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Determinants of sustainable local food preferences of Generation Z tourists

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ABSTRACT

The study provides a perspective on sustainability through the lens of Generation Z, which is one of the most crucial issues in terms of the efficient use of limited resources. Specifically, our study focuses on identifying the underlying factors behind Generation Z's sustainable local food preferences. Data were collected from Türkiye between November and December 2023 using web-based surveys with a convenience sampling method. The "Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling" approach was employed for data analysis. Research findings revealed that Generation Z tourists exhibit strong intentions regarding environmental concerns (EC), the social and environmental sustainability of local food (LFSES), green consumption value (GCV), and local food attitude (LFA). Additionally, Generation Z's preferences for local food were significantly and positively predicted by LFSES, GCV, and LFA. The results are believed to contribute to the existing theoretical knowledge on Generation Z's sustainable food consumption.

1. Introduction

Consumers, as the driving force behind agricultural production, exert a significant impact on the environment through their food preferences (Duchin, 2005). Indeed, factors such as the industrialization of agriculture and rapidly evolving consumption patterns have accelerated the consumption of natural environmental resources (Bacon & Krpan, 2018). Therefore, widespread adoption of sustainable consumption preferences is necessary to preserve rapidly depleting natural resources for future generations. At this point, local foods can play a notable role in the development of sustainable food consumption. The connection between local foods and sustainable tourism is strong (Sims, 2009) supporting sustainability for destinations from social, environmental, and economic perspectives (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). The production and consumption of local foods can reduce the negative environmental impacts of distribution distance, fuel consumption, production, and commercialization. Additionally, it can contribute positively to the economic sustainability of local producers, thereby supporting local employment (Stein & Santini, 2022).

Consumers' preferences, expectations, or requirements may vary according to their ages (Pricope Vancia et al., 2023). This is pertinent within the tourism industry and is important for understanding the orientation of tourists' behavior and preferences (Gardiner et al., 2014). Understanding the behavior and consumption preferences of Generation Z, who are expected to be the most influential tourists in the future due to generational changes, is considered valuable. In 2020, the European Travel Commission (ETC) introduced Generation Z as a segment that plans international travel, allocates a significant portion of their money to travel, and has a high inclination for taking holidays. Indeed, a large part of Generation Z (72%), compared to other generations (68% for Generation Y, 60% for Generation X, and 51% for the Boomer generation), plans to spend more money on getaway trips (TravelPerk, 2023).

The intentions and behaviors of Generation Z, an important tourist segment for the tourism industry, have been examined in various contexts (Genç et al., 2023; Genç, 2021; Morrone et al., 2023; Nowacki et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2023; Sujood et al., 2023). However, it can be said that empiricial studies on the food consumption and preferences of Generation Z tourists are limited. For example Kamenidou et al. (2019) focused on the sustainability of university students' food consumption behaviors. Conti et al. (2018) investigated the meal preferences of university students for traditional and potential future foods. Sharma et al. (2023) examined Generation Z's behaviors to avoid food waste, while Orea-Giner and Fusté-Forné (2023) qualitatively explored Generation Z's perspectives on sustainable consumption in

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their food tourism experiences. From this point, some research gaps can be identified. Firstly, in the literature, there is no consensus on the sustainability, environmental attitudes, and behaviors of Generation Z. While some researchers indicate that Generation Z exhibits environmentally sensitive and responsible behaviors (Etezady et al., 2021) others state that they are less involved in sustainability initiatives (Kamenidou et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be stated that the behaviors of Generation Z are context-specific. Hence, effective behavioral interventions aiming to trigger environmentally more sustainable behaviors among young tourists cannot be developed without a clear understanding of Generation Z's attitudes and preferences towards food sustainability. Secondly, the sustainable food preferences of Generation Z from the perspective of local food have not been empirically addressed before. Thirdly, the local food consumption preference of Generation Z is considered within an original hypothetical model encompassing environmental concerns, attitudes, and the sustainability perception of local food. Lastly, this study is conducted in a sample area, Turkey, where food waste is high (93 kg per capita annually), making it one of the most significant adversaries of food sustainability (UNEP, 2021).

