Agata Niemczyk
Krakow University of Economics (Poland, 0000-0002-5594-6296)
Magdalena Wawoczny
Krakow University of Economics (Poland, 0000-0002-8504-8358)

The Role of Coffee Shops in Meeting the Tourist Needs of Representatives of Generation Z

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of the article is to identify the role of coffee shops in meeting the tourist needs of representatives of Generation Z. The starting point is a discussion of the place of tourism in the hierarchy of human needs and the mechanisms of making decisions in the tourist market. In the following section, Generation Z is characterised with its values, lifestyle, expectations of travel and how it uses food services. Special attention is paid to the role of gastronomy, especially coffee shops, which are increasingly becoming not only a place of consumption, but also an important part of the tourist experience, a space for social integration and an environment conducive to social media content creation. The study uses the diagnostic survey method with a survey questionnaire. The research sample included 255 Polish students belonging to Generation Z. The results of the survey may provide guidance for food service operators, especially in adapting their offers to the needs of young tourists. The practical implications include the potential for the development of the so-called coffee tourism as a new form of travel activity. The originality of the article lies in combining the gastronomy and tourism perspectives in the context of younger generation behaviour, and addressing the rarely analysed topic of coffee tourism as an emerging trend among Generation Z representatives.

Keywords: tourist needs, Generation Z, coffee tourism, coffee shops, catering establishments

JEL ClassIfication: Z31, Z32, M31

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Introduction

Coffee is never *just coffee* – it is both a cultural and everyday product, the way it is brewed, served and consumed reflecting both local traditions and individual lifestyles. The type of grain, roasting method, preparation method, additives and even the form of the cup: each of these elements carries a specific symbolic, social and aesthetic message. The choice of coffee may be an expression of taste, cultural capital, generational affiliation or aspirations (Morris, 2013, p. 883).

Contemporary research on coffee culture is increasingly considering its importance in the context of tourism, especially among the representatives of Generation Z, that is tourists raised in the era of widespread digitisation, mobility and personalisation of experiences. Previous analyses emphasise the role of coffee shops as a social space, where coffee consumption is combined with relationship building, the search for aesthetics and a moment of respite. Coffee culture also permeates the lifestyle of Generation Z in the context of travel, as part of everyday life *transferred* to new places.

Although the role of gastronomy in tourism has been widely described in the literature, and the importance of coffee as a cultural product is clearly recognised, there is a lack of in-depth research on how young tourists from Europe, and Poland in particular, perceive a coffee shop and its fundamental product, coffee, as part of the tourist experience. Previous studies focused on research from Asian countries, overlooking the European context where coffee culture is also growing rapidly.

The purpose of this article is to identify the role of coffee shops in meeting the tourist needs of Generation Z representatives from Poland. The conducted analysis allowed us to answer such questions as: how young tourists perceive the ritual of drinking coffee outside the everyday context, what are their motivations and preferences for choosing a coffee shop, and whether the experience is local and authentic for them, or rather global and commercial. The article is an attempt to fill the research gap concerning the European perspective on coffee tourism among the young generation in the context of mobility.

The structure of the article includes a theoretical part, which discusses the role of tourism in meeting human needs, the determinants of consumer decisions in the context of travel, the characteristics of Generation Z, and the importance of catering establishments and coffee shops in tourist spaces. The next section presents the research methodology, the results of the empirical analysis and their interpretation in the context of the literature on the subject. It ends with conclusions and possible directions for further action on the discussed topic.

Literature review

Tourism in the hierarchy of human needs

A need is defined as the awareness of the lack of something necessary for the proper functioning of a person or something that is a mere craving. Desires are subject to hierarchy and are related to physiology, security, affinity, respect, recognition, self-realisation, gaining knowledge, understanding the world and aesthetics. Their satisfaction involves the consumption of goods and services (Lubaś, 2020, pp. 238-239).

Tourist needs are understood as those *personal* needs *related to the realisation of leisure functions (rest outside the place of* *permanent residence), material and spiritual needs, as well as those related to material goods and services, higher-order and luxury needs, mass and universal needs, although characterised by high individualisation in satisfaction* (Łazarek, 2001, p. 230). Tourist needs are usually analysed with reference to A.H. Maslow's pyramid, as they can be attributed to the counterparts of the above-mentioned human needs. It follows that the base of the pyramid of tourist needs is occupied by the change in the environment which is a condition for the existence of tourism. The next levels are occupied by accommodation, insurance, food, tourist values, mental and physical regeneration, experiences and dreams (Bali-ńska & Stępniak, 2012).

Tourist needs have long since ceased to be considered as those of a higher order, i.e. those whose satisfaction makes it possible to have a discretionary fund. According to Statistics Poland, in 2023, a single household participated, on average, in as many as three tourist trips, and the representatives of Generation Z participated in at least one trip (Statistics Poland, 2024, p. 18). One may venture to say that tourism has become an immanent human need (Seweryn et al., 2024). This regularity was particularly highlighted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, when restrictions that were imposed around the world banned travel. Although, from the psychological point of view, what is forbidden is most desirable and few trips actually took place, the isolation, as well as the fear, triggered an even stronger impulse to travel. As a result, in 2024 the number of international trips almost reached the level of 2019, which was the best period in that regard on the tourist market (UN, 2025). Thus tourism, which is now undeniably constituting one of the basic elements of modern civilisation's existence, can be seen as a response to the basic needs mentioned above; it has a positive impact on physical health and, above all, mental health, changes the way of thinking and attitude towards oneself, and provides intellectual and emotional develop-ment (Karczewski, 2013).

