The way we live, the way we travel: generation Z and sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences

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Abstract

Purpose – This research aims to examine Generation Z's perspectives of sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences, considering the drivers on food tourists' behavioural intents and basing its analysis on the value-attitude-behaviour model of norm activation theory.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative design, 27 qualitative online surveys were conducted with Generation Z travellers who are also active on social media.

Findings – Results show that while they are aware of environmental knowledge and ethical food choices and think that sustainable food consumption improves individual and social wellbeing, the sustainability of food consumption is limited by factors such as time and budget. Also, results reveal that the eating habits of Generation Z people are more sustainable when they eat at home than when they travel. Theoretical and practical implications for food tourism management and marketing are described.

Originality/value – While food tourism has been largely investigated in recent years, little previous research has focused on the relationships between daily eating behaviours and sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences, especially from the perspective of Generation Z individuals and the influence of social media on individual and social food decisions.

Keywords Food activism, Food tourism, Generation Z, Sustainable behaviour

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction and objective

Food tourism can play several different roles, ranging from being an emerging niche form of tourism to a primary motivator for tourists when choosing the places to visit (Andersson *et al.*, 2017; Tsai and Wang, 2017). Many destinations emphasise food tourism as a primary offering (Ellis *et al.*, 2018), and visitors are willing to spend more money on unique food and beverage experiences (Okumus, 2021). Food is a big portion of tourists' budgets, reaching a third of their total expenditure (The World Food Travel Association, 2020). However, do we invest in food tourism sustainably? Is the food and drink industry choosing ethically? Do tourists care about the environmental impacts of their food experiences?

Recent decades have witnessed a progressive change towards healthier and more conscious eating habits (Su *et al.*, 2019). Consumption trends have raised a growing preoccupation with foods' origin and nutritional aspects (Liu *et al.*, 2021). This is especially

manifested in younger generations such as Generation Z. Generation Z comprises people born between 1995 and 2010, following the classification of generations proposed by Williams and Page (2011). This generation is a challenge for tourism managers and marketers since it appears that they behave differently from earlier generations, which leads to changes in consumer behaviour (Schlossberg, 2016). Food is a relevant attribute for Generation Z people when they seek to discover a sense of place (Alton, 2012). Generation Z consumers follow healthy eating habits, and their customers' decisions are linked with sustainable activism (Su et al., 2019). The literature focused on the relationships between food and activism highlights the necessity to study how food activism can have economic, political and social implications (Schneider et al., 2018). According to the EIT Food research (2021), Generation Z individuals want a healthy food system in which they can participate actively. This paper departs from the understanding that Generation Z is a potent force that can affect health and well-being expectations around food consumption (Kılıç et al., 2021).

From a hospitality and tourism perspective, the role of food activists is crucial to promote ethical consumer behaviours which are aware of environmental impacts through the eyes of Generation Z individuals. Generation Z is the most concerned generation about the planet's well-being and inspires others to make purchasing decisions that prioritise sustainability (First Insight and The Baker Retailing Center, 2021). Generation Z people do not only actively participate in social media conversations, but social media also exerts a great influence on their lifestyle and travel decisions (Haddouche and Salomone, 2018; Barbe and Neuburger, 2021). In this sense, socialisation is also at the core of food tourists' motivations (Park et al., 2022; Su et al., 2019).

Generation Z comprises people born between 1995 and 2010, following the classification of generations proposed by Williams and Page (2011). This generation is a challenge for tourism managers and marketers since it appears that they behave differently from earlier generations, which leads to changes in consumer behaviour (Schlossberg, 2016). Due to the previous facts, this research aims to analyse the perceptions of Generation Z about sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences considering the drivers of food tourists' behavioural intentions (Soltani et al., 2021) and based on the value-attitude-behaviour in the framework of norm activation theory. In this sense, the value-attitude-behaviour is a conceptual model to measure the impact of sustainability on actions. The environmental values are predictors of "attitudes toward pro-environmental behaviors" (Kim et al., 2020, p. 798). In addition, the norm activation theory refers to the personal awareness of the environmental consequences of personal behavior (Han, 2021) which is applied to the study of local food consumption when traveling.

Therefore, this study defines the following research questions:

RQ1. Do Generation Z travelers have sustainable eating habits when travelling?

RQ2. Generation Z individuals are more environmentally friendly when eating at home than when they travel?

RQ3. How does the food supply affect the long-term viability of Generation Z food tourism motivations?

RQ4. How do social media influence food tourism motivation and sustainable consumption in Generation Z?

The originality of this research is based on a study focused on Generation Z food consumers' habits, both as part of their daily lifestyle and as part of their tourist experience, departing from a qualitative analysis based on their social media use.

After the introduction, the theoretical framework and the research questions are presented. Later, the methodology and the results and discussion are described. Finally, in the

conclusion the authors identify the theoretical and practical implications, the limitations and the opportunities for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

This section discusses the relationship between Generation Z and travel behaviour. Also, it reviews the role of food in tourism and the relevance of sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences.

2.1 Generation Z and travel behaviour

Previous works assigned different birth dates to Generation Z. However, most people believe that Generation Z refers to those born between 1995 and 2010 (Williams and Page, 2011; Priporas *et al.*, 2017; Su *et al.*, 2019). They are regarded as the most impatient, immediate, individualistic, self-directed, demanding, materialistic and hungry generation to date (Agarwal and Vaghela, 2018). Generation Z is a consumer-driven generation (Kılıç *et al.*, 2021). Members of this generation will soon be adults in leadership positions, as well as the financiers of tourism and travel (Robinson and Schänzel, 2019).

