

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Kwazulu-Natal Generation Z Attitude towards Domestic Tourism

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on KwaZulu-Natal generation z attitude toward domestic tourism. Generation Z represents much of the consumer groups at present and is considered a very important cohort because it prioritizes experience over possession, which increases their motivation to travel. The study investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members' attitudes towards domestic tourism in South Africa, while focusing on the effect of the pandemic, the study examines whether there are differences in their attitude toward domestic tourism before and during the pandemic. Data was collected online from November to December 2021 using a structured questionnaire survey sampling 200 respondents. Through the theoretical lens of planned behaviour, this study explored the relationship between attitude, perceived behaviour control, subjective norms and risk factors that influences the travel choices of Generation Z members during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings reveal that despite the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members, they portray a positive attitude towards domestic tourism. The results also show that Generation Z members appreciate and acknowledge the positive quality of life (QOL) they get from participating in tourism activities especially within their domestic space. However, because of the peculiarities of the pandemic and the need to ensure safety, respondents prefer individual trips to group trips, and individual accommodation to group accommodations. This research contributes to scholarship that examine how COVID-19 pandemic influenced travel behaviours and deepened the uncertainty associated with domestic tourism across various regions of the globe.

Keywords: Generation Z; COVID-19 pandemic; domestic tourism; KwaZulu-Natal; South Africa

Introduction

A global pandemic status for the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 (Jebri, 2020). Global pandemic status implied that the disease is widespread and everyone within the globe was prone to infection (Wachyuni and Kusumaningrum, 2020). Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus [WHO Director General] noted during a media briefing on 11 March 2020 that, “*this is not just a public health crisis; it is a crisis that will touch every sector – so every sector and every individual must be involved in the fight*”. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many industries, with the world tourism industry topping the list of mostly hit businesses (Zhu and Deng, 2020). The pandemic has influenced travelling behaviour all over the world immensely. United Nations World Tourism Organization UNWTO (2020) describes the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the most contagious outbreaks in recent human history, this pandemic has created significant health challenges worldwide. Robbins (2005) notes that the South African economy relied heavily on international tourism arrivals, but with the advent of COVID-19 this industry suffered immense economic loss.

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According to recent Statistics South Africa report, total foreign arrivals to South Africa declined by 71% to an estimated 5 million arrivals in 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Although domestic and international tourism was adversely affected by suspensions on non-essential travel (Lockdown), the easing of local travel restrictions encouraged domestic tourism, while international travel remained severely restricted (SATSA, 2020). Aina and Ezeuduji, (2021) state that domestic tourism contributes greatly to the growth and development of the tourism industry in South Africa. Domestic tourism constitutes a large and growing proportion of the tourism industry in most developing countries at approximately 80% (Mazimhaka, 2007). There are nine provinces in South Africa namely: The Eastern Cape, the Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape, Northwest and the Western Cape. The South African Tourism annual report, (2017) states that the three most visited domestic tourism provinces were Limpopo (24% of all trips), Gauteng (17%), and KwaZulu-Natal (16%); while South Africa's least-visited provinces were the Free State (5% of all domestic trips) and the Northern Cape (2%). This study is situated in KwaZulu-Natal, one of the most visited tourist destinations in South Africa. The province is gifted with rich cultural and natural heritage, where tourists can experience both traditional and modern ways of life, including the big five - a marine paradise, the Indian Ocean, history, culture, iSimangaliso Wetland Park, Phezulu Safari Park, the battlefields of the Anglo-Zulu War, and the Drakensberg mountains (Domestic Tourism Survey, 2017; Economic Development and Growth in eThekweni, 2014; Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2013).

Numerous studies have examined the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism and hospitality industry but there is a paucity of literature on those examining the effect of COVID-19 and related safety concerns on domestic tourism, especially how it has impacted members of the Generation Z cohort. This study explores the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members' attitudes towards domestic tourism in South Africa. The result sheds light on how domestic tourism can be reinforced and how the industry can better cater to their needs (Generation Z).