The needs of tourists are not homogeneous in nature, so the tourist product is generally complex, a combination of multiple utilities, a package composed in terms of identified consumer needs (Olearnik, 2016, p. 11). These needs change frequently, making the tourist market dynamic. Until recently, the tourist demand was shaped by supply, but now a reverse relationship is being observed. This is due to changes in the tourist demand. Today's tourists are more aware and confident of their needs, have the necessary knowledge, know how to satisfy them, and have higher incomes at their disposal. What is equally important is that they also have the freedom to choose travel products that will best satisfy their desires. The supply side, in turn, is forced to constantly search for market niches and enter into constant competition (Balińska & Stępniak, 2012, pp. 324-325).

It seems reasonable to conclude that, in addition to personal, demographic or biological characteristics, the modern needs of tourist market consumers are created by social trends and lifestyles (Lubowiecki-Vikuk, 2018, p. 10). Recently, there has been a transformation of patterns of behaviour on the tourist market that reflects the needs of an individual in the society (Wieczorek, 2020, p. 104). As a result, traditional leisure activities, focused mainly on physical and mental regeneration, are giving way to more individualised and diverse forms of travel, such as e.g. slow travel, wellness tourism and culinary tourism.

In times of excess, when daily functioning is dictated by ever-increasing globalisation, development of urban agglomerations and fast-paced lifestyles, slow tourism becomes the answer to the need to slow down and unwind, resulting from the increasing pace of life and chronic overstimulation. It also provides an alternative to mass tourism, away from noise, pollution and over-consumption. It includes various forms of travel and involves travelling short distances, using alternative means of transportation that are safe for the environment, and close contact with the natural, cultural and social environment. The term *slow* has become synonymous with quality resulting from sensitivity and attentiveness (Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2020, pp. 469-473). Leading a fast-paced lifestyle brings to light the need to take care of one's health, appearance and fitness. The consumers' health-seeking behaviour affects tourist trips, resulting in the development of wellness and medical tourism. There is also the issue of nutritional needs and the quality of products consumed during the trip. In this context, culinary tourism is gaining momentum, with its various forms allowing for the exploration of new flavours, dishes, food rituals, but, above all, experiencing the authentic contact with the culture of the visited place.

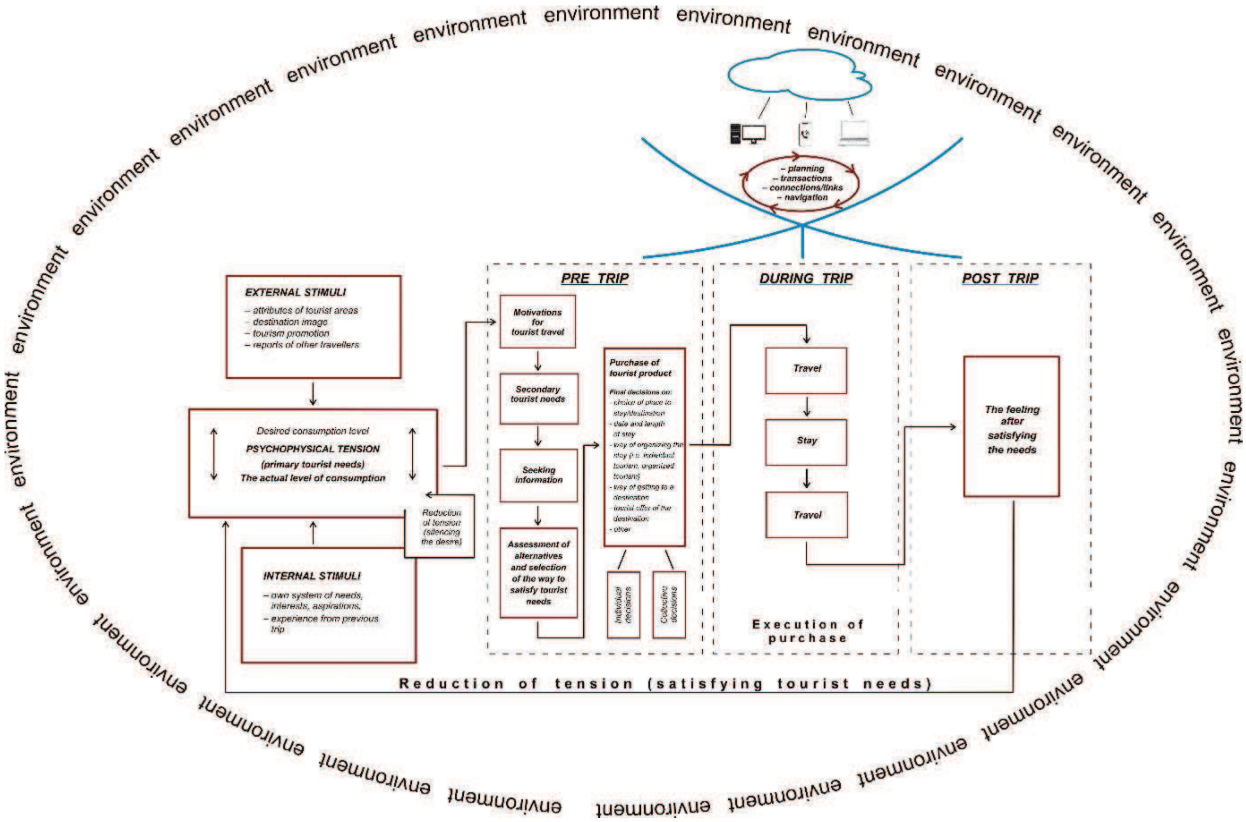
The above-mentioned examples of trends influencing the style and quality of life of modern tourists not only satisfy the needs for a change of environment, rest and recovery, but, above all, those of belonging, identity and image. People manifest social needs: they want to realise themselves for others and be accepted or perceived in a particular way. Tourism is a tool for building social prestige, self-esteem and self-expression. Being a tourist today *is one of the markers of being modern. Not going anywhere is like not having a car or a nice house. In modern society, tourism has become a status symbol and, at the same time, it is considered a condition of health* (Urry, 2007, p. 17).