Generation Z people are more inclined to embrace good ethical action, being active when it comes to spreading government petitions online and urging citizens to take direct action (Soltani *et al.*, 2021). According to Barbe and Neuburger (2021), sustainability and climate change are relevant subjects for Generation Z, and influencers supporting sustainable travel are becoming more prominent on social media platforms. They are regarded as the most environmentally friendly citizens when compared to prior generations (Williams and Page, 2011), and they are willing to pay more for organic products (Fromm and Read, 2018). Han (2021) highlights that to understand ecologically sustainable consumer behaviour, environmental knowledge is seen as a primary cognitive feature. Also, Su *et al.* (2019) found that within this group of people, sustainable activists, sustainable believers and sustainable moderates all placed distinct values on their dietary choices. However, despite being generally supportive of green measures, generation Z expresses suspicion of them, viewing them as a ploy to attract clients and save money (Lemy, 2016).

Because Generation Z is the first digitally native generation, technology is essential while seeking information, managing a vacation and searching for tourist services (Bako, 2018). The rising usage of social media by younger generations has spurred the quest for distinctive and original places that elicit emotion and emphasise the uniqueness of the experience, particularly for later dissemination on social media (Stylos *et al.*, 2021). As a result, technology plays an essential role in optimising and personalising digital content as well as the tourist experience (Walters, 2021).

Young travellers from Generation Z are complex and intelligent, and they have high expectations for their vacations (Kılıç *et al.*, 2021). With its travel and accommodation choices, as well as its relationships with the environment and local people, they are a travel profile away from typical tourism (Kılıç *et al.*, 2021). In this sense, when travelling, Generation Z individuals make new acquaintances, interact with locals and fellow travellers and seek a deeper significance to personal life and self-development (Robinson and Schänzel, 2019).

The food service sector is also concerned about Generation Z since they enjoy dining out and are willing to try new dishes (Lee *et al.*, 2022). Healthy eating habits are practised by Generation Z consumers, and their purchasing decisions are tied to environmental action (Su *et al.*, 2019). Okumus (2021) highlights the significance of future food tourism research on environmental problems and sustainability challenges. For example, measures to reduce food waste in the tourism industry are crucial for combining a sustainable product with a sustainable demand (Goh and Jie, 2019) and are also related to the interest in ethical

consumption among Generation Z consumers (Walters, 2021). Moreover, Generation Z individuals make new acquaintances, interact with locals and fellow travellers and seek a deeper significance to personal life and self-development (Robinson and Schänzel, 2019).

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2.2 Sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences
Food tourism is a path to discovering a place through food (see Hall and Sharples, 2004) and it includes a range of experiences that go from visiting a café to attending a festival. During the last couple of decades, food has become a primary motivation for tourists (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Among food tourism research, the nature of food consumption is one of the key investigation arenas (see, for example, Ellis *et al.*, 2018). Local foods, and drinks, do not only act as tourism attraction factors (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; Fusté-Forné, 2020), but they also emerge as tourism motivation factors (Quan and Wang, 2004; Timothy, 2015). This fact is also linked with the value of visitors' intake of local cuisine that is a robust predictor of characteristics including the quality of the overall trip experience, the consolidation of the destination brand and the strength of the connection to the location (Rousta and Jamshidi, 2020). In this sense, the analysis of the intersections between food and tourism from a consumption perspective is also pivotal to understanding the sustainable planning and development of food-focused destination. Food does not only contribute to the tourism experience (Tsai, 2016) but it also builds a destination's competitive advantage (Knollenberg *et al.*, 2021).

Drawing from the integration of food experiences as part of the community environment (Fountain, 2022), the experience of co-creation (Rachão *et al.*, 2021) should be placed at the centre of sustainable tourism development (Ellis *et al.*, 2018) in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2020) such as number 12. Previous research has focused on both production and consumption patterns (Hall and Gössling, 2013). For example, Higgins-Desbiolles and Wijesinghe (2019) highlight the role of restaurants in integral sustainable planning, and Johnston and Baumann (2009) warn about the impact of food habits on the environment.

While "eating out" has become a basic need in a leisure contemporary context (see Bauman, 1998), little previous research has examined the links between food tourism and sustainable consumption. Testa *et al.* (2019) have studied the tourists' motivation toward sustainable food experiences and found that environmental and social issues influence the selection of tourist experiences. However, previous studies have also evidenced that people are more environmentally friendly at home than when they travel (Holmes *et al.*, 2021). Using consumer value theory, sustainable restaurant practices increase customer involvement and loyalty (Kim and Hall, 2020). The restaurant managers must encourage staff to participate in sustainable service innovation efforts while promoting sustainable services (Chou *et al.*, 2018). This fact is linked with the importance of the human service traits of friendship and personalisation, because it presents a favourable influence on perceived value, and perceived value has a positive effect on beliefs (Jang, 2021).