2. Theoretical Background

The study has been approached within the framework of the Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) theory. This theory was developed by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) to investigate information processing in the field of advertising. According to the theory, consumers' perceptions of advertising outcomes are significantly influenced by their motivation to process information, opportunities, and abilities (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989; Zhu, 2016). According to the mentioned theory, a consumer is inclined to exhibit a certain behavior when they perceive that the behavior will support their own goals and are informed about the consequences of the behavior (motivation). Additionally, the likelihood of performing the behavior (opportunity) and having the necessary skills to engage in the behavior (ability) further increases the tendency to display that behavior (van Geffen et al., 2020). The theory is not limited to the field of advertising information processing but has also been applied in various contexts such as consumer experiences (Wiggins, 2004) and pro-environmental behaviors (Grunert et al., 2014). Widely adopted in the field of tourism (Sharma et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2020) the theory has been employed to investigate consumers' sustainable behaviors, particularly within the domains of eco-tourism, organic food, and energy conservation (Soma et al., 2021).

In this study, we aim to understand the local food preferences of Generation Z tourists using the MOA theory. The first component of the MOA model, motivation, serves as an internal driving force defining the direction, desire, and intention of an individual's behavior (Jepson et al., 2014). In this study, motivation is defined as a stimulus that leads Generation Z towards green consumption and local food preference. From a sustainability perspective, motivation reflects the responsibility to consider the well-being of future generations (van Geffen et al., 2020). Local foods are products with a higher likelihood of being consumed by consumers interested in social and ecological justice (Wenzig & Gruchmann, 2018). It is suggested that tourists' concerns about environmental sustainability also influence their motivation to experience local foods (Kline et al., 2015). In addition, individuals' value perceptions of resource conservation and sustainable consumption are shaped by their motivation to protect the environment (Halder et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021). Additionally, environmentally friendly attitudes are expressed as behaviors that promote sustainable natural resource use, where tourists prefer travel modes and products that do not harm the ecosystem (Wu et al., 2020). In short, if an individual has environmental concerns and values local foods, their motivation to engage in this behavior may be high.

Opportunity, the second component of the MOA model, represents factors that facilitate or hinder an individual's behavior. Perceptions, when interacting with situational and contextual factors, can influence the likelihood of a positive behavioral outcome (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020). Conner et al. (2010) express that interest in local foods comes from the ability to enhance the sustainability of the food system. In this context, our study considers attitudes towards local food as an opportunity to engage in the behavior of choosing local food. Ability, the final component of the MOA model, is considered as a cognitive capability that shapes many interconnected aspects such as financial competence, knowledge, experience, and accessibility (Sääksjärvi & Samiee, 2011). In this case, the social and environmental sustainability perceptions of Generation Z regarding local food represent their knowledge and competence regarding choosing local food.

3. Literature review

Generation Z

The Generation Z constitutes a demographic group encompassing individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (Su et al., 2019). Generation Z, characterized by being well-educated, technologically savvy, and innovative, is considered the most impatient, hasty, and materialistic generation to date (Agarwal, 2018). From the perspective of the tourism industry, considering that Generation Z individuals will constitute the largest driving force in the coming years, the significance of these young adults further increases. In the near future, this generation, which will assume leadership roles in various sectors, will be the financiers and decision-makers in the tourism and travel industry (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). Therefore, their perceptions regarding sustainability are of utmost importance. However, conflicting research results are

observed in studies on this topic. For instance, there is considerable evidence that Generation Z is incorporating sustainability into their activities (Barbe & Neuburger, 2021). Studies conducted in countries such as the England, USA, China and Germany indicate that the majority of Generation Z (69%) acts environmentally and socially consciously during their travels (Globetrender, 2021). However, studies conducted in countries like France, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey state that the behaviors of Generation Z are not in harmony with sustainability (Görpe & Öksüz, 2022). The environmental stance of Generation Z is still debatable (Pinho & Gomes, 2023). Many researchers argue that there is no relationship between age and environmentally friendly behavior (Gray et al., 2019; Sargisson et al., 2020). Additionally, some researchers suggest that environmental concerns are higher in older generations compared to younger generations (Parzonko et al., 2021).

Similarly, there are conflicting research results regarding the sustainable food consumption of Generation Z. For instance, a study conducted in Italy highlighted that sustainable food-labeled products are not significantly taken into consideration by Generation Z (Annunziata et al., 2019). On the other hand, Kamenidou et al. (2019) state that the sustainable food consumption behaviors of Generation Z are shaped by purchasing local food and consuming seasonal fruits and vegetables. In summary, it can be said that the sustainability and environmental concerns of Generation Z vary not only by topic and context but also by geographical location. Therefore, our study provides new insights into the sustainable local food consumption preferences of Generation Z from a local food perspective in a sample area where food waste is high (Türkiye).

