

Table 4. *Cont.*

Rank	Author(s) and Year	Article Title	Journal Title	Total Citations	TC * per Year	Normalized TC
4	Sakdiyakorn et al. [33]	Understanding Gen Z through collective consciousness: Impacts for hospitality work and employment	International Journal of Hospitality Management	126	25.20	2.42
5	Robinson & Schänzel [32]	A tourism inflex: Gen Z travel experiences	Journal Of Tourism Futures	94	13.43	0.91
6	Goh & Baum [10]	Job perceptions of Gen Z hotel employees towards working in COVID-19 quarantine hotels: the role of meaningful work	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	92	18.40	1.77
7	Vitezić & Perić [38]	Artificial intelligence acceptance in services: connecting with Gen Z	Service Industries Journal	85	17	1.63
8	Yu et al. [74]	Robots can't take my job: antecedents and outcomes of gen Z employees' service robot risk awareness	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	76	19	2.68
9	D'arco et al. [75]	Exploring the pro-environmental behavioral intention of Gen Z in the tourism context: the role of injunctive social norms and personal norms	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	71	71	14.36
10	Ribeiro et al. [42]	Determinants of Gen Z pro-environmental travel behavior: the moderating role of green consumption values	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	70	70	14.15

* TC stands for Total Citations.

Other highly influential works include Goh and Jie [73], which explores the motivational factors that drive Gen Z hospitality employees' attitudes toward food wastage, and Goh and Okumus [24], which examines strategies for attracting and retaining Gen Z talent in the sector; each has received 151 citations, highlighting the growing importance of workforce sustainability and talent management. Sakdiyakorn et al. [33], with 126 citations, provides insights into the collective consciousness of Gen Z and its impact on hospitality work and employment, further enriching the understanding of generational dynamics in the industry.

Additional notable contributions come from Robinson and Schänzel [32], who investigate Gen Z travel experiences, and Vitezić and Perić [38], who examine the acceptance of artificial intelligence in services among Gen Z, reflecting the field's expanding focus on technology and customer experience. Yu et al. [74] address Gen Z employees' awareness of risks associated with service robots, and more recent studies by D'Arco et al. [75] and Ribeiro et al. [42] highlight the growing interest in pro-environmental behavioral intentions and green consumption values among Gen Z travelers. Collectively, these highly cited publications reflect the expanding academic attention to Gen Z's role within hospitality, emphasizing key themes such as workforce development, technological adaptation, and sustainability.

4.2. Research Methods and Variables Tested

The studies in this review focus on diverse methods, reflecting a multifaceted approach to understanding Gen Z's behaviors, attitudes, and experiences in accommodation and hotel industry contexts. Quantitative research methods predominate in this field, representing 93 studies (ap-proximately 71% of the total). Within this methodological category, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) emerges as a central analytical approach, appearing in two major forms. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), in particular, has been widely applied to examine constructs such as behavioral intention, trust, job demands, environmental attitudes, and the willingness to use AI-driven devices, as illustrated in several studies by Yordudom et al. [76], Leung et al. [77], Wang et al. [40,78], and Vitezić and Perić [38]; AMOS-based SEM examines outcomes such as Gen Z employees' adaptive performance and attitudes toward e-booking platforms, as in Katsaros [55], Stavrianea [5], and Siddiqui et al. [20]. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) validates constructs such as green knowledge sharing behavior and staged hospitality experiences (reservation, check-in, living, check-out), with examples from Alam [79], Wang et al. [40], and Siddiqui et al. [20]. Regression methods, particularly OLS, probe relationships involving hospitality environmental practices and eco-consciousness [14,31,80], while comparative tests such as *t*-tests and ANOVA assess performance differences across technologies and generations and evaluate environmental practice outcomes [17,31]. Additional regression applications investigate organizational socialization, digital technology services, and intentions to adopt advanced information technologies [25,49,81]. Finally, factor analysis underpins dimensionality reduction and scale development in topics including working with service robots, intentions to use RFID, and accommodation choices in the post-pandemic era [35,58,82]. This methodological emphasis reflects the growing reliance on data-driven models to capture the complex interrelationships that characterize Gen Z's behavior and attitudes within the hotel industry.

In contrast, 23 studies (18%) used qualitative methods, relying on interviews, focus groups, and interpretive analyses. These studies commonly examined constructs around careers and food waste—attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intentions [23,73]; values and their links to work behaviors [33]; sociocultural and gendered understandings of "hospitality" with implications for inclusive practice [83]; management trainee adaptability and leadership [84]; service-robot encounters [37]; and hostel experience drivers [85]. A comparatively limited body of work, consisting of 6 studies (5%), employed mixed-method approaches that integrate quantitative surveys with qualitative inquiry. While these studies aimed to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, their limited number suggests an underutilization of methodological triangulation within the field. Mixed-method designs, such as those combining qualitative probes with quantitative modeling [30,85–87], offer valuable potential for capturing both measurable patterns and contextual depth; however, their scarce application indicates a gap in methodological diversity and highlights opportunities for future research to adopt more multi-dimensional and critically integrative frameworks.

Finally, 11 studies (8%) were categorized as other approaches, including literature reviews, systematic analyses, and conceptual or theoretical contributions; examples include a critical synthesis of Gen Z as customers and employees [8], a Social Exchange Theory–human needs conceptualization for Gen Z retention [53], and a systematic review of Gen Z digital marketing [5].

4.3. Theoretical Frameworks

Figure 6 indicates the distribution of theoretical categories in studies focusing on the hotel industry and Gen Z consumers (see Appendix A for a complete list of grouped

theories and their frequencies). The most frequently applied frameworks are behavioral and psychological theories (22%), with the Theory of Planned Behavior appearing in 14 studies. This demonstrates a strong scholarly focus on Gen Z's decision-making processes and purchasing behaviors within this demographic. Technology adoption and acceptance models represent the second most applied category (17%), with the Technology Acceptance Model dominating in 7 studies. This indicates a strong emphasis on examining how Gen Z engages with digital and smart technologies in hospitality such as app-based bookings and self-service technologies.