Decision-making process of consumers on the tourism market

People have to make decisions almost all the time. The decision-making process boils down to an individual considering whether they really need a particular purchase at a particular time. In this way, they create a certain hierarchy and determine which goods or services are more important to them and which they want to realise first. These decisions usually involve identifying needs, available financial resources and how to use them to meet those needs.

The literature discusses several stages in the decision-making process in the context of tourist travel: it begins with the realisation of the need to travel, followed by the search for information, the comparison of possible options, the selection of one of them, and finally post-return reflections related to whether the trip met one's expectations. This pattern of activity, from the first thought of a tourist trip to the memories afterwards, can be divided into three stages: the imagined trip, the actual trip and the recollected trip (figure 1).

Figure 1. The Travel Decision-Making Process and its Stages



Source: own study.

The diagram shown in Figure 1 illustrates the complete travel decision-making process. It shows how, from the moment the need to go on a trip arises, through the analysis of possible options, to the memories afterwards, the individual goes through the decision-making stages. The process begins with stimuli which can be external (e.g. the destination's tourist advantages, its image, promotion and the opinions of other visitors) or internal (personal needs, dreams, previous experiences). They result in psychophysical tension as a result of the discrepancy between current and expected levels of satisfaction. This actually leads to feeling the need to go on a trip, be it for leisure, learning, cultural or natural purposes. The next step is to seek information. Tourists use a variety of sources, both personal (e.g. recommendations from family or friends) and marketing (brochures, advertisements, the Internet), as well as their own previous experiences. On this basis they evaluate the available options and select the ones that best suit their needs. The decision can be made either individually or collectively, in which case the participants play different roles: initiator, advisor, decision-maker (and at the very moment of purchase and consumption: buyer and user). Ultimately, the consumer determines the place, time and travel arrangements. The actual travel is the moment when the consumer experiences what they had planned earlier, moves around, uses services and experiences emotions. The recollected trip is, in turn, the stage that takes place after returning: a time of reflection, evaluation, and the formation of memories that influence future choices.

The whole process is strongly determined by various factors. Among themendogenous and exogenous determinants can be distinguished. The collection of the former includes an individual's physical characteristics, needs, emotions, motives, preferences, attitudes, perceptions, lifestyle, personality, learning and risk awareness. Exogenous determinants, in turn, can be classified in macro terms such as economic prosperity, integration processes, the political situation, legal regulations, globalisation, technical and technological progress, security, exchange rates, inflation; and in micro terms such as economic, socio-cultural, geographic and demographic factors (Niemczyk, 2016, p. 137).

One of the basic demographic characteristics is age. It determines the individual's belonging to a certain generation, the specifics of which determine consumer behaviour on the tourist market. In that regard, it is reasonable to look at the tourist behaviour of people belonging to Generation Z whose needs and preferences are shaping new trends on the tourist market.

Travel behaviour of Generation Z representatives

Generation Z is represented by people born slightly before or after 2000 (the most commonly adopted period is 1995-2009). These are the people who do not know how to function without new technologies, because they grew up during the global digital revolution. It was characterised by the rapid evolution of the Internet, the popularisation of social media, the mass propagation of e-commerce and e-learning, as well as the ubiquity of electronic devices, including smartphones. Generation Z is distinguished by perseverance, self-awareness, self-confidence and innovation. What is important is that their daily lives are heavily integrated with social media. Through which, they seek approval and recognition, as they interact with their peers in the online space, and maintain contacts and relationships there. They adhere to humanistic values, such as freedom, choice, self-realisation, morality and ethics. They are concerned with the issue of the negative impact of human activities on the environment and climate change (Entina et al., 2021, pp. 131-136). Undoubtedly, all these inventions significantly affect the lifestyle of young people and their needs, including the tourist ones.