Theory of Planned Behavior as a Framework

The theory of planned behaviour is adopted as a framework to understand the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Generation Z tourism behaviours. Ajzen (1991), argued that the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), establishes a model that describe the intricacies of human social behaviour; is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1977). The theory of reasoned action is often used by researchers to understand and predict human behaviour; for example, during times of uncertainty like a pandemic (Paul, Modi and Patel, 2016; McEachan, Taylor, Harrison, Lawton, Gardner and Conner, 2016). Taking into context the complexity of human behaviour, TRA specifically considers both social (subjective norms) and psychological (attitudes) factors in the tourist decision-making process. Subjective norms focus on the environment of an individual, social networks, cultural norms, group beliefs and other social factors that influences decisions; while psychological factor accounts for the tourist's attitude towards a particular behaviour (Pannilage, 2016). Choirisa and Rizkalla (2021) defined attitude as the evaluation of behaviour that is positive or negative.

TPB has been adopted by various researchers working in the hospitality and tourism industry (Pannilage, 2016). Particularly, scholars use TPB to study people's behaviours and behavioural intentions in the face of natural disasters and crises, for example, preparation for natural disasters such as earthquakes (Ong *et al.*, 2021). After the outbreak of COVID-19, TPB has also been applied to study the impact of public opinion on the acceptance of social distancing as a public health safety measure (Qazi *et al.*, 2020), the impact of COVID-19 on overseas tourists' behaviours (Han *et al.*, 2020), people's willingness to visit national parks (Seong and Hong, 2021), and the impact of social media reports of COVID-19 on people's willingness to travel (Adiyoso and Wilopo, 2021). The current study checks the application of TPB in the context of the travelling intention of travellers during the period of Coronavirus.

It is adopted to critically explore how social norm and prevailing attitudes within a context as a result of uncertainty (in this case the COVID-19 pandemic) influence and alters the dynamics of Generation Z travelling behaviours. This theoretical lens became crucial for the framing of questions and research design adopted in this study. The objective is to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced domestic tourism in KwaZulu-Natal by altering the prevailing norms and attitudes of what is considered a desired quality of life for members of the Generation Z age cohort.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Generation Z Quality of Life

The earliest definition of Quality of life [QOL] is by Cutter, 1985. He notes that an individual's happiness or satisfaction with life and environment includes needs, desires, aspirations, lifestyle preferences, and other tangible and intangible factors that determine overall well-being. Barreto Torres, Asmus, and da Cal Seixas (2019) reviewed the definition of QOL as a condition that originates from human well-being and, as a tool that allows the extent to which human potentialities can be used and assessed at their fullest, bearing in mind the environmental conditions in which individuals or groups find themselves and the opportunities provided. The widespread of the COVID-19 virus led to a global healthcare crisis, a financial crisis followed by an economic recession (Fotiadis, Polyzos and Huan, 2021). Countries across the world were placed lock down and so was the tourism industry. The tourism and hospitality sector was hit hardest and it shut down almost completely because, it created an enabling environment for the virus to spread faster, turning an epidemic into a pandemic quickly.

Perčić, and Spasić (2021) posit that the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting recession will have a long-lasting impact on younger generations (Generation Z). With no exception to South Africa, studies estimated that between 2.2 and 2.8 million people in the country lost their jobs from February to April 2020, following the lockdown and the wide scale of suspension of economic activity (StatsSA, 2020). The loss of jobs harmed young adults' access to economic resources and are most likely to fall into poverty, as they have fewer savings to rely on (Casale and Posel, 2021d; OECD, 2020). As shown by previous economic shocks, people who graduated from higher institutions or colleges during the lockdown period were most likely to find it more difficult to get decent jobs and income, leading to delays in their path to financial independence (OECD, 2020). Also, the costs of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown are not just limited to physical health but also include an individual's mental or psychological health as well as economic wellbeing (Oyenubi and Kollamparambil, 2020; Vindegaard and Benros, 2020; Xiong Lipsitz, Lui *et al.* 2020).

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design. Quantitative research according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) can be classified as both descriptive and experimental research. The essence of descriptive research is to become familiar with the phenomena, gain innovative insight, and formulate a more specific research problem or hypothesis. This study aims to delve into the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members' attitudes towards domestic tourism in South Africa. This makes the quantitative research approach appropriate for this study, as the nature of the research requires descriptive attributes and examines attitudinal trends. Research that investigates perceptions and analyses trends and patterns often leans toward a positivistic epistemology.