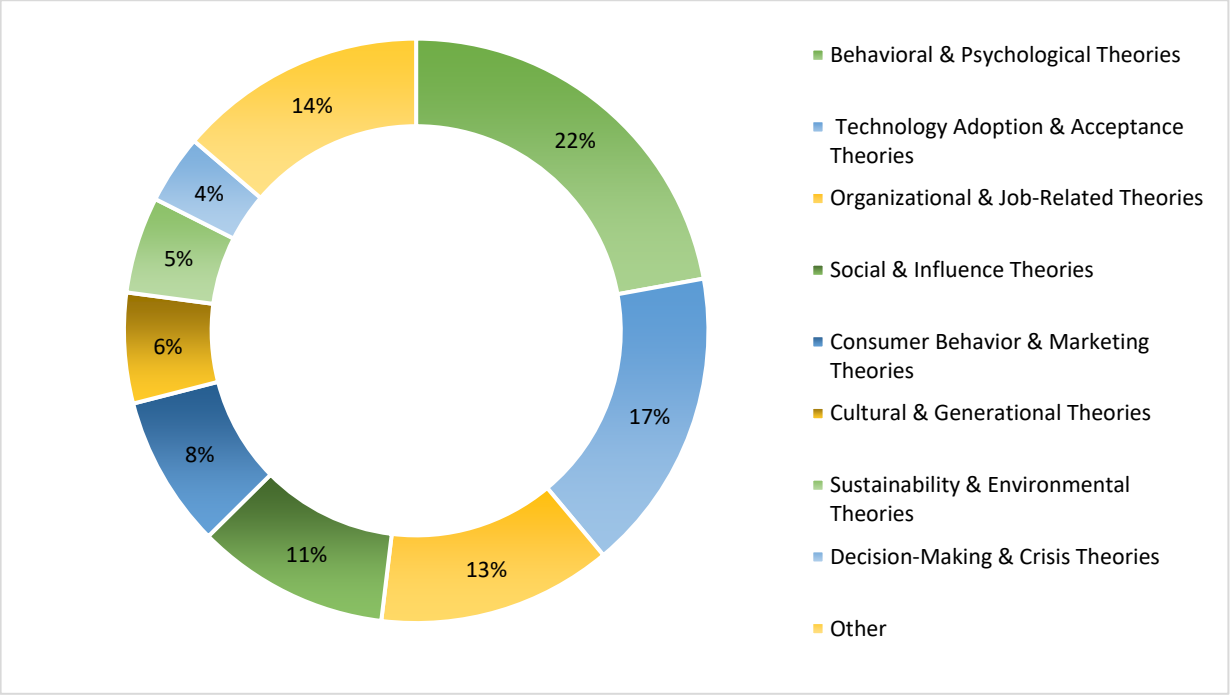


Figure 6. Distribution of theoretical frameworks in studies on Gen Z consumers in the hotel industry. Source: authors' processing in Excel, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

Organizational and job-related theories (12%) and social and influence theories (11%) are applied less frequently, despite their relevance in understanding Gen Z as both employees and consumers in hospitality contexts. Their relatively modest presence suggests an under-exploration of workplace dynamics, leadership, and the role of peer or social influence in shaping Gen Z's behaviors. Similarly, cultural and generational theories (6%) appear under employed, even though generational identity and cultural variation are central to the study's population of interest. Sustainability and environmental perspectives (5%) remain marginal, which is somewhat paradoxical given Gen Z's frequently reported concern for sustainability. This gap highlights a disjunction between the rhetoric of sustainability in hospitality and the theoretical grounding of existing research. Decision-making and crisis-related frameworks (4%) also appear underrepresented, despite the growing relevance of crisis management in a post-pandemic hospitality landscape.

4.4. Science Mapping and Future of Research Trends on Gen Z and Hotel Industry

There are several approaches to science mapping, among which co-occurrence analysis, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation analysis are particularly well-known [88,89]. While co-citation and bibliographic coupling reveal the intellectual structure and dynamics of a field through document relationships, co-occurrence analysis is uniquely suited to map the conceptual landscape based on the terminology itself [69,89]. Given our objective to map the conceptual structure and identify key topics within Gen Z and the hotel industry,

co-occurrence analysis was selected as the primary method. Beside this approach, we developed a data-driven research agenda by calculating the centrality and density of research themes to track their evolution over time, which revealed priority areas for future study.

4.4.1. Foundational Knowledge Through a Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

This section employs Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis to uncover the foundational knowledge and thematic structure of research on Gen Z in the hotel industry [69]. The analysis was conducted using a threshold of a minimum of three occurrences, resulting in 26 high-frequency keywords. The findings, visualized in Figures 7 and 8, reveal the field's structure through seven distinct thematic clusters. In the network visualization (Figure 7), node size represents frequency of occurrence, line thickness indicates co-occurrence strength, and color denotes cluster affiliation.

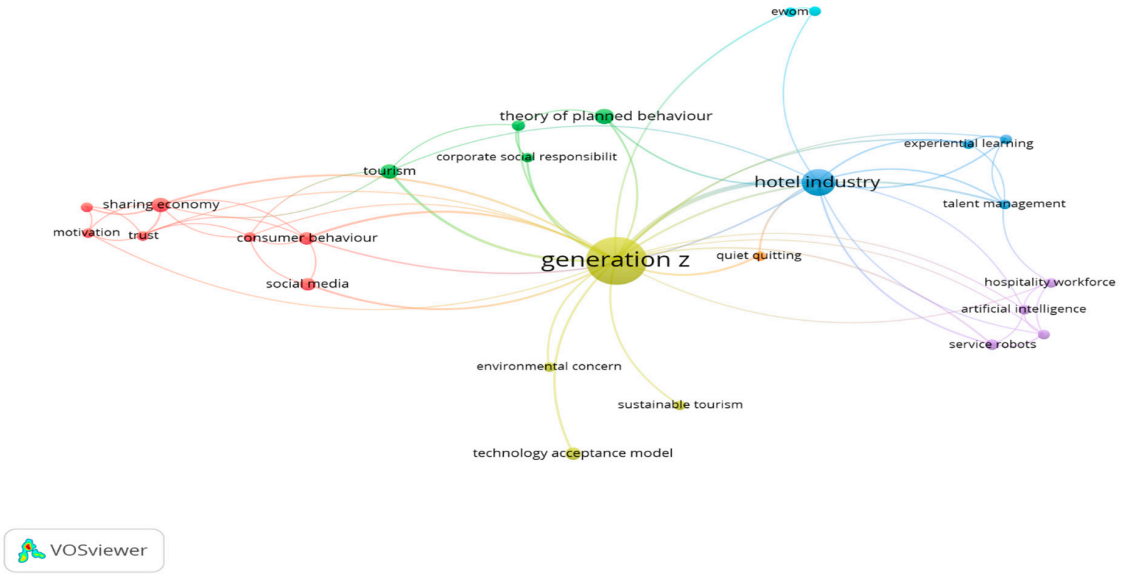


Figure 7. Network visualization related Gen Z hotel literature. Source: authors' processing in VOSviewer, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