Niche examples of food tourism, such as slow food tourism (Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2020) and regenerative (Cave and Dredge, 2020) and transformative (Teoh *et al.*, 2021) tourism urge (food) tourism stakeholders to take action towards a more sustainable and responsible (food) tourism system that addresses preoccupations such as climate change or food waste (Fennell and Bowyer, 2020). Local food may help maintain culture and customs by protecting agricultural landscapes and lifestyles (Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.*, 2019). This also applies to culinary tourism marketing, which is becoming increasingly digital (Kim *et al.*, 2009) since social media affects how tourists view locations (Leung *et al.*, 2013; Månsson, 2011). Social media shape food narratives (Fusté-Forné and Masip, 2022) and foster food tourism

(Ranteallo and Andilolo, 2017). The influence of social media on food tourism is also accentuated by influencers (Ingrassia *et al.*, 2022).

This article understands social media content about food as a source of tourism experiences. Here, there is a need to study pro-environmental behaviours that aim to minimise the impact of human activities on the environment (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002), to not only observe how daily eating habits are transferred to travel experiences but also how travel experiences are transferred to eating habits at home (Wu *et al.*, 2021). Departing from the previous work described in the literature section, the authors have elaborated the following framework (Figure 1) to analyse the perceptions of Generation Z about sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and approach of the research

Based on the literature review and research framework (Figure 1), this research uses a deductive technique (Bingham and Witkowsky, 2021). This study uses 27 qualitative online questionnaires with Gen Z. According to Rue (2018), Generation Z prefers texting over face-to-face contact. The art of having rich, meaningful conversations is at risk (Rue, 2018). To reach them and boost engagement, qualitative Internet questionnaires are used. This research presents a deductive approach (Bingham and Witkowsky, 2021) based on the previous literature review and the research framework (Figure 1). This study is based on 27 qualitative online surveys with Generation Z individuals. According to Rue (2018), there is a decline in face-to-face communication among Generation Z, which means that many people now prefer texting to phone conversations. As a result, the skill of holding a rich and meaningful conversation is in danger of being lost (Rue, 2018). Because of this fact, qualitative online surveys are the tool selected to contact them and increase their participation rate.
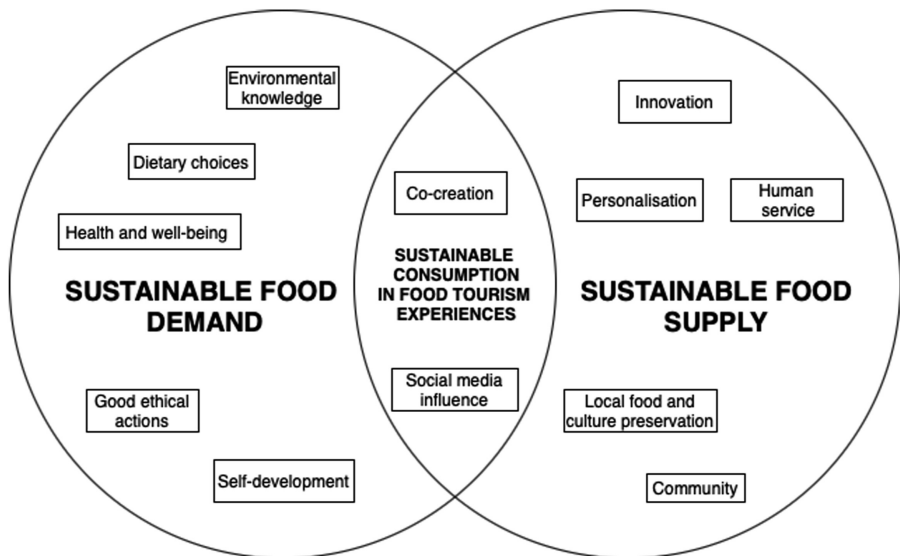

Figure 1.
Sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences

Source(s): Authors work

3.2 Qualitative online survey design

Qualitative online surveys can provide extensive descriptions of the setting in which qualitative researchers are interested (Braun *et al.*, 2021). They are self-administered, with everyone getting identical questions in the same order. Participants input their remarks in their own words rather than selecting from pre-determined answer options (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Even if individual responses are short, qualitative online survey datasets in their entirety provide richness and depth of answers (Braun *et al.*, 2021). The qualitative online survey was designed considering previous studies focused on sustainable consumption in food tourism experiences (Table 1), presenting three different blocks in line with the research objective: food consumption at home, food tourism experiences and social media in food tourism experiences.

3.3 Distribution of the qualitative online survey and participants

The participants were chosen via purposive sampling (Rossiter, 2011). First, members of Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2002) were recruited to participate in this study. The online qualitative survey was given to 256 Gen Z adults between May and July 2022 (18 years

Questions	References
Food consumption at home	
Describe your diet and lifestyle	Su *et al.* (2019)
	Liu *et al.* (2021)
	Kılıç *et al.* (2021)
Do you consider (or not) that you have sustainable eating habits at home? Why?	Holmes *et al.* (2021)
	Wu *et al.* (2021)
Food tourism experiences	
What type of choice do you make to select food experiences (restaurants, events, etc.) when travelling?	Kivela and Crotts (2006)
	Ellis *et al.* (2018)
Do you (or not) change your eating habits when you travel? Why?	Schlossberg (2016)
Do you have sustainable eating habits when travelling? Please, describe it and give us three examples	Soltani *et al.* (2021)
	Barbe and Neuburger (2021)
	Okumus (2021)
Do you think that the food supply allows you to eat sustainably when travelling? Why?	Goh and Jie (2019)
	Soltani *et al.* (2021)
	Barbe and Neuburger (2021)
Do you prefer local food establishments or global food chains when you travel? Why?	Fromm and Read (2018)
	Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.* (2019)
	Robinson and Schänzel (2019)
	Fountain (2022)
	Han (2021)
Social media and food tourism experiences	
What social media platforms and users do you follow to gather information about food experiences?	Haddouche and Salomone (2018)
	Park *et al.* (2022)
	Barbe and Neuburger (2021)
Could you provide three examples of food experiences you enjoyed following a social media recommendation?	Walters (2021)
	Lee *et al.* (2022)

Table 1.
Design of the qualitative online survey and the supporting references

old). Participants who published food content on social media provided informed consent before participation. Then, 27 participants answered the qualitative questions on the form. Annex describes the participants. The order of participation (P + number) determines coding.