The representatives of Generation Z are increasingly playing a significant role in family trip planning and tourism decisions. Their approach is very different from earlier generations; they focus more on accumulating experiences than material possessions. This generation is characterised by great openness to new forms of travel and to the use of new technologies in planning and making their trips. The opinion of others is extremely important to them, they are eager to share their experiences in the online space and, just as often, rely on reviews posted on sites designed for this purpose. The process of searching for information before travelling often relies on social networks. Platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter not only serve as an inspiration, but also play an informative role. This is where young tourists look for inspiration and recommendations, ask for opinions, and share their plans with other users (Baruk, 2024). Flexibility, availability and the possibility to act quickly often become more important to them than planning well in advance. In practice, this means that the decisions about where to stay or what tourist attractions to visit are based not only on the size of the budget, but also on convenience, experience and recommendations from friends and strangers on the web (Torrejón-Ramos et al., 2023, pp. 20-23).

Young people are interested in travelling and the main motivations, apart from leisure, are activities related to the pursuit of passions and hobbies, culture, healthcare and self-development. The factors that have the greatest influence on their purchasing decisions are being *up-to-date* in terms of comfort and convenience, as well as brand story. They are conscious consumers who support local businesses and trust them much more because they know who stands behind them. They pay attention to pro-environmental practices in shaping the image of the brands they use (Hałderna-Mielcarek et al., 2024, p. 109). For Generation Z, travel is not just about moving through space; it is a process in which emotions, authenticity and the ability to share their experiences with others are important. Their travel decisions are driven by the need to experience something unique, quick access to information and flexibility in their activities. This way of thinking clearly distinguishes them from previous generations and shapes the new reality of the tourist market (Torrejón-Ramos et al., 2023).

According to the report: *What are the Polish Zoomers? Insights about generation without generalisation* (2024), the shopping basket of the so-called Zoomers included four categories: entertainment, clothing, travel and food (Gen Z Report..., 2024, p. 38). The last two categories are closely related. Food while travelling has ceased to be merely a necessary addition to leisure or sightseeing, but has become an end in itself (Krakowiak & Stasiak, 2015, p. 5). It was found that young tourists are very interested in the originality of local food and drinks. They are commited to discovering and tasting them, which has been recognised as one of the highlights of the trips (Akgis Ilhan et al., 2022, p. 6). They may be considered Foodies, i.e. gourmets, being permanently interested in culinary aspects (food and beverages, including alcoholic drinks), paying a lot of attention to the aspects of food. The passion for taste is the paramount element of their lifestyle (consisting of buying, cooking, eating, etc.). They appreciate traditional and local products. All of this motivates Foodies to travel, as they feel the need to explore new places and flavours (Buczkowska-Gołąbek, 2015, p. 176), and the use of food services is at least as important to them as the use of smartphones (Jaciow & Wolny, 2018, p. 65).

The importance and functions of catering establishments in tourism

Although in basic terms food facilities are associated with satisfying one of the most fundamental physiological needs, that is hunger and thirst, their role in the context of tourism is much broader and multi-faceted.

Gastronomy addresses physical needs, but also social, emotional and aesthetic needs, which is in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. At the basic level, it enables regeneration and energy supply while traveling. At a higher level, it fosters relationship building, integration with other trip participants, and learning about new cultures and traditions through local cuisine. Gastronomy is defined as an *organised economic activity taking a separate place in the social division of labour which consists in satisfying the nutritional needs of consumers through the sale of prepared food* *and beverages, creating conditions for their consumption at the point of sale, and providing a variety of services to meet the needs for entertainment, rest, mental regeneration* (Sala, 2004). Catering services, on the other hand, are a collection of diverse activities that jointly create a complete culinary experience. They include both the preparation of dishes for consumption (the production aspect), their sale (the commercial aspect), and the creation of suitable conditions for on-site consumption (the service aspect). In some venues, the scope is sometimes expanded, for example, to include entertainment elements. Places where such services are provided directly on site are collectively referred to as a catering base (Piziak, 2011, p. 181).

From the point of view of reception areas, the catering base plays a key role in the provision of food to tourists (Rogalewski, 1974). Depending on the nature of the business and its connection with serving tourists, four types of facilities are distinguished: stand-alone, open-access establishments, such as restaurants, coffee shops or beer halls; catering facilities operating at places of accommodation catering to the needs of guests; closed establishments intended for specific groups, such as employee or student cafeterias; and catering facilities in means of transportation, such as on trains (Sala, 2004).

Today, modern food catering facilities and services play a much broader role than just meeting nutritional needs: they are an important factor in the development of tourism, influencing the volume of inbound traffic and the level of tourist satisfaction. A catering base that is diverse in terms of type, standard and offer increases the attractiveness of places and regions. Some establishments even become culinary showpieces, attracting tourists as destinations or must-visit points. Original cuisine and local products stimulate interest and support the development of culinary tourism (Piziak, 2011, p. 182).

The importance of catering in tourism is also evident in the varied dietary needs of tourists, depending on the form of travel and the nature of the undertaken activities. Leisure tourism is dominated by the demand for light, local dishes served in comfortable conditions, often with an emphasis on authenticity and regional products. In the case of active tourism, such as trekking or biking, it becomes crucial to provide nutritional value quickly - the meals must be functional, easy to transport and consume. In urban tourism, gastronomy often becomes an integral part of the experience, and such is provided, for example, by coffee shops where a special place is given to coffee which, thanks to alternative brewing methods and a narrative around the origin of the beans, fits in with the growing interest in authentic culinary experiences.