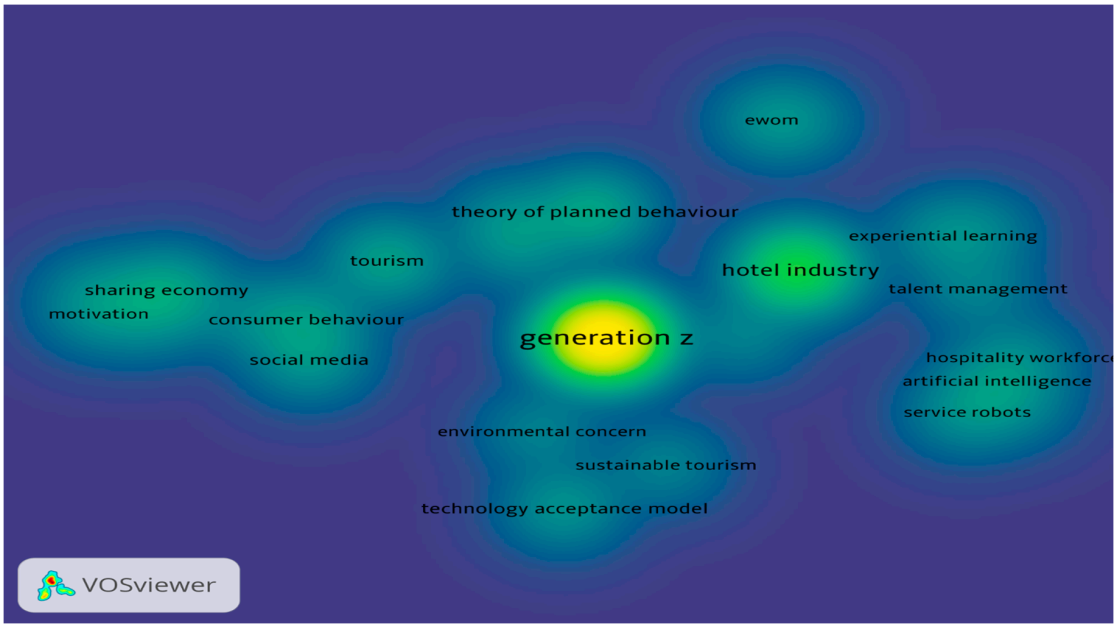


Figure 8. Science mapping of Gen Z and hotel literature though density visualization. Source: authors' processing in VOSviewer, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

Figure 8 displays the density visualization, illustrating how closely nodes are positioned in relation to each other. Nodes with greater density, indicating more connections, are highlighted in darker, more vivid colors (yellow), whereas those with lower density appear in lighter shades (green). The yellow nodes, which represent topics Gen Z and hotel industry, reflect areas where substantial research activity has occurred. In contrast, the green nodes signify less-studied areas, such as consumer behavior, talent management, and sustainable tourism.

4.4.2. Topical Trend in Hotel Industry

A primary objective of this systematic analysis is to develop a robust future research agenda. As emphasized by Lim et al. [69], this requires moving beyond a static mapping of the field to incorporate trend analysis. This approach is crucial because it reveals how themes evolve over time, highlighting not only established core areas but also emerging frontiers and underexplored gaps. Guided by this principle, we employed Biblioshiny in RStudio to conduct a temporal analysis, calculating metrics of keyword centrality and density to precisely quantify the evolution and developmental status of research themes. The examination of trending topics related to Gen Z and the hotel industry, as illustrated in Figure 9, indicates a dynamic progression of emerging and evolving research themes. Consumer behavior remains a central and enduring focus, originating in 2018 and persisting through 2023, demonstrating sustained scholarly interest in how Gen Z engages with the hospitality sector.

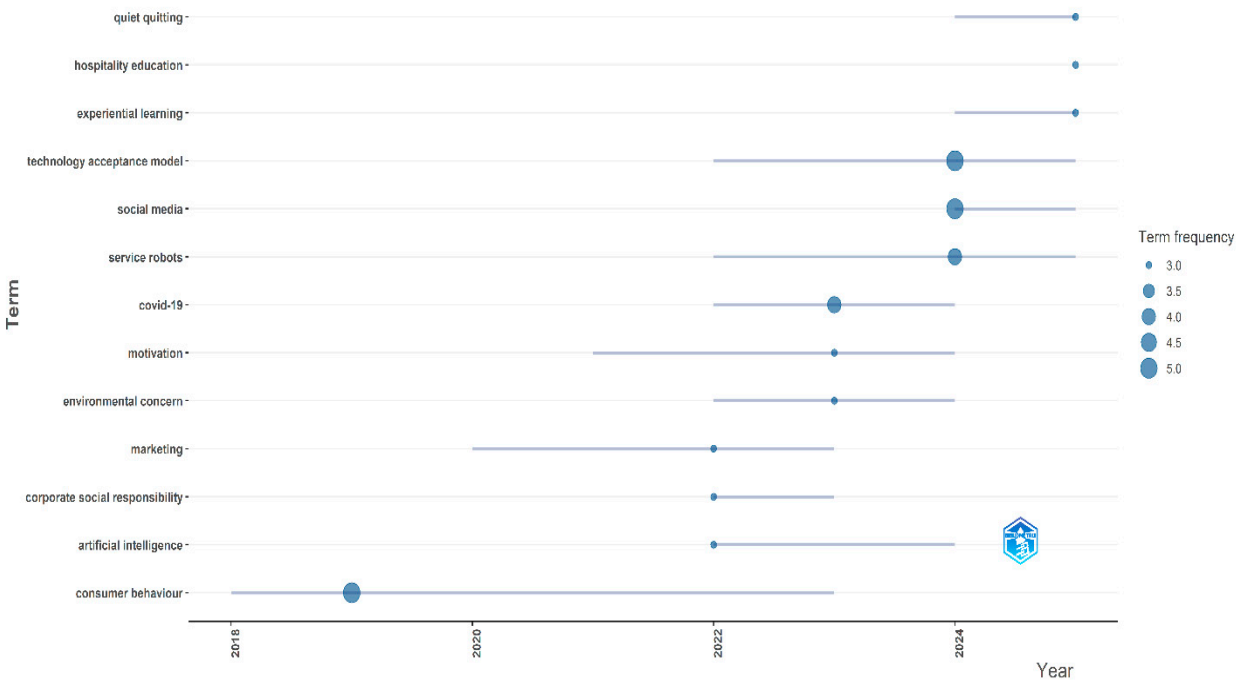


Figure 9. Topical trends of hotel industry and Gen Z. Source: authors' processing in bibliometrix, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