3.4 Data analysis
First, the answer papers were reviewed and assembled. Spanish and English were used to analyse the data because those were the languages used to reply to the online qualitative questionnaires.

The second phase involves deductive theme analysis of qualitative data using Nvivo 2022 version (Bingham and Witkowsky, 2021). Framework-coded data were manually entered (Table 2). One researcher coded and another checked the results' correctness and validity. If quotes were in Spanish, they were translated for this publication.

4. Results and discussion
After the data analysis and the codification of the results, this section is divided into different sub sections according to the themes identified in the theoretical framework (see Figure 1) that inform sustainable (or unsustainable) food consumption.

4.1 Environmental knowledge
Sustainability is driven by environmental understanding (Han, 2021). Generation Z is environmentally conscious and devoted to sustainable food usage. Generation Z members say it's not always simple to embrace sustainable consumption patterns, either because they can't afford sustainable food or because their purchase decisions depend on others (for example, their parents). Environmental knowledge is a driver of sustainable consumer behaviour (Han, 2021). Generation Z people are largely concerned about the impacts of food consumption on the environment and are committed to sustainable consumption. However, Generation Z individuals point out that it is not always easy to adopt sustainable consumption practices, either because they consider that the price of "sustainable" food products is higher and they cannot afford it or because their purchasing decisions depend on other people (for example, their parents). In this sense, Generation Z individuals behave differently from earlier generations (Schlossberg, 2016) and since they are more concerned

Themes	Example of codes
Environmental knowledge	Sustainability, sustainable, natural, local market, small producers, tote bag, reciclying, reusable, km 0 products, organic food, bulk goods ...
Dietary choices	Diet, omnivorous, Mediterranean diet, flexitarian ...
Health and well-being	Healthy food, home-made, exercise, sugar-free, ultraprocessed food, vegetables, fruits ...
Good ethical actions	Fair trade, avoiding meat products, responsible consumption ...
Self-development	Discover, new, try ...
Co-creation and innovation	Experience, opinion, social media, theme restaurant, food truck, live music, special ...
Social media influence	Recommendations, inspiration, evaluation, review ...
Personalisation	Personalise, adapt ...
Human service	Service, waiter ...
Local food and culture preservation	Traditional, preserve, discover, local restaurants, local food, culture ...
Community	Community, local ...

Table 2.
Themes and codes

about sustainable-based purchasing decisions (Williams and Page, 2011), they can also influence other people's decisions (First Insight and The Baker Retailing Center, 2021). Some of the participants have highlighted that:

> In my family, we have lately reduced the massive purchase of food. We are trying to buy more ecological products, but due to the great increase in prices it is practically impossible to have a shopping basket based on ecological products. (P20)

> I feel that for [purchasing decisions] to be sustainable, you need to invest a lot of time, research sustainable alternatives, and more money. Also, when you live with more people, it does not only depend on you. I think it is quite difficult. (P6)

A shopping basket of sustainable food goods costs more due to political and environmental volatility, but it also depends on where we live and the food supply chain. Previous research indicates that individuals with insufficient purchasing power will have trouble selecting a product and will be less willing to take environmental protection measures (Pekersen and Canöz, 2022). Living in rural areas and near agricultural and animal hubs can help people adopt sustainable consumption practises through proximity foods. Although a shopping basket of sustainable food products implies a higher cost, increased by the current situation of political and environmental instability, it also depends on the place we live and the structure of the food supply chains. In this sense, the fact of living in rural environments and near areas with a great agricultural and livestock activity can facilitate the implementation of sustainable consumption practises through proximity foods. One of the participants explains it in the following way, also linked to the previous problems:

> It has cost us a bit to make my parents aware since they are an older generation, but we are increasingly promoting sustainable eating habits. Luckily, we live in a small town [. . .] and, therefore, we usually eat quite well and naturally. Seasonal diets are followed because there are many products, and many people have crops, so there are dishes that are 'traditionally' cooked at certain times of the year for that reason. (P1)

Although most of the participants are aware of the need to carry out sustainable consumption measures, in some specific cases, unsustainable dynamics continue to be maintained, such as:

> I do not consider that I have sustainable eating habits because there are times that I do not realise all the plastic that we unconsciously buy (food packaging, for example). I am trying to reduce my consumption of plastic, but I do not consider it to be sustainable yet. (P23)

Based on environmental knowledge, the following sections discuss the role of dietary choices, health and well-being and good ethical actions in relation to the food consumption of Generation Z people.