Coffee shop and coffee in tourist spaces

Among the various catering facilities present in tourist spaces, coffee shops occupy a special place. While their primary function remains serving beverages and small snacks, they are increasingly becoming important spots on the tourist experience map. A modern coffee shop is not only a space for consumption, but also part of the cultural narrative of the place. In many cities and regions, the coffee shops attract tourists looking for authenticity and local colour due to their atmosphere, originality of interiors, brewing methods or selection of beans. The phenomenon of coffee tourism which has been observed for several years and is a part of the broader trend of culinary tourism points to the growing role of coffee shops as not only service places, but also symbolic places building the image of the destination and responding to the needs of more and more aware and demanding travellers.

Coffee tourism is undoubtedly a huge attraction for tourists with great potential for the future. It is estimated that 2.5 billion cups of coffee are consumed daily worldwide, and about 500 billion cups are drunk annually. There is, therefore, a great potential for coffee-based travel experiences. Coffee tourism has a significant impact on local culture and the community's economic development. By visiting coffee plantations, experiencing coffee cultivation, processing and tasting, coffee tourism not only provides tourists with real experiences and increases social and economic value, but also helps to build the brand image of destinations and creates opportunities to promote them (Pan, 2023, pp. 688-690).

Coffee tourism provides travel experiences for tourists through a variety of activities, including the observation of coffee brewing, coffee tasting, and also visits to coffee shops. Coffee invariably remains one of the Poles' favourite beverages: in terms of its consumption, Poland ranked seventh in Europe. Today, more than 80% of adults in Poland regularly drink coffee, and a sizable portion of them (more than half) do so in coffee shops. The coffee shop market in Poland is growing rapidly. Its value is already estimated at around PLN 1.5 billion, and the number of establishments exceeds 5,400. Almost every day new places pop up where you can try different types of coffee prepared by professional baristas (Woźniczko & Orłowski, 2019, p. 185). Poles are eager to visit different types of coffee shops of which there are plenty on the domestic market. Several main categories of such venues can be distinguished, including coffee shops specialising in specialty coffee, independent and more informal, locally-operated venues, popular chains, pastry shops serving coffee, ice cream parlours offering drinks, restaurants where coffee is an addition to the meal or club coffee shops that combine social, cultural and gastronomic functions (Ziółkowska, 2023, p. 38).

When writing about the coffee shop market, it is impossible to ignore the growing environmental awareness. Both the needs of the consumers and the way the establishments themselves operate are changing. Increasingly, there is a move towards reducing waste, the popularity of reusable cups, the choice of plant-based products or reaching for coffees from brands that support sustainable trade, such as FairTrade and Rainforest Alliance. Environmental issues are becoming an important purchase criterion. Similarly to other HoReCa players, coffee shops are increasingly recognising this trend (Ziółkowska, 2023, pp. 38-40).

Coffee shops are visited not only to drink coffee, but also to experience something pleasant and unique (Mruk, 2024). A modern tourist expects more than just good coffee, as the non-consumption aspect also matters: the atmosphere of the place, the quality of service and the overall impression the consumer has from the visit to the establishment. Aesthetics are increasingly important, both as an element influencing the emotional impression and as a factor engaging the senses. The interior of the coffee shop, the smell, the light, the music, the colours or the details of the decor build the atmosphere and influence how the place is remembered. Refined aesthetics can reinforce positive emotions and keep the customers coming back, not just for the food offerings, but for the experience of being in that particular space (Bekar & Sürücü, 2017, p. 374). This is especially important for the Zoomers. They are characterised by high sensitivity to aesthetics, authenticity and social values. For this age group, a coffee shop is not just a place to eat a meal, but often also a meeting point, a space for relaxation, inspiration or even a digital activity for posting stories and photos or rating the place on social media.

In conclusion, catering establishments, especially coffee shops, play a much greater role in the life of a tourist than just providing food. For the representatives of Generation Z, they are a place where physical needs merge with emotional, social and cultural needs. Selecting, visiting and rating them is an integral part of the trip, and often even becomes a motive for it. Therefore, the role of coffee shops in meeting the tourist needs of young people deserves a separate place in the study of contemporary forms of tourism and consumer behaviour.

Research methods

The analyses undertaken in this article were conducted in order to find the answers to the research question: How are coffee and coffee shops perceived by Generation Z during their trips?

The above question was disaggregated into the following specific questions:

RQ1. What is the travel style of the surveyed group of respondents?

RQ2. How important is coffee to the representatives of Generation Z during a tourist trip?

RQ3. What are the motives for drinking coffee for the surveyed respondents?

RQ4. What determines the choice of a coffee shop in a tourist space for the surveyed group of respondents?

RQ5. Is there a commercial or local dimension to coffee for the Generation Z representatives on a tourist trip?

The answers to the above research questions were provided by the results of surveys conducted in February-April 2025 among students, mainly of Polish nationality, with the use of the CAWI technique. Non-random sampling was used with the snowball method. In this way, answers were obtained from 255 respondents. After rejecting questionnaires that were not related to the topic (as decided by filtering questions that eliminated people who do not travel and/or do not drink coffee at all, in addition to people of non-Polish nationality), the answers from 229 people were accepted for analysis.