From 2022 onward, studies concerning artificial intelligence and corporate social responsibility have increased notably, signifying a growing emphasis on technological innovation and ethical dimensions within hospitality management. The COVID-19 pandemic has also left a visible imprint, with related research intensifying between 2022 and 2024. Additional themes such as environmental concern and motivation, which surfaced around 2021–2022, have continued through 2024, reflecting heightened awareness of sustainability and psychological factors shaping Gen Z's attitudes. The influence of social media has

become particularly salient in 2024–2025, highlighting its expanding role in consumer engagement and decision-making. Moreover, the rising prominence of the technology acceptance model and service robots with research peaking between 2024 and 2025 demonstrates a clear scholarly shift toward digital transformation and automation in hospitality. Collectively, these evolving topics capture the complex and interrelated nature of contemporary research, shaped by technological progress, societal change, and the evolving expectations of new generations of consumers.

4.4.3. Thematic Trends of Hotel Industry and Gen Z

In conducting thematic trends analyses, we selected the "Leiden" algorithm for clustering, as it provides a more accurate identification of well-connected communities within systematic networks [68]. From the perspective of thematic development, a four-quadrant thematic map, shown in Figure 10, was produced using the biblioshiny interface of bibliometrix. This visualization represents the maturity and prominence of themes based on their respective density and centrality [71]. While previous scholars have offered brief and general descriptions of the characteristics associated with each quadrant [66], this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive yet succinct interpretation of the four quadrants, as follows [66,69,89]: (a) basic themes (bottom-right: high relevance, low development) are fundamental to the field and widely connected to other themes, though they may require further in-depth development. (b) Motor themes (top-right: high relevance, high development) are well-developed and highly relevant, representing the driving forces in the current research landscape, particularly in relation to Gen Z's engagement with hospitality. (c) Niche themes (top-left: low relevance, high development) comprise expert knowledge that has been extensively researched due to its importance to specific interest groups, areas, or industries. (d) Emerging or declining themes (bottom-left: low relevance, low development) refer to areas of transitioning knowledge that are either newly emerging or may lose relevance over time. The results, as illustrated in the thematic map (Figure 10), reveal a clear segmentation of research themes concerning Gen Z and the hotel and accommodation industry. The map categorizes themes according to their degree of development (density) and relevance (centrality).

Within the bottom-right quadrant, several basic themes emerge as the foundational knowledge in the field of Gen Z and the hotel industry:

Booking motivation in peer-to-peer hospitality platforms. This theme investigates how digital hospitality platforms, particularly within the sharing economy, shape new forms of motivation, value exchange and trust between hosts and guests [90]. Peer-to-peer accommodation such as Airbnb has redefined interaction patterns, expectations, and service delivery in hospitality ecosystems [61,91]. Future research should examine how these platforms balance the interests of individual users with broader industry standards, and what new motivational dynamics are emerging as hospitality becomes increasingly decentralized. Additionally, the long-term effects on traditional hospitality businesses and local communities warrant continued scrutiny.

Digital adoption and rejection drivers. This theme examines how guests and service providers evaluate, accept, or reject emerging technologies that are increasingly reshaping hospitality experiences. Drawing on established models such as the TAM or resistance theory, recent studies highlight how behavioral intentions, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived risk influence the uptake of digital solutions in hotels and other service settings [6]. As hoteliers and service providers introduce new tools, from mobile check-ins to AI-powered recommendations, questions arise about user trust, data privacy, and the impact of perceived risks on adoption rates [92]. Researchers are encouraged to probe deeper into how different demographic and cultural groups perceive these

technologies, and to identify strategies that foster greater acceptance and sustained use. Furthermore, the continuing digital transformation of the hospitality sector necessitates critical reflection on barriers to inclusion and underscores the importance of adaptive change management to ensure equitable and effective technological integration.

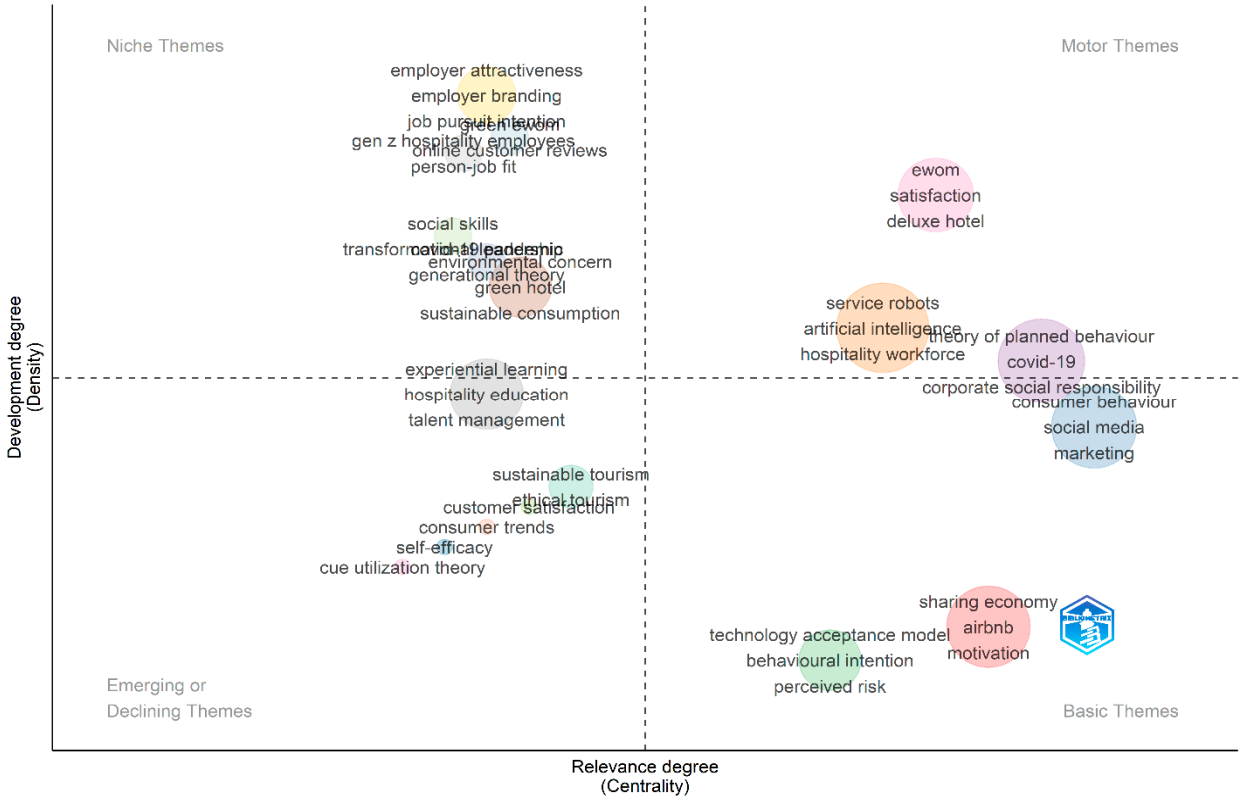


Figure 10. Thematic trends of hotel industry and Gen Z. Source: authors' processing in bibliometrix, using Web of Science and Scopus indexed articles.