4.2 Dietary choices
In general, the participants have an omnivorous diet, with some exceptions that show the diversity of food-based lifestyle identities (Su et al., 2019). All people have concerns about following a balanced and healthy diet, which is in line with a progressive change towards healthier and more conscious eating habits. The participants are also active people, though they believe they are unable to be as healthy as they would like due to a lack of time in several cases. For example:

> I try to eat a balanced diet as much as possible and take care of what I eat, although my routine makes it quite complicated for me. [. . .] spending time thinking about it, looking for ideas, getting information, cooking, etc. (P5)

This prompts reflection on the importance of a healthy diet in the busy and fast-paced lives of people. In some cases, it is observed that although the usual practise tends to healthy eating habits (Su *et al.*, 2019), when this is transferred to leisure, the "requirement" is lower:

> Regarding my eating habits, I consider that I eat quite healthily; I cook myself, and I hardly buy processed foods. I try to buy seasonal fruits and vegetables, although if I fancy something sporadically, I don't deprive myself. I also usually go out with my friends during the weekend. Sure, I drink alcohol, but during the week I avoid it almost 100% unless I have an event (wich is not usual) (P1)

When the day-to-day practises are transferred, then, to leisure and tourist practices, most of the interviewees emphasise that when they travel, they tend to break their "healthy diet". They prefer to try local food even if it is not healthy, and while they don't care much about a healthy tourist diet, many people consider local food to be healthier than that from global chains, which is further discussed below. Sharma *et al.* (2022) conducted research on this issue and analysed the impact of tourists' ethnocentrism on their perceptions and patronage of local restaurants.

4.3 Health and well-being

In relation to the consequences of environmental knowledge and dietary choices on health and well-being, the participants recognise the value of local food, both for the benefits it brings as a result of shorter supply chains, as well as for the positive economic and environmental impacts it has on regional development (see Schneider *et al.*, 2018). One of the participants highlighted:

> Local food is a thousand times better because there are more possibilities that the products are autochthonous, and the preparation is healthier. (P11)

In addition, one of the interviewees mentioned that it is important to know the origin of products and ingredients, although the current context, as mentioned in the previous section, sometimes makes it difficult to choose the most beneficial options:

> I try to think not only about the type of food that I am going to consume but also about the product that I am consuming (where it comes from, avoiding processed foods, etc.). However, although the theory is fairly clear, it is true that many times, due to a lack of time, money, or simple laziness, I end up adopting habits that are not very sustainable in terms of food. (P5)

When we analyse the relationships between daily and leisure habits, a different impact on the well-being of Generation Z people is also observed. On the one hand, in relation to homemade food. Even though homemade food is healthier because the ingredients are closer together, especially in rural areas, it also means that more meat is eaten:

> At home, we eat foods that we could define as 'grandmother's' cuisine. When my grandmother was alive, she was the one who cooked and luckily, I learned to cook those dishes (lentils, stews . . .)." (P1)

On the other hand, food leisure practices, which also have an impact on people's health and well-being (Su and Zhang, 2022), do not always provide a healthy diet, as pointed out above:

> I try to eat in the healthiest way possible. Yes, it is true that I really like going out for lunch and dinner, so there are times when it is difficult for me. My lifestyle could be summed up as 'make all the plans you can and get to know as many places as possible.'" (P23)

While this statement does not directly refer to unsustainable food consumption practices, it is clear that it does not place sustainability at the centre of the food experience. While both the literature and the results of this research show that Generation Z people are worried about the environmental impacts of food decisions, the influence of food consumption on health and

well-being expectations (see Kılıç *et al.*, 2021), especially when they travel, does not necessarily promote sustainability.

4.4 Good ethical actions
Environmental understanding affects ethics. Previous research demonstrates that Generation Z is engaged while making ethical judgments (Soltani *et al.*, 2021), which leads to environmental action (Su *et al.*, 2019). The participants want 'proximity' in their eating behaviours, which demonstrates they are interested in organic and fair-trade items and the foods' origin (Liu *et al.*, 2021):

> I try to eat in local or traditional places whose dishes, I understand, are local. I buy food in traditional markets. I buy in neighbourhood supermarkets. (P2)

In some circumstances, sustainable practises are observed, but in others, participants would like to do so but do not due to time and money constraints. While in some cases, sustainable practises are observed, in others, sustainability is something that the participants would like to do but do not take it into account for two main reasons: a need to invest time in getting information and a lack of financial resources. These results are therefore related to what has been observed in the section on environmental knowledge and make it difficult to apply this environmental knowledge to food consumption habits. Also, when they travel, these actions are even more diluted:

> When I travel, I think I am much more flexible in that aspect. If I'm really hungry sometimes, I don't mind eating 'bad', for example, going into a Burger King. Sure, I try to take my reusable bottle so as not to buy a lot of plastic or if I see cardboard bottles, I opt for them. If I have to buy some food, I usually look for traditional or local stores (P1)

Sometimes, this also happens because "there are countries that strongly promote sustainable habits (markets, bio, no plastics, etc.), however, there are countries that do not" (P17). In this sense, in geographical places where there is still less awareness, the difficulty of making ethical decisions increases, because time and economic resources are also greater.