Environmental Concern

Widely debated as a determinant of environmentally friendly consumption, environmental concern signifies an individual's general sensitivity towards the environment (Schlossberg, 1992). As an individual's attitudes towards environmental issues increase, their likelihood of exhibiting environmentally friendly behaviors is higher. Indeed, individuals who show more interest in the environment are known to be willing to change their behaviors and consume substitute green products (Hansla et al., 2008). Furthermore, Aprile et al. (2016) state that environmental concern is a significant factor in explaining consumers' positive attitudes towards local foods. Individuals with high levels of concern and knowledge about the environment tend to exhibit a positive attitude towards businesses offering local foods based on their concerns and knowledge, showing a tendency to prefer these businesses (Shin et al., 2017). According to Su et al. (2019), the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers is shaped by environmental actions.

Consumers prefer to consume locally produced products and adopt sustainable behaviors due to both personal reasons and their perceptions of sustainability (Cappelli et al., 2022). The consumption of local foods by consumers is seen as a preference for reasons such as their healthiness, consideration of animal welfare, and sensory appeal (Meas et al., 2015). In this context, Kline et al. (2015) state that consumers' sustainability concerns motivate them to experience local food. Additionally, they express that consumers' environmental and social sustainability motivations also shape their consumption preferences.

Based on the above information, the following hypotheses were developed.

H1: *Environmental concern influences the social and environmental sustainability perception of local food.*

H2: *Environmental concern influences the attitude towards local food.*

H3: *Environmental concern influences green consumption value.*

Social And Environmental Sustainability of Local Food (LFSES)

This study addresses the sustainability of local food within the framework of social and environmental sustainability, considering tourists' values for environmental conservation (Testa et al., 2019). Local foods not only create significant destination appeal but also offer social and cultural sustainable opportunities for destinations (Sims, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019). It is believed that local foods reduce adverse environmental impacts, benefit consumers, and support the development of local economies (Rebbeck, 2012). Moreover, individuals who prioritize social and ecological justice are more likely to consume local foods (Wenzig & Gruchmann, 2018). Indeed, Ahmed et al. (2021) express that with the increasing awareness and responsibility for the environment, individuals show great interest in purchasing local food to protect the environment. Consuming local and sustainable products positively contributes to preserving food systems and enhancing environmental sustainability (Aksakallı Bayraktar et al., 2023).

The "localness" of foods represents environmental sustainability for consumers (Autio et al., 2013) and is believed to contribute to the community's sustainability by supporting local businesses (Yang & Leung, 2020). For example, regarding environmental sustainability, Hashem et al. (2018) emphasize that local foods are more environmentally sensitive. Alsetoohy et al. (2021) argue that purchasing local food products is a significant sustainable practice. In addition, individuals' consumption of local food demonstrates their commitment to sustainable consumption habits and efforts (Scalvedi & Saba, 2018). Based on this information, the following hypotheses have been developed.

H4: *LFSES affects the attitude towards local food.*

H5: *LFSES influences the preference for local food.*

Green Consumption Value

Green consumption value is defined as the effort consumers put forth for environmental activities and the preservation of nature (Haws et al., 2014). This study defines this value as the tendency of consumers to integrate their environmental conservation awareness with purchasing and consumption habits (Bailey et al., 2016). With natural resources and the environment rapidly deteriorating, consumers are adopting a more environmentally conscious and sustainable approach, thus altering their consumption values towards more sustainable directions (Halder et al., 2020). In this context, local foods provide consumers with more sustainable consumption opportunities. For example Hashem et al. (2018) indicate that local foods support environmental sustainability. It is also known that green consumption value strongly influences consumers' preference for eco-friendly products and sustainable repurchasing behavior (Haws et al., 2014; Tan et al., 2022). Based on this information, the following hypotheses have been developed.

H6: *Green consumption value influences the attitude towards local food.*

H7: *Green consumption value influences local food preference.*

Local Food Attitude (LFA)

Attitude is expressed as individuals' comprehensive evaluations of a specific behavior, reflecting their positive and negative preferences toward the behavior after a thorough assessment (Tandon et al., 2021). Consumer attitudes explaining sustainable consumer behavior have been the subject of numerous studies in the tourism sector (Kim et al., 2020). For instance, Han et al. (2010) indicate that attitudes positively influence tourists' intentions to stay in green hotels. Lee (2009) also states that attitudes are a significant factor in tourists' destination choices and repeat visits. Phillips et al. (2013) emphasized that positive attitudes toward Korean cuisine influence tourists' intentions to revisit. Varshneya et al. (2017) indicates that attitudes significantly influence the consideration of purchasing green products. Research conducted on the consumption of local foods also supports the relationship between individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Levitt et al., 2019). In this context, Hussain et al. (2023) stated that tourists' attitudes toward local food have a positive effect on their intention to try local cuisine. In light of the information above, the following hypothesis has been proposed.