Online social marketing and communication. This theme focuses on how social media, targeted advertising, and real-time interactions shape consumer behavior, influence purchasing decisions, and redefine brand loyalty [26,93]. The proliferation of user-generated content and influencer marketing has given rise to new forms of authenticity and trust, yet also introduces challenges in managing online reputation and ensuring ethical communication [44,45,94]. Future studies should explore the effectiveness of various digital marketing strategies across different market segments, the role of personalization and data analytics, and the evolving expectations of digitally savvy consumers. As digital platforms increasingly merge marketing, service, and experience, hospitality organizations must adopt strategies that promote authentic, transparent, and meaningful engagement with Gen Z consumers.

In the upper-right quadrant, three motor themes emerge, marked by high centrality and density. These signify mature, well-developed knowledge areas that are fundamental to Gen Z and the hotel industry and have been the focus of intensive research:

Guest satisfaction in luxury hospitality. In the realm of luxury hospitality, guest perceptions and satisfaction are increasingly shaped by electronic eWOM, online reviews, and the broader management of brand reputation across digital platforms [44,95,96]. The relationship between eWOM and service excellence highlights critical considerations for luxury brands seeking to preserve authenticity, effectively manage consumer feedback, and cultivate trust within an intensely competitive and digitally driven marketplace [17]. Future research could investigate the strategies luxury hotels employ to manage their online

reputations, the impact of negative or misleading reviews, and the evolving expectations of discerning guests in the digital age.

AI-driven service transformation. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and service robots are reshaping market structures, job roles, and service delivery models in the accommodation sector [8]. As hotels increasingly implement AI-driven concierge systems, contactless check-ins, and predictive analytics, critical considerations arise concerning how to balance technological efficiency with personalized human interaction and job roles, ensuring that innovation enhances rather than diminishes the guest experience [97]. Ongoing inquiry is needed to assess how these technological advancements influence guest satisfaction, operational efficiency, and long-term industry sustainability.

CSR in times of global crisis. CSR has taken on heightened significance during global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, influencing both organizational actions and individual behavioral intentions [98]. Further research can explore how hospitality organizations adapt their CSR initiatives during emergencies, the factors driving customer and employee support for such efforts, and the broader implications for recovery and sustainable growth in the face of uncertainty.

In the upper-left quadrant, we observe several niche themes that represent specialized knowledge within Gen Z and accommodation research.

Shaping employer appeal in hospitality. The hospitality industry is increasingly focused on cultivating strong employer brands to attract top talent and inspire job pursuit intentions among potential hires [99,100]. Through the strategic application of employer attractiveness and branding initiatives, organizations seek to establish a distinctive identity and gain a competitive advantage within an increasingly intensified labor market [16,22]. Key questions include how employer branding impacts recruitment outcomes, what motivates prospective employees to pursue roles within specific companies, and how organizations can sustain their appeal amid shifting workforce values and expectations. Further research might investigate the role of digital platforms in employer branding and the long-term effects of a positive employer reputation on employee retention and engagement.

Eco-friendly initiatives. Sustainability has become a defining factor in the reputation management strategies of hospitality organizations, with green eWOM and online customer reviews playing a pivotal role [21,31]. The increasing online visibility of eco-friendly initiatives prompts critical inquiry into the authenticity, effectiveness, and strategic management of green reputations within the contemporary digital landscape [101]. Researchers are encouraged to consider how hotels can leverage positive green eWOM, address negative or skeptical feedback, and communicate their sustainability efforts transparently.

Leadership styles and leader development. Effective leadership in hospitality hinges not just on strategic vision, but also on the cultivation of strong social skills and transformational capabilities [79]. The relationship between interpersonal skills and transformational leadership highlights the importance of developing effective leadership pipelines, understanding the role of emotional intelligence in navigating complex service environments, and assessing the broader impact of leadership behaviors on employee motivation and well-being [48,49]. Future research could explore methods for assessing and enhancing social intelligence within hospitality settings, investigate the relationship between leadership practices and guest satisfaction, and identify strategies for cultivating socially intelligent leaders capable of thriving in an increasingly diverse and dynamic industry.

Tailoring hospitality careers. The integration of Gen Z employees into the hospitality workforce has introduced new dynamics in person-job fit, as organizations adapt to the expectations and work styles of this emerging generation [23]. This theme prompts critical questions about how hospitality organizations can redesign roles and management practices to attract, engage, and retain Gen Z workforce. Further research should examine the

impact of workplace culture, flexible work, and digital transformation on job satisfaction and performance among young employees. As Gen Z becomes a larger portion of the workforce, organizations must consider how to reconcile generational differences and foster environments that support both individual fulfillment and organizational goals.

Environmental concerns and sustainable choices. Represented by topics such as green hotels and sustainable consumption, this theme explores how different generations perceive and engage with environmentally friendly hospitality options and sustainable consumption practices. Green hotels and sustainable consumption are not universally valued or approached [101]; instead, generational perspectives shape consumer expectations, willingness to pay, and advocacy for eco-friendly practices [14,102]. Key questions include how marketing and service design can be tailored to appeal to varying generational segments, and what barriers prevent widespread adoption of sustainable options. The evolving landscape of hospitality offers opportunities for intergenerational learning, innovation in service delivery, and the cultivation of lifelong sustainable habits among travelers.

In the lower-left quadrant, we note five emerging rather than declining themes that are likely to gain both centrality and density.