4.5 Self-development
A relevant aspect of the results is that the participants connected their sustainable habits with their personal development. This includes not only eating habits, but also a broader view of one's lifestyle. In this sense, the results obtained also reveal that lifestyle changes when people travel, which is in line with previous research that reveals that people tend to be more environmentally friendly at home (Holmes *et al.*, 2021). About this topic, Santos *et al.* (2020) highlights that visitors of all origins and dispositions have varying relationships to local cuisine, and not just that these interactions are a result of the gastronomic choices supplied by the location. It means that tourists altered their diets while on vacation, since this might be a result of the holiday environment as well as the shift in cultural background. In this sense, tourism emerges as a way to escape from the "routine", and the participants again consider that there is a break in their habits when they travel because they are less worried about it:

> Traveling means breaking routines and habits (at least for me). And although, in a way, I try not to eat badly all day either, I please myself more. (P5)

This shows that following healthy diets based on sustainable food consumption habits is not easy and also results in a lot of effort by the consumers. When they travel, they feel freed from it. Generation Z people primarily travel to interact with locals, and through food experiences, they search for new meanings to their lifestyles (Robinson and Schänzel, 2019). Both the "home" and

the "tourist" behaviour contribute to the self-development, while in different ways, which offer at the same time a tension between sustainable and unsustainable food experiences.

4.6 Social media influence

Social media is also a driver of sustainable consumer behaviour (Seyfi *et al.*, 2022). Beyond daily eating habits, all the participants have highlighted the role that social media has in the choice of their food experiences. In particular, social media has a large influence on Generation Z people's lifestyle and travel decisions (Haddouche and Salomone, 2018; Barbe and Neuburger, 2021). It is observed that, in this case, time is not a problem when choosing the best place:

I go to restaurants where youtubers or Instagrammers have previously gone and recommended it. (P8)

I usually look at restaurant apps to see the best value for money. (P22)

I choose my gastronomic experiences according to online opinions, blogs, etc. when I look online, the truth is that I usually take time to see what is in the area and what is typical. (P6)

In addition to social networks, some of those interviewed stressed the importance of interaction with residents as a means of increasing the authenticity of the gastronomic experience:

I try to ask local people so I can enjoy a more authentic experience. It is also true that social networks lately are putting a lot of emphasis on publicizing traditional places that not even the local population knows about, which are great to enjoy good food. (P13)

This authentic connection is related to the aspects highlighted in the following two sections, based on the local culture and people.

4.7 Local food and culture preservation

Destinations have paid growing attention to food as a tourist attraction factor (Ellis *et al.*, 2018). The participants see local food as a way of discovering the local culture (which is also a way to protect it), without which the tourist experience does not have the same value. Food is a path to discover the sense of a place (Alton, 2012). Local food is part of a trip, and they think that if they don't try local food, the experience is incomplete. This is also in line with research which understands local foods and beverages as a source of tourism motivation (Quan and Wang, 2004; Timothy, 2015). For example, some participants highlighted:

I prefer local foods because they usually have better quality. They usually use local products, and everything is much more 'homemade'. (P23)

Local consumption is linked to sustainable consumption and the preservation of local landscapes and ways of life (Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.*, 2019), as we've seen in the previous sections:

I think that if we talk about Europe, it is totally possible to eat sustainably when traveling. Another thing is that it is not done due to factors such as money, comfort, laziness, ignorance, etc. (P5)

However, when it comes to choosing restaurants to go to, their low budget and food trends have a large influence on their decisions, and many of those interviewed end up eating at globalised food places:

If I am in a country where local restaurants are very expensive and there are other cheaper chains or franchises, I prefer them and save money. (P2)

One of the benefits of traveling, in my opinion, is the opportunity to try local cuisine. And really, if I end up in a global food chain because of social pressure from the people I travel with or because it's an

expensive country and I take turns deciding which foods to spend more on and which ones to spend less on, then it a global food chain. (P6)

The participants think that local restaurants are often more expensive than global food chains, and because of budget restrictions, they tend to consume more global food than they would like to. This shows that the local-global conflict is transferred to the choices of gastronomic experiences. While the interest in local food experiences is evident, there are a series of factors that habitually transform these decisions into global ones.

4.8 Community and human service
Human-to-human interaction is pivotal to food tourist experiences (see Robinson and Schänzel, 2019), which are negotiated in the framework of a community environment (Fountain, 2022). In this sense, the participants highlighted the influence of locals on their restaurant and local food purchasing decisions, but they did not talk about the direct impacts of this local connection in a broad way:

I prefer local establishments, since tourism should leave wealth wherever you are. (P13)

This human ingredient does not only refer to the expert opinion of locals in relation to traditional eating places to visit, but also to the human service provided in these dining places. The participants pointed out that when they look at restaurant reviews, they also try to gauge on the general evaluation of the restaurant. In some cases, the food is good, but the service is not, and that impacts their experience and satisfaction. For example, one of the participants reported it as follows:

Good experience despite bad reviews because of the waiters and the product of the day, which was spectacular. Bad experience: a restaurant with a €90 menu in which several waiters argued during the service. (P10)

In line with previous studies, the human service contributes to the perceived value of the food tourist experience (Jang, 2021) and also increases the level of personalisation, as discussed in the next section.

4.9 Personalisation
Previous research shows that technology has a large influence on the personalization of food-based digital content and the tourist experience (Walters, 2021) based on sustainable food consumption. However, results demonstrate that the interest of Generation Z people in following a healthy diet when they travel cannot often be preserved for various reasons. Money and time are among them. However, there are other reasons, such as the low adaptation of restaurants to specific food needs (Muñoz-Mazón *et al.*, 2021). One of the participants, who is lactose intolerant, talked about the difficulty of finding places to eat.
From one side, a participant stated that:

Today, there are a large number of restaurants of all kinds that adjust to the taste of each person. (P14)

However, from the other side, another participant explained that:

Most of the food is not healthy and sustainable, they encourage us to eat dishes with a higher fat load. (P16)

While the offer of food experiences and gastronomic services is large, as observed in the next section, and fits with most of the tourist preferences, results also show that the current offer does not cover specific food needs, which challenge the food experiences of people when travel (see Fuentes-Moraleda *et al.*, 2022).

