

An Empirical Study of Tourist Experience, Perceived Value, and Satisfaction among Generation Z Tourists in the Nilgiris District

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Abstract

Generation Z represents an increasingly important segment of the tourism market, with destination evaluations shaped by the quality of experiences and the value obtained during travel. This study examines the influence of Tourist Experience and Perceived Value on Tourist Satisfaction among Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu, India. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 180 Generation Z tourists who had visited the Nilgiris District using a structured questionnaire. Tourist Experience, Perceived Value, and Tourist Satisfaction were measured using five-item scales. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's correlation, and multiple linear regression. The results demonstrate that Tourist Experience has a significant positive relationship with Tourist Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.351$, $p < .001$), while Perceived Value has a stronger positive relationship with Tourist Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.487$, $p < .001$). The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 177) = 103.403$, $p < .001$, and Tourist Experience and Perceived Value jointly explained 53.9% of the variance in Tourist Satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.539$). The findings indicate that Generation Z tourists evaluate the Nilgiris through both experiential and value-oriented perspectives, with Perceived Value emerging as the stronger predictor of satisfaction within the study sample. The study contributes destination-specific evidence to Generation Z tourism research and highlights the importance of developing memorable, accessible, convenient, and value-oriented tourism experiences in the Nilgiris. The findings provide useful implications for destination managers, tourism businesses, hospitality providers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen visitor satisfaction among younger tourists.

Keywords: Generation Z, Tourist Experience, Perceived Value, Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Experience, Youth Tourism, Nilgiris District

1. Introduction

Tourism has increasingly evolved from a product-oriented activity into an experience-driven form of consumption in which visitors seek meaningful, memorable, and personally satisfying encounters with destinations. Contemporary tourists evaluate destinations not only on the basis of physical attractions but also through the quality of interactions, emotions, activities, authenticity, accessibility, and overall value generated during the journey. Tourist experience therefore represents an important determinant of post-visit evaluations and behavioural responses. Earlier tourism research established that experience quality can influence perceived value, satisfaction, and subsequent behavioural intentions, providing a foundation for understanding tourism as a holistic consumption experience (Chen &

Chen, 2010; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). More recent evidence similarly demonstrates that positive tourist experiences can contribute to satisfaction and loyalty through emotional and experiential mechanisms (Bagheri et al., 2024).

This transformation is particularly significant for Generation Z, whose travel behaviour differs in several respects from that of previous generations. Generation Z tourists are generally more digitally connected, experience-oriented, and influenced by contemporary forms of information exchange and social interaction. Their travel decisions may be shaped by social media, peer-generated content, destination experiences, affordability, cultural encounters, and opportunities for personal discovery. Agustina and Astari (2022) highlight changes in travel microtrends associated with Generation Z, while Akgiş İlhan et al. (2023), based on qualitative evidence from young tourists, demonstrate that Gen Z travellers attach importance to escaping everyday routines, managing travel budgets, and experiencing cultural, historical, architectural, and culinary elements. Similarly, Liu et al. (2023) show that social media marketing activities can influence the travel behaviour of Generation Z. These findings suggest that understanding Gen Z tourists requires attention to the complete experience they obtain at a destination rather than focusing exclusively on conventional destination attributes.

An important dimension of tourism evaluation is perceived value, which refers to tourists' overall assessment of what they receive relative to the resources they sacrifice, including monetary cost, time, effort, and psychological investment. Zeithaml's (1988) conceptualization established perceived value as a comparison between perceived benefits and perceived sacrifices, while subsequent tourism research demonstrated its relevance to satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Gallarza and Saura (2006) identified relationships among value dimensions, satisfaction, and loyalty in tourism, and Chen and Chen (2010) demonstrated that experience quality and perceived value are closely associated with tourist satisfaction. More recent empirical studies reinforce this relationship. Su et al. (2021) found that perceived value plays an important mediating role in explaining tourist satisfaction, while Carrascosa-López et al. (2021) reported significant relationships between perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty in an ecotourism context. Similarly, Dewi et al. (2022) established the relevance of experience quality and perceived value in explaining tourist satisfaction and behavioural intention.