4. Methodology

Questionnaire Design

The study aims to understand the preference for local food among Generation Z tourists using the MOA theory. In the study, which adopts a quantitative method, the survey form used for data collection consists of two parts. The first part includes statements whose validity has been previously established to measure the variables included in the study. In this context, attitudes toward local food were measured using items adapted from environmental concerns of Generation Z (Cordano et al., 2010), attitudes toward local meals (Choe & Kim, 2018), social and environmental sustainability of local food (Testa et al., 2019) and finally, local food preference was measured using items adapted

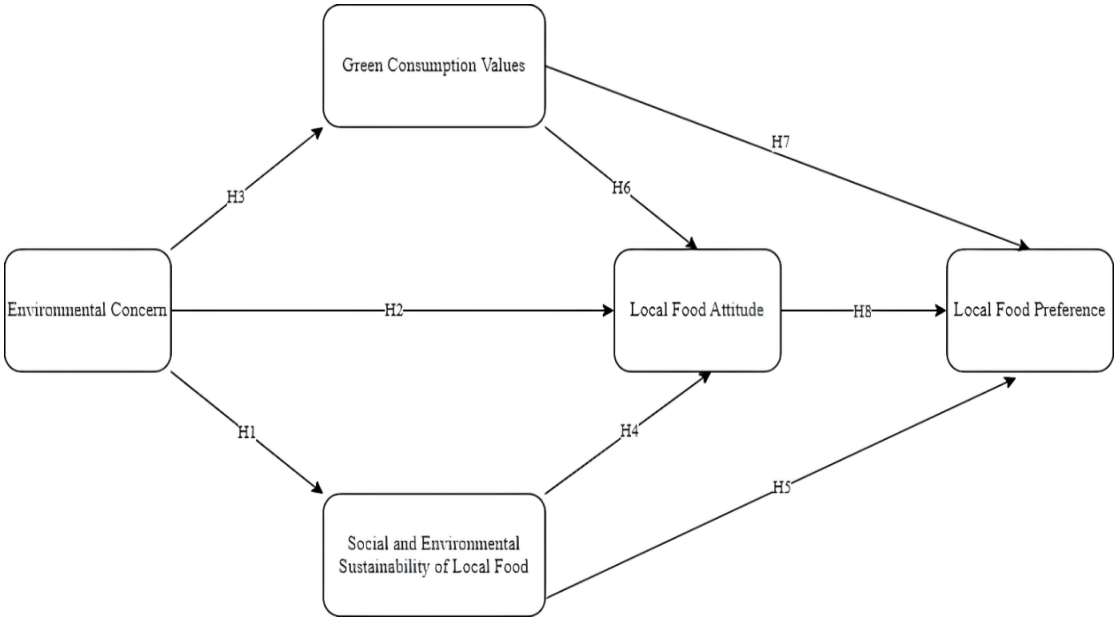

Figure I: Research Model

Source: Authors own elaboration

from Klein et al. (1998) and Josiassen et al. (2011). The items in the first part were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert scale. The second part of the survey form included questions about the demographic profile of the participants (age, gender, education, etc.).

Data Collection

This empirical study was designed using the quantitative research method and was operationalized on a cross-sectional sample from Türkiye. Despite the fact that the behaviors of Generation Z tourists in Türkiye are not in line with sustainability (Görpe & Öksüz, 2022), significant food waste is observed in Türkiye (UNEP, 2021). Moreover, considering factors such as time and cost, Turkey was selected as the research universe. The universe of the study consists of Turkish Generation Z individuals who have traveled at least once. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were used together in the study. As a purposive sampling method, the individuals who will participate in the study are required to be over the age of 18 and have travelled at least once. Social media tools and travel sites were used in the convenience sampling method, which was preferred for the easiest, fastest and most economical collection of data. By leaving survey links to the relevant places, Generation Z individuals were enabled to participate in the survey. In addition, the fact that Generation Z actively uses social media has been important in choosing the method in question. Prior to commencing the data collection process, ethical approval was obtained from the Legal Advisory Department of Atatürk University (Social Scientific Institute) (Ref: 2023; 00367329). Data were collected between November and December 2023.