The structure of the study population is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic structure of respondents

Criterion	Features	Percentage
Gender	Women	72.9
	Men	27.1
Age	18-20 years old	17.5
	21-22 years old	38.4
	23-24 years old	34.1
	25-28 years old	10.0
Socio-professional status	I study	28.0
	I study and work	72.0

Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

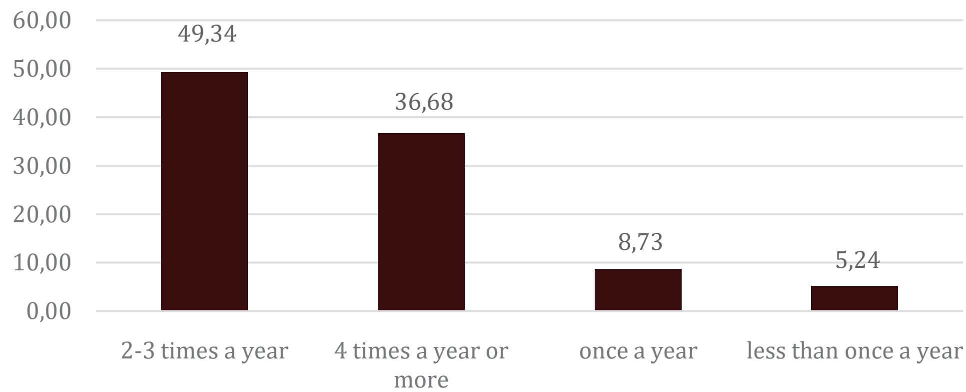
In view of the foregoing, it is concluded that the research sample is dominated by women, people aged 21-24 who study and work.

Research results

Travel style of representatives of Generation Z

The results of the survey made it possible to identify the travel style of the surveyed representatives of Generation Z. The analysis of empirical data summarised in Figure 2 proves that they are significantly active in tourism. Half of them travel 2-3 times a year.

Figure 2. Frequency of travel of representatives of Generation Z (in %)



Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

The most common motives for domestic travel indicated by the respondents were leisure, sightseeing, and visiting relatives and friends (Figure 2). Foreign travel is, in turn, dominated by sightseeing and leisure.

Table 2. Most frequent motives for domestic and foreign travel for representatives of Generation Z (% of indications)

Motives	Domestic travel	Foreign travel
I do not participate in domestic/ foreign tourism	0.87	4.37
Education	0.87	0.44
Visiting friends/ family	21.83	2.18
Sports	5.68	0.44
Participating in cultural events	8.30	2.18
Business trips	1.31	0.87
Leisure	33.62	40.17
Shopping	1.31	0.00
Sightseeing	26.20	49.34

Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

As could be expected and as confirmed by the published data (Popșa, 2024), the representatives of Generation Z organise their tourist trips on their own (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Organisation of the trip by representatives of Generation Z (in %)

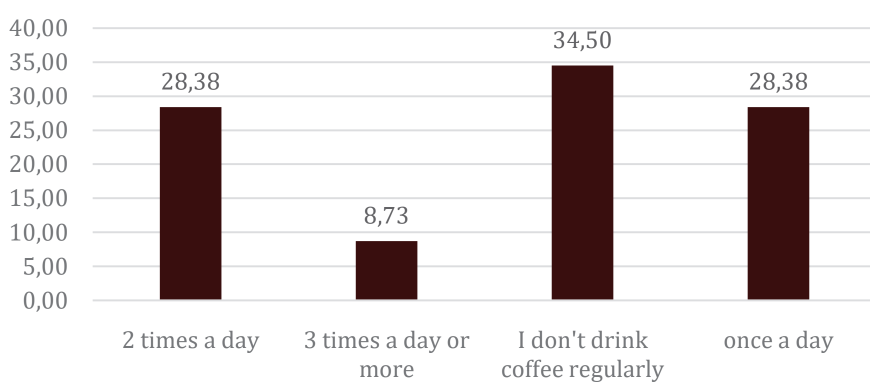
Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

Almost all respondents try regional cuisine in the visited tourist destinations (only 7 people did not declare such participation).

Coffee, coffee shop in tourist travels of the representatives of Generation Z

No individuals were identified as particularly *addicted* to coffee. in the surveyed group. This type of habit was declared by 30% of respondents who drank coffee once a day, while 1/3 of them drank coffee irregularly. The group of people drinking coffee 2 or more times a day accounted for 37.11% of the respondents (Figure 4).

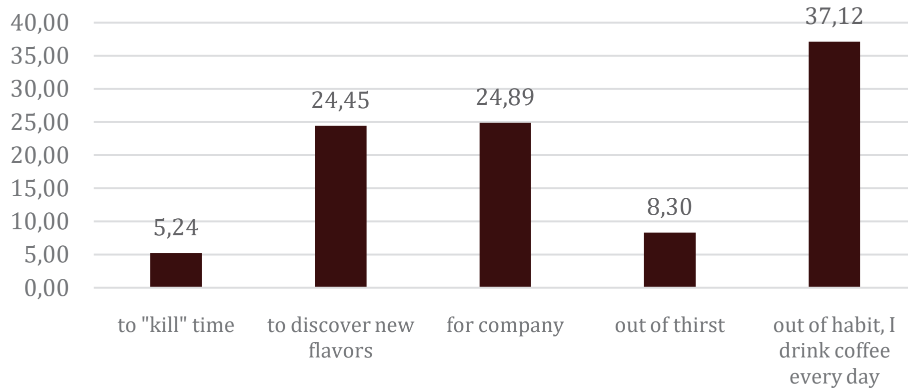
Figure 4. Frequency of drinking coffee declared by representatives of Generation Z (in %)



Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

During tourist travel, the motive for reaching for coffee is the habit of drinking the beverage daily (37.12% of indications). ¼ of the respondents declare that their motive for reaching for coffee while travelling is for company and to discover new flavours (Figure 5).