Tourist satisfaction represents another central outcome of destination evaluation. Satisfaction develops from tourists' comparison of their expectations with their actual experiences and perceived outcomes (Oliver, 1980). In tourism, satisfaction is particularly important because it can influence destination evaluation, loyalty, recommendations, and future behavioural intentions. Recent studies demonstrate that experience quality and perceived value continue to be important predictors of satisfaction across different tourism settings. Rehman et al. (2023) found that tourist experience quality and related value perceptions significantly contribute to tourist satisfaction, while Yu et al. (2023) demonstrated the importance of perceived value and satisfaction in tourism experiences. Yayla et al. (2023) further showed that experience quality can affect perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions. These findings collectively indicate that experience and value should be examined together rather than treated as isolated components of tourism consumption.

The issue assumes particular importance in the context of the Nilgiris District, a prominent hill tourism destination in Tamil Nadu characterized by scenic landscapes, pleasant climatic conditions, biodiversity, heritage attractions, tea plantations, indigenous cultural elements, and nature-based tourism opportunities. Such characteristics provide a diverse experiential environment for young tourists. However, the experiences of Generation Z tourists cannot necessarily be inferred from studies conducted among general tourist populations or in other geographical settings. Existing literature has examined Gen Z tourism behaviour, experience, sustainability, and digital influences across different destinations, but there remains scope for destination-specific empirical evidence concerning how tourist experience and perceived value jointly contribute to satisfaction among Generation Z visitors.

The present study therefore focuses on Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District and empirically examines the relationships among tourist experience, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction. By concentrating on a specific destination and a clearly defined generational segment, the study seeks to extend existing tourism research beyond general tourist populations and provide destination-level evidence on the factors shaping Gen Z satisfaction. The findings are expected to provide useful implications for destination managers, tourism businesses, hospitality providers, and

policymakers seeking to design experiences and value propositions that better correspond to the expectations of younger tourists. The study consequently contributes to the growing literature on experience-based tourism by examining whether the quality of the tourist experience and the value perceived by Generation Z visitors translate into higher levels of satisfaction in the Nilgiris District.

2. Review of Literature

Tourist experience has become a central concept in contemporary tourism research because visitors increasingly evaluate destinations according to the experiences they obtain rather than merely the physical attributes of a destination. Otto and Ritchie (1996) established that tourism experiences contain affective, cognitive, and behavioural elements that distinguish tourism services from routine consumption experiences. This perspective was subsequently strengthened by Chen and Chen (2010), who demonstrated that experience quality is closely associated with perceived value and satisfaction among heritage tourists. Their findings indicate that the quality of experiences generated during a visit can influence tourists' evaluations of what they receive from a destination and their overall satisfaction. Thus, tourist experience can be regarded as an important antecedent of tourists' subsequent evaluations.

Recent research has extended the experience perspective by examining how different dimensions of tourism experiences contribute to satisfaction and behavioural outcomes. Bagheri et al. (2024) found that tourist experiences can influence satisfaction and loyalty, with well-being playing an important role in the relationship. This finding suggests that tourists' evaluations are not restricted to functional benefits but can also involve emotional and psychological outcomes. Similarly, Yayla et al. (2023) reported significant relationships among experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions. These findings provide empirical support for considering experience quality as an important component in explaining tourist satisfaction.

The significance of tourist experience becomes particularly relevant when examining Generation Z, a cohort whose tourism behaviour is strongly influenced by digital connectivity, social interaction, and changing consumption preferences. Agustina and Astari (2022) observed that Generation Z has contributed to emerging travel microtrends and changing patterns of tourism consumption. Akgış İlhan et al. (2023) examined Generation Z tourist experiences and highlighted the importance of diverse experiential elements, including cultural, historical, culinary, architectural, and recreational encounters. Their findings suggest that young tourists construct destination experiences through multiple dimensions rather than evaluating destinations solely according to conventional tourism attractions. Liu et al. (2023) further demonstrated that social media marketing activities can shape Generation Z travel behaviour, indicating that digital environments have become increasingly connected with the tourism decision-making process.