4.10 Co-creation and innovation
This section is about the sort of experience participants want, which demonstrates they seek innovation for co-creation. Participants reported unique dining experiences, and the results reveal social media influence, as seen above. They rely on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube for travel advice (see Bako, 2018). The interviewees also cited unusual eating experiences they generate at home, such as following a TikToker and leisure activities in their own city that allowed them to find delicious menus at cheap pricing.

Previous food adventures have included crepes in Paris, Belem cakes in Lisbon, and waffles in Brussels, as well as gelaterias in Rome. The identification of foods as emblems of locations is more essential than their sustainability. In addition, themed experiences and activities, such as a restaurant with a live DJ and a celebrity restaurant (Goxo by David Muoz), illustrate that tourists may not mind spending extra on unusual gourmet experiences (Okumus, 2021).

The wide availability of unique food tourism experiences enhances the co-creation of value focused on a combination of tradition and innovation, as is also observed in previous research. In this sense, social media is the main source of information in relation to unique experiences (Stylos *et al.*, 2021). In this context, the search for new experiences is also significant (see Lee *et al.*, 2022). This is, for example, observed with service robots. Now they are a novel attraction, but when we are used to having them at home, will they remain as an innovative food tourist experience (see Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2021)?

5. Conclusions
This paper has analysed the sustainable food consumption of Generation Z travellers, observing relevant differences in daily eating lifestyles and food travel behaviours, which are characterised by a detachment from more stressful daily routines. Based on the results and discussion, an answer is given to the research questions at the beginning of the paper.

While they are aware of the need to have sustainable eating habits, and most of them show that healthy and sustainable diets are part of their lifestyles, they have reported that time and money are two inhibitors of dietary choices for eating sustainably (RQ1). According to the participants, eating sustainably requires knowledge (time to obtain the knowledge) and a high budget (because organic foods are believed to be more expensive).

Generation Z people are more environmentally friendly when eating at home than when traveling. While in general, the participants are worried about the environmental and economic, and sociocultural impacts of their food choices, and their influences on health and wellbeing, when they travel, they pay less attention to the sustainability of their food experiences. Following a healthy diet has been reported as something that requires investment and, while they are willing to invest in a sustainable future in their daily lifestyles, they see tourism as an escape from the routine and are more flexible when they travel (RQ2).

The type of food supply largely impacts the food tourism motivation and experiences of Generation Z individuals. This refers to both home and tourist food consumption. From a home perspective, results show that where you live (for example, rural area vs. urban area) and also the culinary traditions of their relatives (for example, a diet based on meat products) influence their current ethical actions in relation to food behaviour. In this sense, the participants have reported that when they travel, the food supply also impacts their decision. While the availability of dining options is wide, Generation Z travellers search for experiences that engage them with local food, as a form of cultural preservation and local people – both from the perspective of local knowledge and local service. In addition, while they have acknowledged that it depends on the country they visit (some countries promote more sustainable food than others), the price of the dining services is critical to choosing local or global options (RQ3).

Results have shown that, given the sample of respondents' social media usage, social media has a huge impact on the food consumption of Generation Z people. Generation Z travellers rely on social media influencers, and they trust the food experiences recommended by the social media accounts they follow (RQ4). Previous research is linked to this conclusion, highlighting that influencers have the potential to change people perspectives and behaviours in ways that are beneficial to the environment (Kamel, 2020). Some of the examples show that these experiences offer a combination of tradition and innovation, but always lead to processes of co-creation through personal experiences. While this is clearly a driver of food tourism motivation, it is not necessarily a source of sustainable consumption for the reasons explained in the previous paragraphs.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This research provides a timely and innovative approach, considering the theoretical model presented to the understanding of the relationships between food consumption and tourism based on the experiences of Generation Z people. From a theoretical perspective, this paper expands the role of social media influencers as a source of tourism information with an effect on travel decision processes (Pop *et al.*, 2022) and reveals that environmental knowledge does not necessarily impact on ethical actions. The influencers' sustainable behaviours inspire sustainable lifestyles and sustainable choices (see Barbe and Neuburger, 2021) but food-based decisions are highly dependent on personal resources – time and money.

5.2 Practical implications

From a practical perspective, product development and digital marketing strategies around food-based tourism should benefit from the perspectives provided by young people that do not only envision tourism futures but also Earth futures. In this sense, from a destination perspective, it is interesting to target Generation Z individuals based on their limited resources but also their willingness to pay more for sustainable products (Fromm and Read, 2018), keeping in mind that the overuse of "sustainability" may also lead to a sense of mistrust among younger consumers (Lemy, 2016).

Results show that Generation Z travellers look for "local" and they aim to keep away from the "mass" when travelling. However, this is not easy and personal and social challenges are reported (see also Park *et al.*, 2022). Also, the participants show a meaningful awareness of sustainable food practices, which is, for example, manifested in their preference for "fresh ingredients over processed foods" (Critical Vision, 2016, p. 3), reduction of food waste (Goh and Jie, 2019) or their broader interest in ethical consumption (Walters, 2021). A food experience based on the notions of ecologic, natural and organic features of their consciousness, which is, in turn, the driver of their food activism, which has increased as a result of the pandemic (Carolan, 2021) and the challenges in relation to food security (Jamal and Higham, 2021). In this sense, there are different levels of awareness, which is also in line with recent research (Su *et al.*, 2019) and individuals placed different importance on food choices. This has also been observed in this paper, where Generation Z travellers show a commitment to sustainable food consumption in their daily lives (a permanent attitude), which does not tend to be maintained when they travel (a provisional attitude).