Data was collected using online questionnaires developed by the Qualtrics survey tool and through WhatsApp broadcast messages. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data for this study were collected between November to December 2021. Researchers set the sample in this study to a minimum of 300 respondents, Veal (2011) notes that the criteria for sample size selection should without a doubt be determined based on the level of precision in the results, the level of detail in the proposed analysis, and the available budget. Study variables emanated from the literature reviewed and researchers'

knowledge. Questionnaire variables are mostly made up of attitude statements set on a Likert scale (scaling agreement or disagreement, using a standard set of responses, which were quantified using coding). Babbie (2010) adds that a Likert-type scale questionnaire is regarded as reliable because it is structured and elicits the same response from respondents. The target population of this study was the Older Generation Z respondents (above 18 years of age) residing in KwaZulu-Natal were targeted and included.

Data collected were analysed using IBM’s Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 25. Descriptive (frequency distribution) analysis was used to explore the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members’ attitudes towards domestic tourism. In total 220 responses were received, and 20 cases were excluded due to missing values. The final sample of 200 valid and useable responses was considered for the study. According to Humphries and Truman (2017), for research to be ethical, it must be informed by moral principles which avoid harming others. All the participants were informed of the study's purpose, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Furthermore, sensitive, and confidential questions were not asked. All the information gathered was kept confidential and used for research purposes only. Data collected show that KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members portray a positive attitude towards domestic tourism despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings

This section begins with the presentation of respondents’ biographical information, followed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z domestic tourism choices in pandemic times.

Table 1: Respondents biographic profile (N = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Female	58
	Male	42
Where do you reside?	Durban	50.2
	Pietermaritzburg	10.4
	Richards Bay	25.8
	St. Lucia	13.6
Age group	15 – 18	13.5
	19 – 21	27
	22 – 26	39.5
Highest level of Education	No western education	0.0
	Primary education	10
	Secondary education	38.4
	Tertiary education (university, college)	51.6
Employment Status	Studying	63
	Employed or getting funding	22
	Unemployed	15
Since the COVID-19 pandemic have you visited anywhere in South Africa, outside your usual environment, as a tourist or visiting friends and relatives?	No	18.6
	Yes	81.4
If no, why?	I am not interested	15.4
	I fear getting infected with the virus	49.8
	I have limited funds	18.5
	I do not have the time	16.3

Respondents consist of 58% of females and 42% males. 22% of the respondents are employed, 15% are unemployed and 63% are students, the large student population that formed a majority in the sample size is quite consistent with the age category examined in this study. This study

conceptualised Generation Z as individuals born between 1995 – 2012 and as of 2022, these are people in the age bracket of 10 and 27.

Importance of tourism activities

Respondents’ perceptions were accessed on the importance of various tourism activities. Scaling their responses on a scale of very important to not at all important, the study analysed their perception of beach tourism, nature tourism, historical and cultural tourism, attending conferences or meetings as a type of tourism, shopping tourism, rural tourism, and urban tourism.

Table 2: Respondents’ responses to ‘importance of tourism types in South Africa’

Importance of tourism types in South Africa	Very Important	Quite Important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all important
Sun-Sea-Sand (Beach) tourism	46.9	34.1	13.8	4.9	0.3
Nature tourism	67.3	22.1	9.4	1.3	0.0
Historical and cultural tourism	59.2	26.1	11.6	2.4	0.8
Meetings, incentives, conventions/conferences, and Events	38.1	26.4	24.3	7.3	3.9
Shopping	44.4	22.1	19.7	11.2	2.6
Rural tourism	40.3	28.8	18.7	8.3	3.9
Urban tourism	44.1	30.2	16.0	4.5	5.2

Table 2 shows that 89.4% of the respondents noted that visiting nature tourism location is very important to them, 85.3% think visiting historical and cultural sites is very important, 81% will prefer to visit the beach, 74.3% finds urban tourism very important, 69.1% preferred rural tourism, 66.5% consider shopping as very important tourism, and 64.5% believe conference tourism is very important. This is quite an interesting result showing that Generation Z members in KwaZulu-Natal attach more importance to nature, history, and culture than the beach, urban, rural and shopping tourism. This can be linked to the fact that the majority of respondents said they had not visited anywhere in South Africa, outside their usual environment, as a tourist or visiting friends and relatives since the COVID-19 pandemic for the fear of getting infected with the virus.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on domestic tourism choices of KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z

In investigating how COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the domestic tourism decisions of KZN Generation Z members, this study examined respondents’ travel opportunities, financial implications, and safety concerns within pandemic times. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to a set of variables in the questionnaire, used to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z attitude towards domestic tourism (Table 3). These variables were grouped into four dimensions, namely: ‘impact’, ‘finance’, change of travel behaviour’ and ‘safety concerns. The reliability statistics generated proved that variables in these dimensions have enough internal consistency to measure these dimensions (Cronbach’s Alpha higher than 0.7, according to George and Mallery, 2003).