Generation Z's tourism preferences have also been examined from the perspective of sustainability and responsible travel. Salinero et al. (2022) identified internal and external factors influencing pro-sustainable tourism behaviour among Generation Z, while Ribeiro et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of green consumption values in explaining young tourists' environmental travel behaviour. Although these studies primarily focus on sustainability rather than satisfaction, they demonstrate that Generation Z tourists may evaluate tourism experiences through broader personal and social values. For destinations such as the Nilgiris, where nature-based, cultural, and environmentally sensitive tourism resources are important, understanding these characteristics may be particularly relevant.

A second important construct in tourism research is perceived value. Zeithaml (1988) conceptualized perceived value as an overall evaluation resulting from the comparison between benefits received and sacrifices made. In tourism, such sacrifices may include monetary expenditure, time, effort, inconvenience, and psychological costs, whereas benefits can include entertainment, learning, emotional enjoyment, social interaction, and destination experiences. Gallarza and Saura (2006) demonstrated the multidimensional nature of perceived value and established its relationship with satisfaction and loyalty in tourism. Chen and Chen (2010) similarly showed that perceived value forms an important link between experience quality and tourists' subsequent evaluations.

Contemporary empirical research provides further evidence regarding the importance of perceived value. Su et al. (2021) found that perceived value can mediate the relationship between tourism-related characteristics and tourist satisfaction, demonstrating that tourists' assessment of the benefits

obtained during a trip is important for understanding satisfaction formation. Carrascosa-López et al. (2021), in an ecotourism context, reported a significant relationship between perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty. Pujiastuti et al. (2021) also emphasized the role of perceived value in understanding tourist experiences and post-experience responses at heritage destinations. These findings collectively indicate that tourists may evaluate an experience more positively when the benefits generated by the destination are perceived to justify the resources invested in the visit.

Research conducted in more recent tourism contexts further supports the relationship between experience, value, and satisfaction. Dewi et al. (2022) found that experience quality and perceived value significantly contribute to tourist satisfaction and behavioural intention. Kumar and Lata (2022) similarly examined experience quality, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction in natural tourism settings, demonstrating the relevance of these constructs in environmentally oriented destinations. Rehman et al. (2023) found that tourist experience quality and perceived price reasonableness are associated with tourist satisfaction, emphasizing that both experiential and economic evaluations can influence tourists' overall assessments. Yu et al. (2023) further demonstrated a significant relationship between perceived value and tourist satisfaction in the context of Buddhist temple tourism. These studies suggest that perceived value provides an important mechanism through which tourists translate their experiences into overall satisfaction.

Tourist satisfaction represents the final core construct in the present study. Oliver (1980) proposed that satisfaction emerges from consumers' evaluation of outcomes in relation to their expectations. In tourism, satisfaction can consequently be understood as a post-consumption assessment of whether the destination experience has fulfilled or exceeded tourists' expectations. Earlier research by Chen and Chen (2010) established connections among experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions, while more recent evidence continues to support these relationships. Bagheri et al. (2024) demonstrated that positive tourist experiences can enhance satisfaction and loyalty, whereas Regalado-Pezúa et al. (2023) identified significant relationships between perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty in cultural coastal tourism.

The reviewed literature reveals that tourist experience, perceived value, and satisfaction are closely interconnected. However, much of the existing research has examined general tourist populations or specific tourism settings outside India. Although recent studies have increasingly addressed Generation Z tourism behaviour, relatively limited empirical attention has been given to the combined relationship between tourist experience, perceived value, and satisfaction among Generation Z tourists within a specific Indian hill destination. This provides a meaningful basis for examining these constructs in the Nilgiris District. The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on Generation Z visitors and investigating whether the quality of their tourism experiences and their perceived value of the destination significantly influence their satisfaction.

3. Research Gap

Existing tourism research has established that tourist experience and perceived value are important determinants of tourist satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Gallarza & Saura, 2006). Recent studies further demonstrate that experience quality, perceived value, and satisfaction remain closely connected across different tourism contexts (Bagheri et al., 2024; Carrascosa-López et al., 2021; Rehman et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2023). However, much of the available evidence focuses on general tourist populations or destinations outside India.