Experiential education and professional growth. This theme includes how topics such as experiential learning, hospitality education, and talent management within hospitality education can effectively prepare and manage future talent for the industry. Innovative approaches to hospitality education increasingly prioritize experiential learning as a foundation for effective talent management [51,76]. Findings in this area emphasize the critical need to bridge the divide between theory and practice, ensuring that graduates are fully equipped to meet the demands and complexities of modern hospitality careers. Future research should explore the long-term influence of educational models on talent retention, career development, and adaptability within an industry characterized by rapid change. Furthermore, greater attention should be given to issues of access and equity in experiential learning, fostering a more inclusive approach to professional preparation and lifelong learning in hospitality education.

Ethical consumerism in accommodation services. This theme focuses on how travelers' ethical values influence their accommodation choices and drive the sustainability agenda within the hospitality sector. As guests increasingly consider environmental and social responsibility in their decision-making, their consumption patterns act as a form of influence on hotel practices and sustainable development [29,91]. Ethical consumerism is therefore emerging as a critical force that shapes both business strategies and destination management policies in the accommodation industry [7,73]. Current research investigates how accommodation providers and digital booking platforms communicate their sustainability initiatives, build consumer trust, and foster meaningful engagement with responsible tourism offerings. Future studies may further explore motivators behind ethical purchasing decisions, along with mechanisms to scale responsible service models and strengthen the alignment between guest expectations and sustainability commitments.

Guest satisfaction. Delivering exceptional customer satisfaction remains a central objective for hotels aiming to build loyalty and competitive advantage in a saturated market [40]. Insights into customer satisfaction reveal not only the direct impact on repeat business and positive word-of-mouth, but also the underlying expectations that drive guest evaluations. Key questions arise regarding the role of digital touchpoints, staff training, and evolving guest preferences in shaping satisfaction outcomes. Future research could explore innovative approaches to measuring satisfaction, the integration of real-time feedback systems, and strategies for exceeding guest expectations in an increasingly digital hospitality landscape.

Self-efficacy in hotel system. Self-efficacy, the belief in one's capacity to successfully perform specific tasks, holds significant importance in the hotel industry from both employee and guest perspectives. For employees, particularly Gen Z entrants, self-efficacy is strongly linked to job performance, motivation, and career advancement, shaping their engagement and long-term development within hospitality roles [103]. Strong self-efficacy can inspire young professionals to pursue growth opportunities, adapt to industry challenges, and contribute to service excellence. On the guest side, self-efficacy also shapes how Gen Z travelers interact with emerging hotel technologies. For example, willingness to use innovations like facial recognition services is significantly influenced by the emotions and self-confidence elicited by these technologies [101]. Guests with higher self-efficacy tend to adopt digital solutions more readily, resulting in smoother interactions and enhanced satisfaction levels. This dual perspective raises important questions for future research: How can hotels effectively nurture and strengthen self-efficacy among their Gen Z employees to improve performance and retention? Conversely, what factors most significantly enhance or inhibit self-efficacy among guests as they interact with new hotel technologies?

Cue utilization theory. This theme posits that consumers rely on a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic product cues to evaluate information and make purchasing decisions. This framework is particularly relevant for research on Gen Z and the hotel industry, as it provides insight into how young consumers interpret and respond to various service and branding signals in hospitality contexts [11]. For instance, this theoretical framework helps explain how hotels can attract Gen Z job seekers by strategically presenting workplace cues that align with their values and expectations [104]. Moreover, the theory highlights the ways guests shape perceptions and evaluate hotels based on a spectrum of signals including brand reputation, online reviews, physical attributes, and service interactions [105]. In the era of digital transformation, the theory's relevance is heightened, as information asymmetry and the sheer volume of online cues can complicate consumer decision-making. This raises pivotal questions: which cues most strongly influence guest behavior at various stages of the hotel experience? How can hotels manage and curate these cues to shape favorable expectations? What risks arise from the potential misinterpretation or digital manipulation of cues? Continued research is encouraged to explore how cue utilization impacts guest satisfaction, loyalty, and trust in both traditional and online hospitality contexts. By clarifying which cues matter most to different segments such as Gen Z travelers or employees hotels can refine their strategies for reputation management, service design, and talent acquisition.

Overall, the thematic map demonstrates that research on Gen Z in the hotel and accommodation industry is anchored by robust, central themes related to customer satisfaction, technological innovation, and digital communication, while also highlighting potential opportunities for further exploration in less-developed or emerging thematic areas.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

This review provides an integrated understanding of how Gen Z is transforming the accommodation industry through their roles as consumers and employees. The findings demonstrate that Gen Z's preferences are not peripheral but are reshaping the structure of demand, service delivery, and workforce dynamics. As digital natives, this generation evaluates hospitality experiences through technology-enabled convenience, sustainability alignment, and opportunities for authentic engagement. Yet, despite increasing academic attention, the literature remains fragmented, with limited theoretical integration across technological, behavioral, and managerial domains [7,8,28,99].

The synthesis of studies on Gen Z consumers reveals a distinct redefinition of service expectations in hotels. Amenities that were once considered premium, such as flexible and smart check-in, air conditioning, and wellness access, have become essential service attributes for this cohort. Beyond functional requirements, Gen Z places strong emphasis on experiential value, social connectivity, and ethical consumption [27,34,40,106]. Their decision-making processes are heavily mediated by social media, peer recommendations, and electronic word-of-mouth, underscoring the significance of digital reputation and online visibility in shaping hotel choice [8,29]. However, current research tends to emphasize technology adoption models without sufficient examination of user experience quality, trust formation, and the balance between automation and human interaction [4,17,18,35,107]. The reliance on behavioral-intention frameworks limits the understanding of emotional, cultural, and ethical factors that influence how Gen Z perceives service technologies within hotel environments.

The findings also indicate that sustainability occupies a central but often superficial position in Gen Z–hotel research. Several studies associate Gen Z with strong environmental awareness and positive attitudes toward green hotels [27,66,79]. Nevertheless, evidence of consistent pro-environmental behavior remains inconclusive. The tendency to rely on self-reported measures has contributed to an idealized image of Gen Z as environmentally responsible consumers, while fewer studies critically examine the persistent attitude–behavior gap. This gap suggests that while sustainability enhances brand image and booking intentions, economic and experiential considerations continue to dominate actual decision-making [8,29]. For hotel operators, the challenge is to translate sustainability from a marketing narrative into a tangible, verifiable component of the guest experience.