Table 3: Respondents’ level of agreement (%) towards domestic tourism

Impact of Travel on Quality of Life (QOL)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
As a result of the absence of travel opportunities and the shutdown of accommodation facilities and restaurants, I have become even	40.2	44.4	14.4	1.0	0.0

more aware of the positive effect of travel on my quality of life.					
I have realized even more that, involving in tourism activities within and outside South Africa is extremely important for my personal happiness and greatly improves the quality of my life.	59.3	30.1	6.2	3.9	0.5
<i>Reliability Statistics (Impact of Travel on Quality of Life (QOL)), Cronbach's Alpha= .758, N of items = 2 Valid cases = 196(97.7%), Excluded cases =4 (2.3%), Total =200</i>					
Financial resource as a determinant of participation in domestic tourism activities during the COVID-19 pandemic	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have an available financial resource (money) to travel to places in South Africa	7.3	9.2	29.8	35.1	18.6
I have sponsors (for example, parents and relatives) to provide me with financial resources to travel and know South Africa.	6.5	21.0	23.4	29.9	19.2
I know cheaper or more affordable ways of travelling within South Africa.	10.1	27.0	27.0	21.8	14.0
<i>Reliability Statistics (Financial Resource), Cronbach's Alpha= .712, N of items = 3, Valid cases = 193(96.9%), Excluded cases = 7 (3.1%), Total = 200</i>					
Change in Travel Behavior	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I do not think I will change my travel habits in the next five years. I would travel the same way as before the pandemic	48.3	28.8	14.5	5.5	2.3
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I would prefer individual trips to group trips.	30.4	32.2	22.9	8.6	5.5
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I would prefer individual accommodation to group accommodation	34.5	29.6	26.2	6.8	2.6
<i>Reliability Statistics (Change of Travel Behavior), Cronbach's Alpha= .742, N of items = 3, Valid cases =196(98.7%), Excluded cases =5 (1.3%), Total = 200</i>					
Safety Concerns	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am careful about the selection of destinations and tourism sites to visit	36.9	32.7	22.3	6.7	1.4
After the COVID-19 pandemic, I will avoid countries that had a high number of infected people	8.4	13.5	35.2	28.0	13.9
When selecting accommodations, I prefer facilities where I can expect all hygienic measures are respected.	61.9	33.4	3.4	0.2	0.1
<i>Reliability Statistics (Safety Concerns), Cronbach's Alpha= .762, N of items = 3 Valid cases =197(97.9%), Excluded cases =3 (2.1%), Total = 200</i>					

Respondents were more positive than negative about being aware of the positive effect of travel on their quality of life, as about 85% of the Generation Z respondents strongly agree or agree with this statement. Also, about 89% strongly agree or agree with realizing that involving in tourism activities within and outside South Africa is extremely important for their happiness and greatly

improves the quality of their life. Financial resources and unemployment have become a constraint for KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members from getting involved in domestic tourism activities. More than half of the study respondents (53.7%) strongly agree or agree that strained economic opportunity resulting in limited cash circulation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the way people travel. Also, COVID-19 has impacted travel behaviour, for example, 62.6% of respondents now prefer individual trips to group trips, this could be related to the safety measures of social distancing and reduced group interactions popularised to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This also impacted the choice of preferred accommodation. 95% of respondents noted that will take an individual accommodation because of hygiene and safety concerns.

Discussion

Quality of life can be said to be a condition that originates from human well-being and as a tool that allows the extent to which human potentialities can be used and assessed at their fullest, bearing in mind the environmental conditions in which individuals or groups find themselves and the opportunities provided (Barreto Torres, Asmus and da Cal Seixas, 2019). Based on the results from the study, members of Generation Z in KwaZulu-Natal are aware of the positive effect of travel on their quality of life and conclude that involving in tourism activities within and outside South Africa is extremely important for their happiness, and it greatly improves the quality of their life. Similarly, data collected by Rončák, Scholz, and Linderová, (2021) in the Czech Republic from Generation Z members at two periods of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak - first sample was collected after the lifting of restrictions at the first wave, while the second sample was collected one year later, after the lifting of the restrictions at the end of the third wave - shows the same result, as this study.