Data Analysis

The symbolic model of the study has been tested through PLS-SEM. This analysis method, based on a comprehensive measurement and structural model, is preferred for its ability to produce robust results on small samples, analyze multiple variables simultaneously, and perform analyses on data that do not exhibit normal distribution. Widely used in the field of tourism, this analysis method not only tests the research model but also aims to maximize the explained variances of the variables(Hair et al., 2022).

5. Results

Descriptive Statistics

The study included 310 voluntary participants from the Generation Z tourists. The sample size for the participants meets the minimum requirements for the effective use of PLS-SEM(Hair et al., 2022). The descriptive information of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Trait	Variable	n	%
Gender	Woman	190	62,1
	Man	116	37,9
Age	1995-1997	75	24,5
	1998-2000	66	21,5
	2001-2003	110	35,9
	2004-2006	48	15,6
	2007-2010	7	2,3
Education Status	High school or below	10	3,2
	Undergraduate	261	85,3
	Postgraduate	35	11,4
Monthly income	Less than 3000 TL	96	31,3
	3001-4000	75	24,5
	4001-5000	47	15,3
	5001 TL and over	88	28,7

Source: Authors own elaboration

According to the study, 62.1% of the participants are female, while 37.9% are male. When examining age ranges, the highest participation is observed among those born between 2001-2003 (35.9%), whereas the lowest participation is among those born between 2007-2010 (2.3%). 85.3% of the Z generation tourists participating in the study have received education at the undergraduate level. Lastly, 31.3% of the participants have an income of 3000 TL or less, while 28.7% have an income of 5001 TL or more.

Outer Model

The study model was tested with the SmartPLS4 program. Additionally, in line with the recommendations in the literature, the research model was considered reflective. The factor loadings and Variance Inflation Factor values (VIF) for the scale items used in the study model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of the outer model

Constructs and measurement items	Outer Loadings	VIF
Environmental Concern		
EC 1	0.854	2.401
EC 2	0.856	3.305
EC 3	0.899	3.564
EC 4	0.753	2.382
EC 5	0.749	2.177
Local Food Attitude		
LFA 1	0.945	3.208
LFA 2	0.850	4.946
LFA 3	0.764	4.221
LFA 4	0.911	2.613
Social and Environmental Sustainability of Local Food		
LFSES 1	0.862	2.782
LFSES 2	0.865	2.890
LFSES 3	0.822	2.865
LFSES 4	0.809	2.860
LFSES 5	0.722	2.893
LFSES 6	0.798	2.472
LFSES 7	0.737	2.127
Green Consumption Values		
GCV1	0.843	2.106
GCV2	0.732	2.253
GCV3	0.750	1.559
GCV4	0.709	1.888
Local Food Preference		
LFP 1	0.903	2.605
LFP 2	0.869	2.605

Source: Authors own elaboration

It is noted that the ideal loading for factor loadings should be 0.70 or higher (Hair et al., 2022). Upon examining the

scale items in the study model, it is observed that all items have factor loadings above 0.70. High correlation among indicators leads to the problem of multicollinearity. Therefore, VIF values for the items were examined. It is desirable for the item VIF values to be below 5.0 (Hair et al., 2022). Upon reviewing Table II, it can be stated that all items have values below 5.0, indicating the absence of multicollinearity problems. The reliability and validity analysis results for the scales are also presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Reliability and Validity

Measurements	Items	Cronbach Alpha	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Environmental Concern	5	0.913	0.917	0.913	0.680
Local Food Attitude	4	0.927	0.931	0.925	0.757
LFSES	7	0.927	0.922	0.914	0.646
GCV	4	0.845	0.849	0.845	0.578
Local Food Preference	2	0.879	0.880	0.880	0.785

Source: Authors own elaboration

The internal consistency of the study is demonstrated in the table above with CR/rho_a and rho_c values. Since these values are above 0.70, it can be stated that the internal consistency of the study is ensured. For the convergent validity of the study AVE value was examined, and since the value for all constructs is above 0.50, the convergent validity of the study is established (Hair et al., 2022). The discriminant validity of the study was assessed based on HTMT analysis, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity- HTMT

	EC	GCV	LFA	LFSES	LFP
EC	1				
GCV	0.487	1			
LFA	0.553	0.620	1		
LFSES	0.541	0.503	0.555	1	
LFP	0.631	0.642	0.715	0.656	1

Source: Authors own elaboration

The discriminant validity of the study has been evaluated using HTMT due to its comprehensive and less restrictive nature (Qin & Chen, 2022). An HTMT coefficient below 0.90 is expected (Hair et al., 2022). When Table 4 is analysed, it is seen that discriminant validity is provided between the variables. In line with all these results, it can be stated that the study fulfils the validity and reliability criteria.