In parallel, Gen Z's entry into the hospitality workforce introduces new complexities in human-resource management. The reviewed studies show that this generation values flexibility, meaningful work, and leadership transparency. Organizational culture, socialization, and leadership style strongly influence their job satisfaction and retention [10,11,23,108]. Person–environment fit, feedback, and perceived career significance consistently emerge as key predictors of engagement [49]. Authentic and inclusive leadership styles are particularly effective in fostering psychological capital and adaptive performance among young employees [54,55,79]. These findings indicate that the traditional hierarchical management model may not align with the expectations of this workforce, which prioritizes autonomy, social recognition, and continuous learning. Nonetheless, the literature remains limited by a lack of longitudinal evidence linking these factors to long-term retention and performance outcomes.

Moreover, the review highlights the growing importance of corporate social responsibility, particularly in periods of crisis, as a determinant of both customer and employee perceptions of organizational legitimacy. These issues collectively illustrate that Gen Z's influence extends beyond consumption to the ethical and technological repositioning of hospitality systems.

5.2. Conclusions

The hotel industry plays a vital and irreplaceable role within the tourism system, acting as one of the primary foundations that sustain travel, leisure, and business activities across the globe. As a core component of the tourism infrastructure, hotels not only provide accommodation but also create experiences that define the quality and satisfaction of a traveler's journey. Over the past two decades, the expansion and diversification of hotel services have transformed the hospitality landscape, as hotels now serve not only tourists but also local communities seeking leisure, wellness, and cultural engagement. This evolution has intensified global competition and encouraged innovation in service

quality, sustainability, and digital transformation. Within this dynamic context, Gen Z consumers are emerging as influential drivers of change in the tourism system. Their expectations for personalized, technology-integrated, and environmentally responsible hospitality experiences are reshaping how hotels design, operate, and position themselves in the market. Consequently, the hotel industry stands at the intersection of tradition and innovation—remaining a cornerstone of the tourism system while continuously adapting to the evolving preferences of a new generation of global travelers.

By analyzing 131 peer-reviewed studies published between 2011 and 2025, the review reveals that academic attention to Gen Z has increased substantially in recent years, although the field remains relatively young and geographically concentrated. The findings demonstrate that Gen Z's defining characteristics such as digital fluency, sustainability orientation, and authenticity-seeking behavior, are driving transformative changes in hotel consumption patterns, service innovation, and workforce management.

The bibliometric and thematic analyses identified seven dominant research clusters, each addressing different aspects of Gen Z and the accommodation industry such as platform-mediated consumption, responsible tourism intentions, human capital development, sustainability and technology acceptance, AI-enabled service transformation, electronic word-of-mouth, and workforce engagement. Collectively, these clusters demonstrate the multifaceted influence of Gen Z as both consumers and employees, highlighting their pivotal role in redefining service design, marketing communication, and organizational culture within the contemporary hotel ecosystem.

The analysis also revealed that quantitative approaches overwhelmingly dominate the field, accounting for over two-thirds of all studies, with Structural Equation Modeling, particularly PLS-SEM and AMOS-based SEM used extensively to explain behavioral intentions, trust, environmental attitudes, and adaptive performance. In contrast, qualitative and mixed-method designs remain less underrepresented, suggesting that deeper interpretive inquiry is still needed to capture the complexity of Gen Z's values, motivations, and experiences as both guests and employees in hospitality contexts.

The review further demonstrated that existing scholarship is strongly grounded in behavioral and psychological frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Technology Acceptance Model, reflecting an emphasis on technology use and decision-making behavior. However, organizational, social influence, and sustainability theories are less frequently applied, despite their clear relevance to understanding Gen Z's workforce expectations, ethical orientations, and environmental engagement. This theoretical imbalance highlights the need for more integrative approaches that bridge behavioral, technological, and organizational perspectives.

5.3. Theoretical Implications

This systematic analysis contributes to theory development in hospitality and generational research by synthesizing fragmented scholarship on Gen Z's role as both consumers and employees in the hotel industry. First, the study advances generational theory and cohort analysis by clarifying how Gen Z's formative experiences digital immersion, sustainability values, and preference for authenticity translate into distinct patterns of hotel choice, service expectations, and workplace engagement. The clustering of research themes suggests that existing generational models can be refined to account for hybrid influences from earlier cohorts, as well as the accelerating impact of technological and socio-environmental change.

As noted, the systematic review revealed a significant lack of focus on Gen Z within the hospitality literature, with only a limited number of studies published each year over the past two decades. This scarcity highlights a substantial theoretical gap that this study

seeks to address. The present research extends previous bibliometric reviews by moving beyond descriptive trend analysis to provide a comprehensive theoretical synthesis that connects consumer behavior, digital transformation, and workforce dynamics within a unified framework. In doing so, it contributes not only to the emerging body of Gen Z–specific hospitality research but also to the broader theoretical development of tourism and generational studies.

Next, findings on the workforce–technology interface contribute to job characteristics, person–environment fit, and human–robot interaction (HRI) theories by revealing how Gen Z employees navigate AI-driven service transformation, seek meaningful work, and respond to leadership styles. The evidence underscores the need to adapt organizational behavior theories to account for digital fluency, flexible work expectations, and "quiet quitting" tendencies in younger cohorts.

In addition, a key theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating that Gen Z's hotel experience is not adequately explained by traditional behavioral-intention models alone. Their decisions are mediated by complex interactions between technological familiarity, social influence, emotional engagement, and ethical considerations. Hence, the hospitality field would benefit from frameworks that incorporate socio-technical and experiential dimensions, capturing how digital affordances, authenticity, and sustainability converge to form perceived value.

Moreover, the thematic mapping shows that sustainability and ethics are cross-cutting concerns in Gen Z–hotel interactions, suggesting that environmental psychology and moral norm theories can be further developed by embedding crisis contexts (e.g., pandemics) and CSR trust-building into intention models. The strong role of social media as both an informational and symbolic space also implies that signaling theory and elaboration likelihood models should be adapted for high-velocity, peer-driven digital environments.

Finally, the global distribution of research, as illustrated by the mapping, indicates a concentration of studies on Gen Z and hotels in regions such as China, the United States, Australia, and parts of Europe, with notable gaps in Africa, South America, and the Middle East. In this regard, the present study adds theoretical value by consolidating dispersed insights and highlighting where future conceptual and empirical developments are needed. Considering the scope and comprehensiveness of its findings, this review serves as a foundational reference for scholars, students, policymakers, and practitioners seeking structured access to the evolving theoretical dimensions of Gen Z and the hotel industry that remain insufficiently explored.