Recent research has increasingly examined Generation Z travel behaviour, particularly its digital engagement, changing travel preferences, and sustainability orientation (Agustina & Astari, 2022; Akgiş İlhan et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2023). Nevertheless, comparatively limited attention has been given to how tourist experience and perceived value jointly influence satisfaction among Generation Z tourists within a specific Indian destination. In particular, destination-specific empirical evidence concerning Generation Z visitors to the Nilgiris District remains limited.

The Nilgiris offers a distinctive combination of natural, cultural, recreational, and heritage experiences. These characteristics may influence how young visitors evaluate their experiences and the value obtained from their trips. However, relationships established in other geographical and demographic contexts cannot automatically be generalized to Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris.

Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by empirically examining the influence of tourist experience and perceived value on tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District. The study contributes destination-specific evidence to the growing literature on Generation Z tourism and experience-based destination evaluation.

4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework proposes that Tourist Experience (TE) and Perceived Value (PV) influence Tourist Satisfaction (TS) among Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District. Tourist experience reflects visitors' overall experiential evaluation of their destination visit, whereas perceived value represents their assessment of the benefits received relative to the costs and effort involved. Previous research supports the positive association of both constructs with tourist satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Carrascosa-López et al., 2021; Bagheri et al., 2024).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Target population: Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District.

Hypotheses

H1: Tourist experience has a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District.

H2: Perceived value has a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District.

Model

$$TS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(TE) + \beta_2(PV) + \varepsilon$$

Where **TS** represents tourist satisfaction, **TE** represents tourist experience, and **PV** represents perceived value.

5. Objectives Of The Study

The study aims to examine the factors influencing tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District. The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the level of tourist experience among Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District.

2. To examine the perceived value of the tourism experience among Generation Z tourists.
3. To determine the level of tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District.
4. To examine the relationship between tourist experience and tourist satisfaction.
5. To assess the influence of perceived value on tourist satisfaction.
6. To determine the combined influence of tourist experience and perceived value on tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists.

6. Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the conceptual framework and previous empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Tourist experience has a significant positive influence on tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District.

H2: Perceived value has a significant positive influence on tourist satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District.

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among tourist experience, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction. Primary data were collected from Generation Z tourists who had visited the Nilgiris District.

7.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District. Generation Z respondents were identified according to the age categories represented in the survey. Purposive sampling was employed because participation required respondents to meet the specific criteria of belonging to the target generation and having tourism experience in the Nilgiris District. A total of 180 valid responses were obtained and included in the analysis.

7.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section captured the demographic and travel-related characteristics of respondents, while the second measured the three study constructs: Tourist Experience (TE), Perceived Value (PV), and Tourist Satisfaction (TS). Each construct was measured using five items. Responses were recorded using a Likert-type scale, with higher scores representing more favourable evaluations.

7.4 Measurement of Variables

Tourist Experience (TE) represents respondents' overall evaluation of the experiences obtained during their visit to the Nilgiris. Perceived Value (PV) reflects the respondents' assessment of the benefits received in relation to the monetary, time, effort, and other sacrifices associated with the visit. Tourist Satisfaction (TS) represents the overall evaluation of the tourism experience and the extent to which the visit met respondents' expectations.

7.5 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency and percentage analysis were used to describe the demographic and travel characteristics of respondents. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to assess the central tendency and variability of the major constructs. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency of the measurement items.

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to determine the direction and strength of the relationships among tourist experience, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction. Multiple linear regression analysis was subsequently employed to examine the individual and combined influence of tourist experience and perceived value on tourist satisfaction. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explanatory power of the model, while the ANOVA F-test evaluated the statistical significance of the overall regression model. Regression coefficients (β), t-values, and significance levels (p-values) were used to test H1 and H2.

The regression model was specified as:

$$TS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TE + \beta_2 PV + \varepsilon$$

Where **TS** represents Tourist Satisfaction, **TE** represents Tourist Experience, **PV** represents Perceived Value, β_0 is the constant, β_1 and β_2 are the regression coefficients, and ε represents the error term.