Inner Model

The structural model of the study has been tested using the Bootstrap technique with 5000 resampling. The obtained results were used to evaluate the fit indices of the research model, and they are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Model Fit Indices

	SRMR	d_ULS	d_G	Chi-Square	NFI
Saturated Model	0.043	0.321	0.347	572.324	0.887
Estimated Model	0.089	1.357	0.381	614.389	0.897

Source: Authors own elaboration

In the fit indices of the model, it is expected that SRMR value is below 0.80, and the values of d_ULS and d_G are greater than 0.05, while the NFI value is between 0 and 1 (Hair et al., 2022). When the model fit values in Table V are examined, it is seen that the research model meets the fit indices. The effect size f^2, explanatory power R^2, and predicted relevance Q^2 coefficients of the structural model are evaluated and presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Explanatory power of the structural model

Exogenous -> Endogenous	f^2	Endogenous variables	R^2	Q^2
EC -> LFA	0.207	GCV	0.239	0.142
EC -> LFSES	0.402	LFA	0.508	0.234
EC-> GCV	0.314	LFSES	0.290	0.241
GCV-> LFA	0.202	LFP	0.643	0.252
GCV-> LFP	0.193			
LFA -> LFP	0.265			
LFSES -> LFP	0.178			
LFSES -> LFA	0.183			

Source: Authors own elaboration

The effect sizes of the external variables on the internal variables in the research model were calculated, taking into account the f^2 values. When examining the model results, it can be observed that external variables have a moderate to weak effect size on internal variables. In structural models, it is desired that the explanatory power R-squared (R^2) value of variables is above 0.10 (Hair et al., 2022). Upon examination of the research model, it is observed that the explanatory power of all variables is above the value of 0.10. For all internal variables in the model, the predictive relevance (Q^2) values are positive, and the PLS-SEM prediction error average is zero for all three variables (PLS-SEM prediction error average = ±0.000). In conclusion, with all internal variables and indicators showing positive Q^2 values and small prediction error values, it can be stated that the final model has sufficient predictive power (Chua, 2022).

Table 7 Path Analysis Results (Direct effects)

	Yol Katsayısı (β)	Standard Deviation	t value	p value	Decisinons
Direct hypotheses					
H1: EC -> LFSES	0.538	0,069	7.785	0.000	Supported
H2: EC -> LFA	0.242	0.062	3.905	0.000	Supported
H3: EC -> GCV	0.489	0.069	7.133	0.000	Supported
H4: LFSES -> LFA	0.239	0.072	3.323	0.001	Supported
H5: LFSES->LFP	0.318	0.066	4.785	0.000	Supported
H6: GCV-> LFA	0.383	0.078	4.905	0.000	Supported
H7: GCV-> LFP	0.240	0.072	3.355	0.001	Supported
H8: LFA -> LFP	0.390	0.075	5.202	0.000	Supported