5.3 Limitations and further research

This research also has limitations. First, while the sample is formed by 27 individuals, the qualitative design does not allow the generalisation of the results because it is a qualitative study. The results offer a departure point to further analyse the relationships between food consumption at home and food tourism experiences, from the perspective of social media

influencers. In this sense, a quantitative study with a larger sample of individuals would provide more robust results, which would also expand the understanding of the behavioural changes when we eat at home or when we travel. While the results of the paper have revealed the influence of sustainable lifestyles on the sustainable choices of Generation Z when travelling, these do not always happen in the same direction.

Further research should explore the food tourism management and marketing strategies of destinations, at local, regional and national levels, in order to analyse their food tourism competitiveness (Knollenberg *et al.*, 2021), especially in relation to travellers with specific dietary needs and explore further the reasons why Generation Z individuals change their more permanent pro-environmental eating behaviours to provisional – less worrying from an environmental perspective – food consumption experiences when travelling. Further research could also analyse ethical consumption in relation to other products, such as clothing (Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2020), and the role of family businesses on consumer behavior (Bargoni *et al.*, 2023). In this sense, future studies could also develop comparative analyses between generations, and between people with different cultural backgrounds, which would lead to the planning and development of more personalised food tourism experiences that are ethical, conscious and transformative.

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Annex

Birth year	Country	Gender	Diet and lifestyle	Social networks that influence them	Decision-making influence when travelling	Code
1999	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous and high physical exercise	Instagram Tiktok	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices, and I also make the decisions because I travel solo	P1
1995	Spain	Masculine	Omnivorous (low in ultra-processed food)	Instagram Youtube	With my family and friends, and I travel for work, and they consider my opinion and choices	P2
1996	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous and moderate sporting activity	Instagram The Fork	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P3
1995	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous (interest in consuming fruits and vegetables)	Instagram	With my family and friends, and I travel for work, and they consider my opinion and choices	P4
1999	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous	Instagram	With my family and friends, and I travel for work, and they consider my opinion and choices, and I also make the decisions because I travel solo	P5
1996	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous (low in sugars and ultra-processed food at home)	Instagram	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P6
2000	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous	Instagram	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P7
1998	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous	Instagram The Fork TripAdvisor	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P8
1998	Spain	Feminine	Omnivore (low consumption of ultra-processed foods and sugars at home)	Instagram TikTok	With my family and friends and sometimes they consider my opinion and choices and sometimes not, but I always give my opinion	P9

(*continued*)

Table A1.
Participants' profiles

Birth year	Country	Gender	Diet and lifestyle	Social networks that influence them	Decision-making influence when travelling	Code
1998	Spain	Masculine	Omnivorous (Mediterranean) and active life and daily sport	Tripadvisor	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices, and I travel for work, but they don't consider my opinion and choices	P10
1999	Spain	Masculine	Mediterranean (low in ultra-processed foods) and moderate physical exercise	Instagram Tiktok	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P11
1997	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous (low in sugars)	Instragram Tik Tok The Fork	With my family and they consider my opinion and choices	P12
1997	Spain	Masculine	Omnivorous	Instagram	I make the decisions together with the people I travel with	P13
1999	Spain	Masculine	Omnivorous (Mediterranean)	Google Reviews TripAdvisor	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P14
1998	Venezuela	Feminine	Omnivorous and moderate physical exercise	Instagram Tik Tok	With my family and Friends, and I travel for work, and they consider my opinion and choices, and I also make the decisions because I travel solo	P15
1995	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous (Mediterranean)	Instagram TripAdvisor	I make the decisions together with the people I travel with	P16
1997	Spain	Feminine	Flexitarian (Mediterranean)	Google Maps Google Reviews Instagram TripAdvisor	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices, and I also make the decisions because I travel solo	P17
2000	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous	Instagram	I make the decisions together with the people I travel with	P18
1997	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous (Mediterranean)	Google Reviews Instagram Tik Tok	I make the decisions because I travel solo and I also travel with my partner and we make the decisions together	P19
1998	Romania	Feminine	Omnivorous	Facebook Instagram TripAdvisor	With my friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P20

Table A1.

Birth year	Country	Gender	Diet and lifestyle	Social networks that influence them	Decision-making influence when travelling	Code
1999	Spain	Masculine	Omnivorous and high physical exercise	Instagram	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P21
2000	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous and moderate physical exercise	Instagram Tik Tok	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P22
2000	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous	Google Reviews Instagram	With my family and they consider my opinion and choices	P23
1999	Spain	Feminine	Flexitarian (no meat but fish, low in ultra-processed foods)	Facebook Instagram	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P24
1997	Spain	Feminine	Omnivorous and sedentary	Instagram	With my family and friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P25
1995	China	Feminine	Omnivorous	Google Reviews Instagram Weibo	With my friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P26
1996	China	Feminine	Omnivorous (low in sugar and fat)	Google Maps	With my friends and they consider my opinion and choices	P27

Source(s): Authors work

Table A1.

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