7.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the survey. The information collected was used exclusively for research purposes, and respondent confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

8. Data Analysis and Results

A total of 180 valid responses were included in the analysis. The data were analysed using frequency and percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. Tourist Experience (TE), Perceived Value (PV), and Tourist Satisfaction (TS) were calculated from their respective five-item scales.

8.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 180)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	85	47.2
	Female	90	50.0
	Other	5	2.8
Age Group	18–20	46	25.6
	21–23	75	41.7
	24–26	41	22.8
	27–29	18	10.0
Education	Higher Secondary	11	6.1
	Undergraduate	93	51.7
	Postgraduate	61	33.9
	Other	15	8.3
Occupation	Student	93	51.7
	Employed	52	28.9
	Self-employed	24	13.3
	Other	11	6.1
Monthly Income	Below ₹20,000	82	45.6
	₹20,001–₹40,000	48	26.7
	₹40,001–₹60,000	24	13.3
	Above ₹60,000	26	14.4
Nilgiris Visit Frequency	First visit	93	51.7
	2–3 visits	55	30.6
	4–5 visits	20	11.1
	More than 5	12	6.7
Primary Visit Purpose	Leisure	98	54.4
	Adventure	23	12.8
	Nature/eco-tourism	32	17.8
	Visiting friends/relatives	18	10.0
	Other	9	5.0

Interpretation:

The sample was relatively young, with the largest proportion of respondents belonging to the 21–23 age group (41.7%). Females represented 50.0% of the sample, while males accounted for 47.2%.

More than half of the respondents were undergraduates (51.7%) and students (51.7%). Nearly half reported a monthly income below ₹20,000 (45.6%). First-time visitors represented 51.7% of the sample, and leisure was the most frequently reported purpose of visiting the Nilgiris (54.4%).

8.2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

The reliability and descriptive statistics were calculated directly from the five items measuring each construct.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Tourist Experience (TE)	5	3.561	0.753	0.823
Perceived Value (PV)	5	3.593	0.738	0.814
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	5	3.686	0.799	0.866

Interpretation:

Tourist Satisfaction recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.686$, $SD = 0.799$), followed by Perceived Value ($M = 3.593$, $SD = 0.738$) and Tourist Experience ($M = 3.561$, $SD = 0.753$). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.814 to 0.866, exceeding the commonly accepted minimum of 0.70. The scales therefore demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency.

8.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the associations among the three study constructs.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	Tourist Experience	Perceived Value	Tourist Satisfaction
Tourist Experience	1.000	0.524***	0.606***
Perceived Value	0.524***	1.000	0.670***
Tourist Satisfaction	0.606***	0.670***	1.000

Note: *** $p < .001$.

Interpretation:

Tourist Experience was significantly and positively correlated with Perceived Value ($r = 0.524$, $p < .001$) and Tourist Satisfaction ($r = 0.606$, $p < .001$). Perceived Value showed a significant positive relationship with Tourist Satisfaction ($r = 0.670$, $p < .001$). These results provide preliminary support for the proposed positive relationships in the conceptual framework.

8.4 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was performed to determine whether Tourist Experience and Perceived Value significantly predict Tourist Satisfaction.

Table 4. Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.734	0.539	0.534	0.545

The regression model produced an $R = 0.734$, indicating a substantial overall association between the predictors and Tourist Satisfaction. The R^2 value of 0.539 indicates that Tourist Experience and Perceived Value jointly explain 53.9% of the variance in Tourist Satisfaction. The adjusted R^2 was 0.534.

Table 5. ANOVA of the Regression Model

Model	Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	61.514	2	30.757	103.403	< .001
Residual	52.648	177	0.297		
Total	114.162	179			

Interpretation:

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 177) = 103.403$, $p < .001$. This demonstrates that Tourist Experience and Perceived Value, when considered together, significantly predict Tourist Satisfaction.