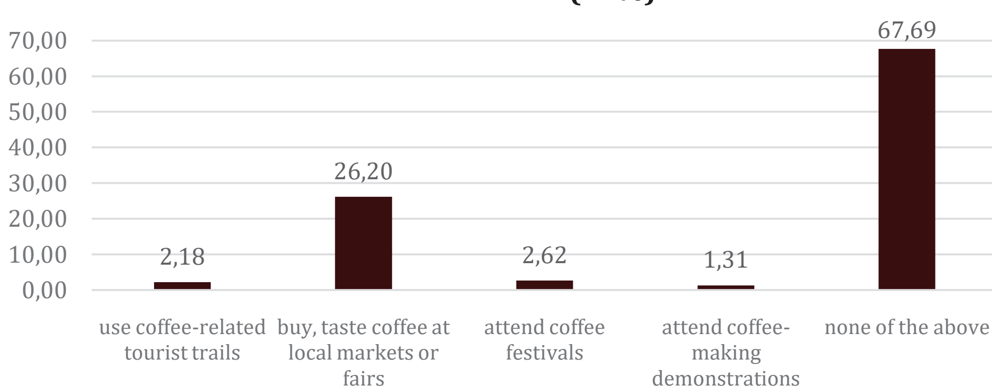
Figure 5. Motives for drinking coffee during a tourist trip by the representatives of Generation Z (in %)



Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

While the respondents are no strangers to regional cuisine, they do not declare the experience of coffee in specific tourist spaces related to this product (Figure 6). The low percentage of indications of participation in coffee festivals or coffee-making demonstrations, or the use of coffee-related tourist routes is not necessarily a consequence of the tourists' ignorance in this regard; it may be due to poor promotion of such events and tourist products. Nevertheless, ¼ of the respondents indicated buying, tasting coffee at local markets or fairs.

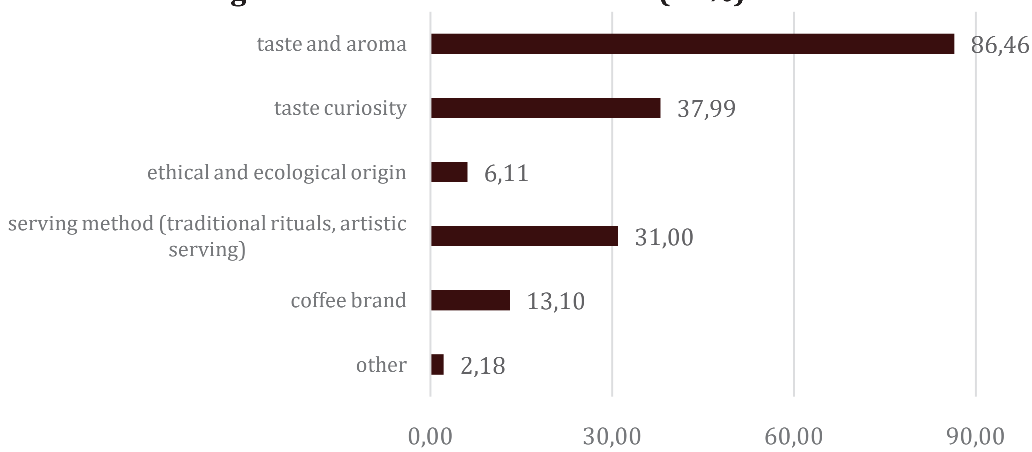
Figure 6. Places in the tourist space related to coffee and attended by representatives of Generation Z (in %)



Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

While trying to recognise the preferences of Generation Z in the market for coffee in tourist spaces, the factors that determine the choice of coffee were also diagnosed. In this regard, a significant role is played by taste and aroma which determine the choice of coffee (almost 87% of indications). Taste qualities also emerged in relation to another motive, that is curiosity about taste (nearly 38% of indications). The next motive concerning the manner of serving (traditional rituals, artistic serving) recorded 7 percentage points less (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Coffee selection factors (in %)