Financial resources were seen as one of the determinant factors of participation in domestic tourism activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of financial resources and unemployment has become a constraint for KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members from getting involved in domestic tourism activities. Dorsey (2018) notes that Generation Z was given the aftershocks of recession as they were coming of age, forcing their parents who were right in the middle of the recession to always caution them [Generation Z] about their spending, which resulted in a generation conservative about spending. Du and Ellen (2019) reiterate Dorsey's findings and further state that Generation Z experienced a suffocated childhood having grown up during the Great Recession which shaped their childhood. The result of this study is in line with previous research carried out in South Africa such as (Aina and Ezeuduji, 2021; Dzikiti and Leonard, 2016; Butler and Richardson, 2013). The widespread of the COVID-19 virus did not only lead to, a global healthcare crisis but also a financial crisis followed by an economic recession (Fotiadis, Polyzos and Huan, 2021). Reports from OECD, 2020 show that the loss of jobs harmed young adults' access to economic resources. Donaldson and Gatsinzi (2005) emphasize that financial restrictions are one of the greatest challenges that Generation Z faces when deciding to travel or get involved with tourism activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone across the planet. Most people have adapted their lives to the pandemic and live their lives according to the new normal. A study carried out in Indonesia by Wachyuni and Kusumaningrum, (2020) shows that although Generation Z members claimed to have a positive attitude towards outgoing tourism, their travel intentions changed due to the pandemic, majority of the respondents agreed that travelling after the pandemic corona ended was frightening. However, the result shows that KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members' travel behaviour changed post-pandemic with a change to individual trips and individual accommodation rather than travelling in groups. This supports Barnes's (2018) argument that Generation Z prefers experiences rather than possessions, which increases their propensity to travel.

Despite the health and safety concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic, KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members strongly disagree with the notion of avoiding destination countries that had a high number of infected people. The result of this study is therefore dissimilar to studies conducted by Ivanova, Ivanov *et al.* (2020) in Bulgaria, where respondents indicated Bulgaria as their first-choice destination for travel, rather than any destination abroad. The spread of COVID-19 pandemic has had great psychological, sociological, and financial impacts on a lot of people. Participants note that they will use accommodation facilities where all hygienic measures are respected. The increased significance of safety and hygiene is also noted in other research papers as well such as (Rahman, Gazi, Bhuiyan, *et al.*, 2021; Wachyuni and Kusumaningrum, 2020). When visiting well-known locations, tourists seek all-inclusive vacation packages, security, and safety. They want to stay away from tourist hotspots that are risky and congested, and they may decide not to visit the location of their destination preferences diminished well-being after the outbreak. It can be stated that Generation Z intends to participate in domestic tourism activities despite concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions

In conclusion, results show KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z is eager to travel and has a positive attitude toward domestic tourism despite the ongoing pandemic and will not change their travel habits. They plan to travel the same way they did before, despite growing anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be noted that there is optimism toward domestic tourism and tourism at large to recover quickly. Also, the study shows that Generation Z members appreciate and acknowledge the positive quality of life (QOL) they get from participating in tourism activities. It can be noted that KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members disagree with the idea of avoiding countries that had a high number of COVID-19 virus-infected people. KwaZulu-Natal Generation Z members intend to have fun, but there is an urgent need that all health and safety rules at destinations to be observed. Therefore, necessary health and safety measures should be made compulsory at destination sites. This research recommends that Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (the Destination Marketing Organisation) and other tourism offices and businesses in KwaZulu-Natal continue to elaborate on the social and psychological benefits of involvement in domestic tourism to attract provincial and local tourists to the community. Also, people should explore the current post-covid pandemic scene cautiously and sympathetically. This study surveyed with the online platform; self-administrative questionnaires, and participants could be biased. Therefore, future studies should aim to use other measures like in-depth interviews and focus groups to gather data. Also, the study has a relatively low sample size, and large-scale studies (larger geographical scope) involving much higher sample sizes can use higher level and more accurate statistical analyses which are more designed for statistical predictions and structural relationships, such as regression analyses and structural equation modelling. In doing so, more conclusive results will be obtained.

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