Table 6. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	0.467	0.228	—	2.051	.042	—
Tourist Experience	0.372	0.064	0.351	5.854	< .001	1.378
Perceived Value	0.527	0.065	0.487	8.124	< .001	1.378

Interpretation:

Tourist Experience had a significant positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction ($B = 0.372$, $\beta = 0.351$, $t = 5.854$, $p < .001$). Therefore, an increase in Tourist Experience was associated with an increase in Tourist Satisfaction.

Perceived Value also had a statistically significant positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction ($B = 0.527$, $\beta = 0.487$, $t = 8.124$, $p < .001$). The standardized coefficient was higher for Perceived Value than for Tourist Experience, indicating that Perceived Value was the stronger predictor of Tourist Satisfaction in the regression model.

Both VIF values were 1.378, indicating no problematic multicollinearity between the independent variables.

Regression Equation

The estimated regression equation is:

$$\text{Tourist Satisfaction} = 0.467 + 0.372(\text{Tourist Experience}) + 0.527(\text{Perceived Value})$$

8.5 Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t	p	Decision
H1	Tourist Experience $\rightarrow$ Tourist Satisfaction	0.351	5.854	< .001	Supported
H2	Perceived Value $\rightarrow$ Tourist Satisfaction	0.487	8.124	< .001	Supported

Note: Significance level = 5%.

Interpretation of Hypothesis Testing

H1: Tourist Experience has a significant positive influence on Tourist Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.351$, $p < .001$). Therefore, **H1 is supported**.

H2: Perceived Value has a significant positive influence on Tourist Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.487$, $p < .001$). Therefore, **H2 is supported**.

Perceived Value has the larger standardized coefficient, suggesting that it makes a relatively stronger contribution to explaining Tourist Satisfaction than Tourist Experience within the present sample.

8.6 Summary of Findings

Table 8. Summary of Major Statistical Findings

Analysis	Result	Conclusion
Tourist Experience	M = 3.561, SD = 0.753	Favourable evaluation
Perceived Value	M = 3.593, SD = 0.738	Favourable evaluation
Tourist Satisfaction	M = 3.686, SD = 0.799	Highest construct mean
TE Reliability	$\alpha = 0.823$	Reliable
PV Reliability	$\alpha = 0.814$	Reliable
TS Reliability	$\alpha = 0.866$	Reliable
TE–PV	$r = 0.524, p < .001$	Significant positive relationship
TE–TS	$r = 0.606, p < .001$	Significant positive relationship
PV–TS	$r = 0.670, p < .001$	Significant positive relationship
Regression Model	$R^2 = 0.539$	53.9% variance explained
Overall Model	$F(2,177) = 103.403, p < .001$	Significant
H1	$\beta = 0.351, p < .001$	Supported
H2	$\beta = 0.487, p < .001$	Supported

9. Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among Tourist Experience, Perceived Value, and Tourist Satisfaction among Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District. The findings provide consistent evidence that both Tourist Experience and Perceived Value are important determinants of satisfaction. The regression model was statistically significant, with Tourist Experience and Perceived Value jointly explaining 53.9% of the variance in Tourist Satisfaction. Both proposed relationships were supported, although Perceived Value demonstrated a comparatively stronger effect.

The first hypothesis proposed that Tourist Experience positively influences Tourist Satisfaction. The results supported this relationship ($\beta = 0.351, p < .001$). This finding indicates that Gen Z visitors who perceive their experiences in the Nilgiris more positively are more likely to report higher satisfaction. The result is consistent with the experience-based perspective of tourism, which considers tourism consumption as a combination of functional, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural encounters rather than simply the consumption of destination facilities. Chen and Chen (2010) similarly established a relationship between experience quality, perceived value, and satisfaction, while Otto and Ritchie (1996) emphasized the distinctive experiential character of tourism services. More recent evidence from Bagheri et al. (2024) also demonstrates that positive tourist experiences can contribute to satisfaction and loyalty through experiential and well-being-related mechanisms. The present finding extends this evidence to Generation Z tourists in a specific Indian hill destination.