Source: Authors own elaboration

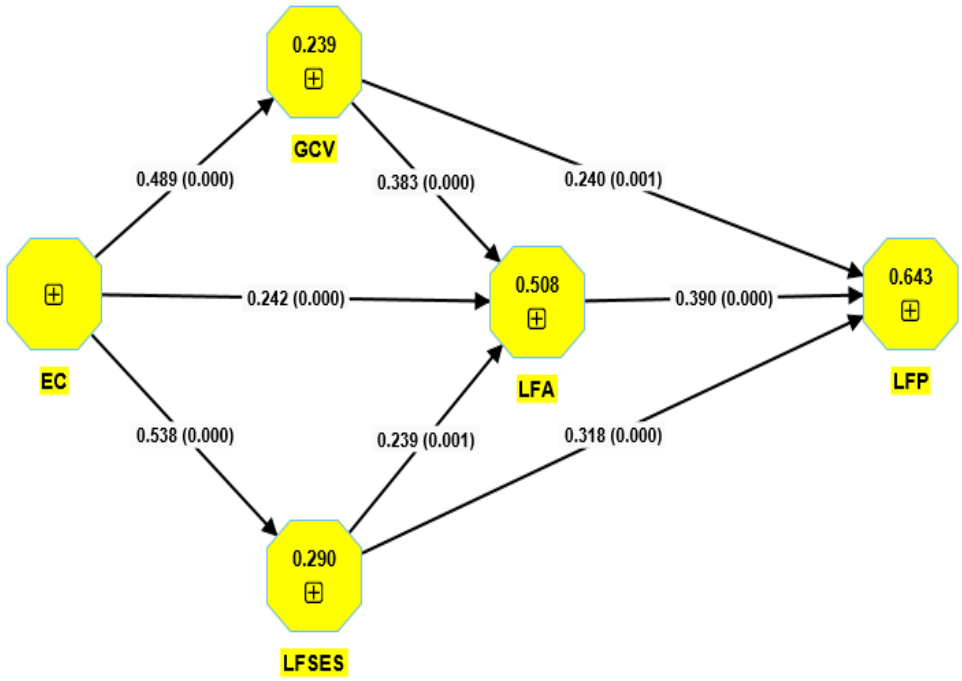

Figure 2 Path Analysis

Source: Authors own elaboration

Path Analysis

Within the scope of the study conducted to predict the determinants of local food preferences of Generation Z tourists, 8 direct hypotheses were proposed and tested. The standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values for these hypotheses are presented in Table 7 and Figure 2.

According to the structural model results, environmental concerns of Z generation tourists significantly and positively influence their perceptions of the social and environmental sustainability of local food (β= 0.538, p < 0.000), their attitudes towards local cuisine (β= 0.242, p < 0.000), and their perceptions of green consumption value (β= 0.489, p < 0.000). Additionally, tourists' perceptions of LFSES (Local Food Social and Environmental Sustainability) and GCV (Green Consumption Value) positively affect their attitudes towards local food (β= 0.239, p < 0.001; β= 0.383, p < 0.000), respectively. Finally, local food preference is significantly and positively influenced by LFSES, GCV, and LFA (Local Food Attitudes) (β= 0.318, p < 0.000; β= 0.240, p < 0.001; β= 0.390, p < 0.000), respectively. In other words, Z generation tourists' preferences for local food are shaped by green consumption value, attitudes towards local food, and the social and environmental sustainability of local food.

6. Conclusion

This study explores the impact of the Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) theory on food tourism within the framework of sustainable local food. In other words, by associating the determinants of sustainable local food preferences among Generation Z with the dimensions of the MOA theory, this research contributes to the theoretical development in the relevant literature. It has been determined that Z generation tourists exhibit strong intentions regarding environmental concern (EC), the social and environmental sustainability of local food (LFSES), green consumption value (GCV), and attitudes towards local food (LFA). Additionally, the preferences of the Z generation for local food are significantly and positively predicted by LFSES, GCV, and LFA. While some studies suggest that individuals from Generation Z are less inclined to take responsibility (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021) and show less sensitivity toward environmentally friendly behaviors compared to other generations (Qiu et al., 2022), this study indicates that these individuals have high environmental concerns, and their preferences for sustainable local food are robust. The findings of the study parallel the results of other studies indicating that the Z generation exhibits environmentally sensitive and responsible behaviors (Etezady et al., 2021; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021). The results of the study contribute to the theoretical development of the literature by enhancing our understanding of the attitudes and preferences of Generation Z tourists regarding food sustainability.

Theoretical implications

One of the key findings is that environmental concern (EC) significantly predicts green consumption value (GCV) and the social and environmental sustainability of local food (LFSES). In other words, perceptions of the social and environmental sustainability of local food and green consumption value among Z generation tourists are

influenced by their environmental concerns. Environmental concern is defined as individuals' sensitivity to the environment (Schlossberg, 1992). Individuals with high environmental sensitivity and interest in environmental issues are known to exhibit environmentally friendly behaviors and are willing to consume sustainable green alternative products (Hansla et al., 2008). Additionally, local foods symbolize environmental sustainability for consumers (Autio et al., 2013) and contribute to societal sustainability through support for local businesses (Yang & Leung, 2020).