5.4. Practical Implications

The findings of this study uncover several strategic priorities for hospitality managers aiming to engage Gen Z effectively as both customers and employees. From a service delivery system, hotels must move beyond transactional models toward experience-driven, digitally integrated, and sustainability-oriented offerings. This involves embedding seamless technologies such as mobile check-ins, smart room features, and AI-powered concierge services, while maintaining human touchpoints to preserve emotional connection. Managers should also incorporate visually appealing and multisensory design elements that align with Gen Z's preference for shareable, "Instagrammable" experiences, and complement these with credible eco-certified amenities to meet their willingness to pay for sustainable options.

Given the central role of social proof in Gen Z's decision-making, hospitality firms should adopt always-on digital engagement strategies that leverage authentic user-generated content and targeted influencer collaborations. Online reputation management is critical; therefore, hotels must monitor and respond proactively to reviews, emphasize

credibility, and employ interactive tools such as virtual tours to strengthen booking intentions. At the same time, CSR should transition from a peripheral marketing tool to a core element of brand identity. This requires transparent communication of ethical practices, standardization of sustainability reporting, and integration of CSR into loyalty programs, for instance, by linking rewards to eco-friendly choices.

Managers are also advised to adopt systems analysis, enabling hotels to personalize various aspects of the guest experience such as activities and local attractions, which is particularly important for attracting and retaining Gen Z customers who value unique, tailored, and memorable stays. From an employment standpoint, attracting and retaining Gen Z talent requires offering flexible scheduling, meaningful work, and transparent career pathways supported by mentoring and regular feedback. Training programs should integrate experiential and gamified learning to accelerate skills development and engagement. Leadership styles that are authentic, participative, and values-driven are essential to enhancing psychological capital and reducing turnover intentions among younger employees. Furthermore, as AI and robotics become more prevalent in service delivery, managers should adopt hybrid service models that combine the efficiency of automation with the empathy of human interaction, while ensuring robust privacy and data protection measures to sustain guest trust.

Finally, to remain competitive against peer-to-peer accommodation platforms such as Airbnb, hotels should differentiate through enhanced trust signals, curated local experiences, and service reliability. Exploring hybrid models that combine the flexibility of shared economy offerings with the assurance of hotel-grade standards may further enhance competitiveness. More broadly, sustainability should be positioned as a defining element of brand identity rather than an optional add-on. By designing "green by default" options and co-creating environmental initiatives with both guests and employees, hotels can transform sustainability into a source of shared value and long-term competitive advantage.

5.5. Limitations

Consistent with other scholarly investigations, this study has certain limitations. First, although the review procedures and article selection criteria were developed from an extensive understanding of the research domain, the keywords employed may not have fully captured all relevant studies, potentially leading to the omission of some important publications. Second, the scope of the review was limited to full-length research articles indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The inclusion of additional databases could provide alternative perspectives and broaden the analytical depth of the findings. Third, this review considered only peer-reviewed journal articles. Extending future research to encompass books, book chapters, and grey literature, as well as conducting comparative analyses between academic and industry-based sources, could yield a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's interactions with the accommodation industry and contribute to a more holistic development of Gen Z-focused hospitality scholarship.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/systems13110989/s1. The sample for the bibliometric and content analysis was selected in accordance with the principles recommended for Systematic Literature Reviews—PRISMA [63].

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

eWOM	electronic word-of-mouth
Generation Z	Gen Z
Theory of Planned Behavior	TBP
Corporate Social Responsibility	CRS

Appendix A. Grouped Theories & Frequencies

1. Technology Adoption & Acceptance Theories

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)—7
Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)—4
Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2)—1
Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT)—2
Artificially Intelligent Device Use Acceptance (AIDUA) Framework—2
Technology Acceptance Models (TAM/etc.)—1
Technology-Adoption Determinants—1
Service Quality–Driven Technology Adoption Lens—1
Trust-Based Acceptance Framework—1
Technology Expectations–Satisfaction Framework—1
Virtual Tourism Adoption/Complementarity—1

2. Behavioral & Psychological Theories

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)—14
Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)—1
Protection Motivation Theory (PMT)—2
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)—1
Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotion—2
Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT)—1
Expectation-Confirmation Theory—1
Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)—1
Self-Efficacy Theory—1
Positive Psychology (PP)—1
Psychological Capital Mediation—1
Resilience-Building Online Information Practices Lens—1
Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)—2

3. Social & Influence Theories

Social Exchange Theory (SET)—4
Social Capital Theory—1
Social Information Processing Theory—1
Social Support Theory—1
Social Influence Theory (SIT)—1
Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)—2
Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF)—1
Norm Activation Model (NAM)—1
Injunctive Social Norms—1
Norm of Reciprocity (NoR)—1

4. Consumer Behavior & Marketing Theories

Stimuli-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory—1
Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) Hierarchy—1
Experiential Marketing Lens (Schmitt: Sense–Feel–Think–Act–Relate)—1
Consumer Style Inventory (CSI)—1
Cue Utilization Theory—1
Means–End Chain Theory (MEC)—1
Signaling Theory—1
Brand Coolness Framework—1
Consumer Socialization Theory (CST)—1
Influencer Marketing/Social Media Influencer Lens—1
Social Media Marketing Activities Framework (SMMAs)—1

5. Sustainability & Environmental Theories

Multi-Dimensional Green Perceived Value—2
Sustainable Consumption Theory—1
Values–Responsibility–Concern Pathway (VBN-inspired)—1
Environmental Concern (EC)—1
Climate Change Awareness (CCA)—1
Sharing Economy & Sustainability Lens—1

6. Organizational & Job-Related Theories

Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM)—2
Job Characteristics Model (JCM)—1
Job Embeddedness Theory (JET)—1
Job Demands–Resources Model (JD-R)—1
Workaholism–Burnout–Turnover Framework—1
Explanatory Quiet-Quitting Model—1
Employer Branding—1
Employer Attractiveness Framework—1
Career Choice/Work Values Lens—1
TQM–Talent Management Model—1
Talent-Management Perspective—1
Componential Model of Creativity—1
Theory of Constraints—1
Transformational Leadership (TL)—1
Authentic Leadership (AuthL)—1
Servant Leadership (ServL)—1

7. Decision-Making & Crisis Theories

Crisis Decision Theory (CDT)—2
Privacy Calculus Theory—1
Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE)—1
Attribution Theory (AT)—1

8. Cultural & Generational Theories

Generational Cohort Theory (GCT)—4
Generational Theory—1
Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions—1
Chinese Cultural Values (CCVs) Normative Model—1
Intercultural Competence (IC)—1

9. Other Theories

Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET)—1
Not Explicitly Stated—17

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