The importance of Tourist Experience is particularly relevant for Generation Z because this group tends to seek varied, engaging, and personally meaningful travel encounters. Akgiş İlhan et al. (2023) identified multiple dimensions of Gen Z tourist experiences, including cultural, historical, architectural, culinary, and recreational elements. Agustina and Astari (2022) similarly reported changing travel patterns and microtrends among Generation Z. Therefore, the significant relationship identified in the present study suggests that the Nilgiris should be viewed not merely as a scenic destination but as an experiential tourism environment in which nature, culture, recreation, hospitality, and local interaction collectively shape visitor satisfaction.

The second hypothesis proposed that Perceived Value positively influences Tourist Satisfaction. This relationship was stronger than the effect of Tourist Experience ($\beta = 0.487, p < .001$), indicating that Gen Z tourists' assessment of whether the benefits of visiting the Nilgiris justify their expenditure, time, effort, and other sacrifices is particularly important in determining satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the value perspective proposed by Zeithaml (1988), in which perceived value reflects

the consumer's overall assessment of benefits relative to sacrifices. Gallarza and Saura (2006) similarly established the importance of value perceptions in tourism evaluation.

The finding is also supported by recent empirical research. Su et al. (2021) demonstrated the importance of perceived value in explaining tourist satisfaction, while Carrascosa-López et al. (2021) found significant relationships between perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty in ecotourism. Dewi et al. (2022) further reported that experience quality and perceived value contribute to tourist satisfaction and behavioural intention. Likewise, Yu et al. (2023) identified perceived value as an important component of tourist evaluation in a cultural tourism setting. The stronger coefficient for Perceived Value in the present study suggests that attractive experiences alone may not guarantee high satisfaction if tourists perceive the overall cost, convenience, service quality, and benefits to be unbalanced.

The correlation results provide additional support for the proposed conceptual framework. Tourist Experience was positively associated with Perceived Value ($r = 0.524$, $p < .001$), while both Tourist Experience ($r = 0.606$, $p < .001$) and Perceived Value ($r = 0.670$, $p < .001$) were significantly associated with Tourist Satisfaction. These relationships indicate that experience and value are interconnected components of destination evaluation. A favourable experience may enhance tourists' perception of the value received, while a strong perception of value can reinforce the overall evaluation of the destination.

The findings are particularly relevant to the Nilgiris because the destination offers a combination of natural landscapes, tea plantations, biodiversity, cultural attractions, heritage resources, and recreational opportunities. For Generation Z, these resources can become more meaningful when they are presented through interactive and memorable experiences. At the same time, the relatively stronger role of Perceived Value suggests that destination stakeholders need to ensure that these experiences are accessible, reasonably priced, convenient, and perceived as worthwhile.

Overall, the results support an integrated interpretation in which satisfaction among Gen Z tourists is shaped by both experiential quality and value assessment. The findings therefore strengthen the argument that destinations seeking to attract younger tourists should move beyond attraction-based promotion and develop coherent experience and value propositions.

10. Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to tourism literature in three principal ways. First, it reinforces the experience-based view of tourism by demonstrating that Tourist Experience has a significant positive relationship with Tourist Satisfaction among Generation Z visitors. This supports earlier conceptualizations of tourism as an experiential form of consumption and extends them to a younger generational segment. Second, the findings reinforce the theoretical importance of Perceived Value in tourism satisfaction formation. The stronger standardized coefficient for Perceived Value indicates that value assessment may be particularly influential in the context of Gen Z travel. The findings therefore support the proposition that tourists evaluate destinations through a comparison of benefits and sacrifices rather than through experience alone.

Third, the study integrates Tourist Experience, Perceived Value, and Tourist Satisfaction within a destination-specific framework. Much of the existing literature examines these constructs separately or uses broad tourist populations. By focusing on Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District, the study provides a more focused application of established tourism theories to a contemporary visitor segment and an Indian hill destination.

11. Practical Implications for Nilgiris Tourism

The findings provide several practical implications for tourism stakeholders in the Nilgiris. First, destination managers should prioritize the creation of memorable and participatory experiences for Generation Z. Nature walks, tea-estate experiences, local food activities, cultural encounters, photography opportunities, adventure activities, and heritage interpretation can be developed as integrated experiential products.