The second result of the study is that attitudes towards local food (LFA) are significantly influenced by EC, LFSES, and GCV. There are various factors that influence tourists' attitudes towards local food. This study confirms that positive attitudes towards local food are influenced by environmental concern, perceptions of food sustainability, and green consumption value. Local foods are perceived as environmentally friendly products due to their contribution to creating a more sustainable food chain in terms of production, consumption, storage, and distribution (Frash Jr et al., 2015; Martinez, 2010). Additionally, it is believed that local foods contribute to the preservation of food systems and the enhancement of environmental sustainability (Aksakallı Bayraktar et al., 2023). Ahmed et al. (2021) state that individuals who act with environmental consciousness and responsibility show interest in local foods. The results obtained from this study confirm in the literature that the positive contribution of local foods to sustainable, environmental, and green consumption, along with EC, LFSES, and GCV significantly explaining LFA, is valid.

The final finding of the study is the strong explanation of Z generation tourists' preferences for local food (LFP) by GCV, LFSES, and LFA. It is known that consumers prefer local foods due to both personal reasons and perceptions of sustainability (Cappelli et al., 2022). This study confirms that Z generation tourists' preferences for local food are influenced by green consumption, attitudes towards local food, and perceptions of the sustainability of local food. The results obtained are parallel to the existing findings in the literature. Customers who prioritize social ecological justice are known to have a higher likelihood of consuming local food (Wenzig & Gruchmann, 2018). Alsetoohy et al. (2021) state that tourists purchasing local food products contribute to sustainable practices. Levitt et al. (2019) suggest a strong relationship between individuals' attitudes and behaviors in studies on the consumption of local foods. Hussain et al. (2023) demonstrate in their research that tourists' attitudes towards local food have a positive impact on their intention to try local food. Additionally, the purchasing behavior of Z generation consumers is influenced by environmental actions (Su et al., 2019).

Practical implications

Sustainability is one of the most important concepts in our lives, given the limited nature of our resources. In this context, the approach of Generation Z, who are the potential future leaders or tourist candidates, towards food is highly valued. From a practical perspective, the findings of the study offer some practical implications for destination managers and marketers to develop successful relationships with Generation Z tourists regarding sustainable food consumption. The study reveals that Generation Z tourists have strong intentions towards sustainability and environmental consumption, which are significantly explained by variables (EC, GCV, LFSES, LFA) in the research model. To disseminate and generalize this effect, impactful advertisements can be made on social media platforms where Generation Z is most active. For example, social marketing tools can emphasize positive advertisements about the health and sustainability contributions of local foods to the well-being of future generations. Orea-Giner and Fusté-Forné (2023) mention that Generation Z tourists seek "local" experiences while traveling. Therefore, food and beverage establishments at destinations can allocate more space for local products on their menus. Indeed, while Generation Z individuals attach greater importance to sustainable food consumption in their daily lives, this trend tends to decrease during their travels (Orea-Giner & Fusté-Forné, 2023; Su et al., 2019). Finally, to attract the interest of Generation Z tourists even more, local food festivals or food tours can be organized more frequently.

Limitations and future research

Like many studies, this study also has certain limitations. Firstly, it predicted the local food preferences of Generation Z tourists through a limited number of variables. Therefore, future research could analyze their food preferences through variables closer to Generation Z, such as productivity, social networks, and lifestyle. Secondly, the study was conducted on Generation Z individuals in Türkiye using a convenience sampling method. Thus, the topic could be further explored in a different culture and with a different method. Finally, the study tested the local food preferences of Generation Z from the perspective of behavioral intention. In other words, it was tested as an unrealized action. Considering that behavioral intentions do not always lead to actual behavior, future research could conduct more advanced experimental studies.

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Determinants of sustainable local food preferences of Generation Z tourists

Abstract

The study provides a perspective on sustainability through the lens of Generation Z, which is one of the most crucial issues in terms of the efficient use of limited resources. Specifically, our study focuses on identifying the underlying factors behind Generation Z's sustainable local food preferences. Data were collected from Türkiye between November and December 2023 using web-based surveys with a convenience sampling method. The "Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling" approach was employed for data analysis. Research findings revealed that Generation Z tourists exhibit strong intentions regarding environmental concerns (EC), the social and environmental sustainability of local food (LFSES), green consumption value (GCV), and local food attitude (LFA). Additionally, Generation Z's preferences for local food were significantly and positively predicted by LFSES, GCV, and LFA. The results are believed to contribute to the existing theoretical knowledge on Generation Z's sustainable food consumption.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Environmental concern, Sustainable local food, .*

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Emre Akoğul:	*Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing*	*100%*

Author statement: *Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.* ***Declaration of Conflicting Interests:*** *The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article*

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