Second, the stronger effect of Perceived Value indicates the importance of providing tourists with a clear sense of value for money. Tourism providers should maintain transparent pricing, reduce unnecessary service charges, improve package design, and combine accommodation, transportation, attractions, and activities where appropriate.

Third, digital communication should be used to communicate the experiential and value benefits of the destination. Gen Z tourists are highly connected to digital information environments, making social media, short-form videos, user-generated content, and interactive destination information useful promotional tools. Liu et al. (2023) demonstrate the relevance of social media marketing activities to Gen Z travel behaviour.

Fourth, tourism stakeholders should strengthen service consistency across accommodation, transportation, attractions, restaurants, and visitor facilities. A high-quality attraction may not produce satisfaction if supporting services create inconvenience or additional perceived costs.

Finally, sustainable tourism practices should be integrated into the visitor experience. Since Gen Z tourism research increasingly highlights sustainability and responsible travel behaviour (Salinero et al., 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2023), conservation-oriented experiences can simultaneously enhance destination responsibility and visitor engagement.

12. Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was restricted to Generation Z tourists visiting the Nilgiris District; therefore, the findings should not automatically be generalized to tourists of other generations or destinations. Second, the study used a cross-sectional research design, meaning that the relationships identified represent respondents' perceptions at one point in time. Changes in destination conditions or tourists' experiences over time could produce different results.

Third, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire responses. Such responses may be influenced by individual perceptions, temporary emotions, recall limitations, or response tendencies. Fourth, the model focused primarily on Tourist Experience, Perceived Value, and Tourist Satisfaction. Other factors such as destination image, service quality, perceived authenticity, social media influence, sustainability perceptions, and revisit intention were not included. Finally, the study's sample size of 180 respondents provides useful empirical evidence but may limit the statistical generalizability of the findings to the entire Gen Z tourist population.

13. Future Research

Future studies can extend the present framework by incorporating additional variables such as destination image, perceived authenticity, service quality, tourist engagement, destination attachment, sustainability perceptions, and revisit intention. Researchers could also examine whether Perceived Value mediates the relationship between Tourist Experience and Tourist Satisfaction, providing a more detailed explanation of the mechanism through which experiences generate satisfaction.

Comparative research involving Generation Z and other generational cohorts could identify whether the determinants of satisfaction differ across age groups. Future studies may also compare the Nilgiris with other hill destinations in India to determine whether the observed relationships are destination-specific or broadly applicable. Longitudinal research could examine how tourists' evaluations change before, during, and after their visits. In addition, qualitative or mixed-method research could provide deeper insight into the specific experiences that Gen Z tourists consider memorable and valuable.

Future research may also examine the role of digital platforms and social media content in shaping destination expectations and post-visit evaluations. Given the increasing relevance of sustainability among young travellers, future models could further investigate whether environmental consciousness moderates the relationship between tourism experience, perceived value, and satisfaction.

14. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of Tourist Experience and Perceived Value on Tourist Satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in the Nilgiris District. The findings demonstrate that both factors significantly contribute to satisfaction. Tourist Experience had a significant positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.351$, $p < .001$), while Perceived Value demonstrated a stronger positive effect ($\beta = 0.487$, $p < .001$). Together, the two predictors explained 53.9% of the variance in Tourist Satisfaction. The results indicate that Gen Z tourists evaluate the Nilgiris through both experiential and value-based perspectives. Attractive and meaningful experiences contribute to positive destination evaluations, but tourists' assessment of whether the benefits received justify the associated costs and effort appears to be even more influential. This finding highlights the importance of developing tourism offerings that

combine memorable experiences with affordability, convenience, service quality, and meaningful visitor benefits.

The study contributes to the growing literature on Generation Z tourism by providing destination-specific empirical evidence from the Nilgiris District. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that tourism stakeholders should develop experience-rich, digitally visible, sustainable, and value-oriented tourism products. Such an approach can help the Nilgiris strengthen its appeal among younger tourists while supporting more satisfying and sustainable destination experiences.

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