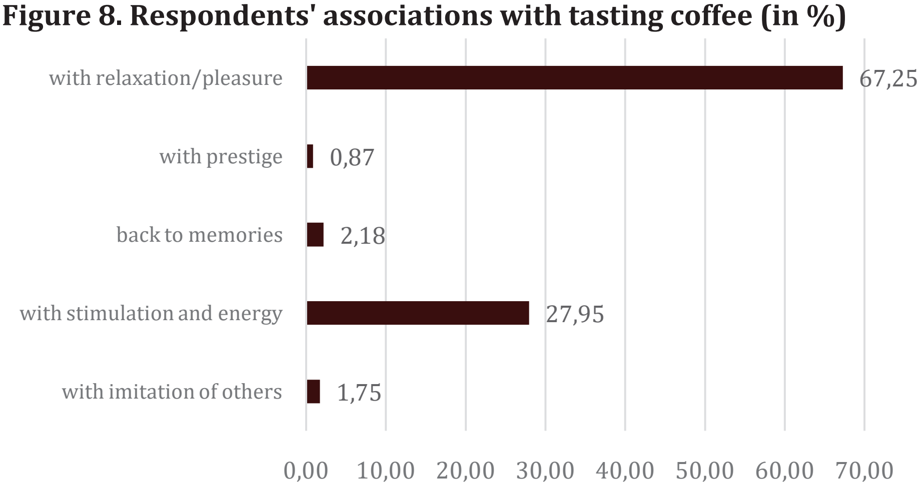


Note: the values do not add up to 100% because the respondents could indicate more than one answer.

Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

Tasting/ experiencing coffee is associated by the respondents with relaxation and pleasure (as much as 67% of indications), but also with stimulation and energy (nearly 30%) (Figure 8). This is in line with the properties of this beverage (Kaviya Priya et al., 2022).

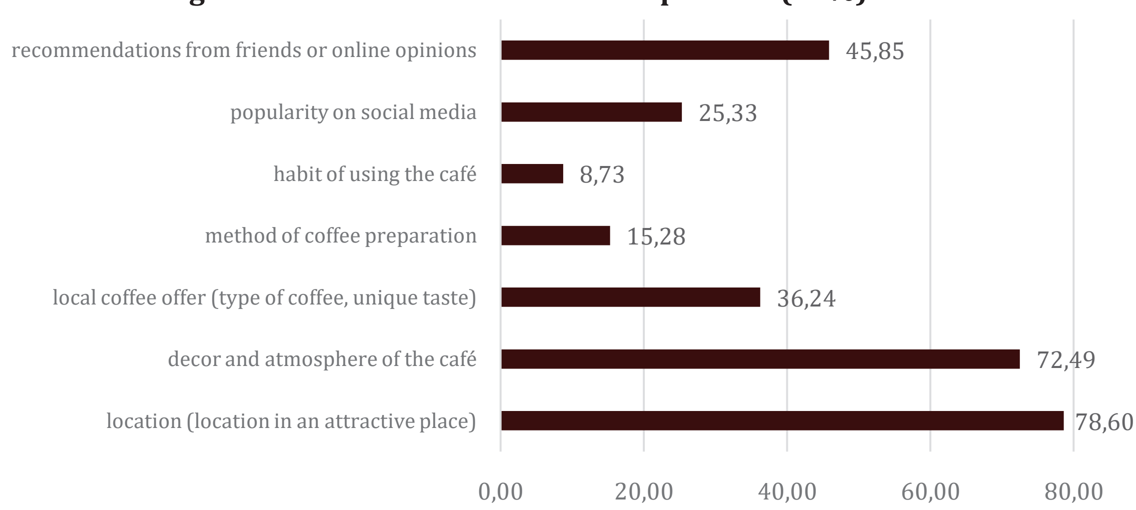
Figure 8. Respondents' associations with tasting coffee (in %)



Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

Coffee is a staple product served in coffee shops. Knowing the determinants of coffee choice, it also became interesting to identify the determinants of coffee shop choice. In that regard, the surveyed representatives of Generation Z declared location (location in an attractive place) as the most important in the whole cafeteria of variables (78.6%) - Figure 9.

Figure 9. Determinants of coffee shop choice (in %)



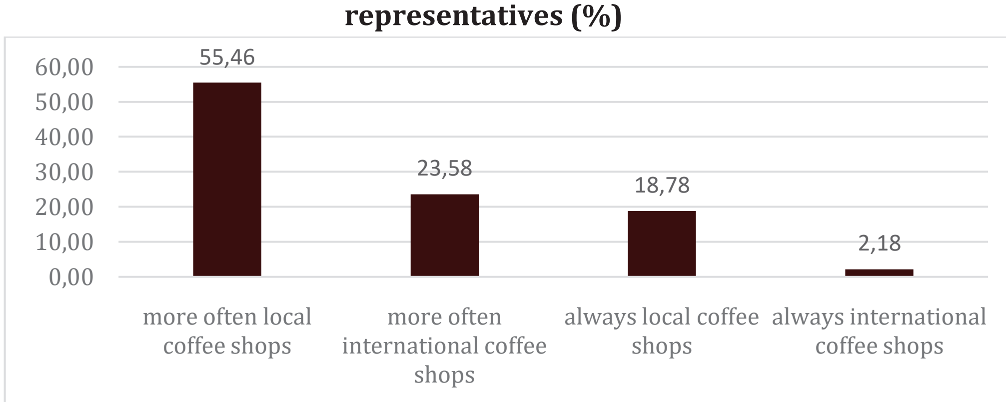
Note: the values do not add up to 100% because the respondents could indicate more than one answer.

Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

In terms of the determinants of coffee shop selection, the second place was taken by the design and atmosphere of the coffee shop (73%). Nearly half of the respondents (46%) declared recommendations from friends or online reviews as the factor that closes the podium of the three most important determinants according to Generation Z representatives.

Respondents overwhelmingly (in 55.4%) report the use of local rather than international coffee shop chains more often (Figure 10).

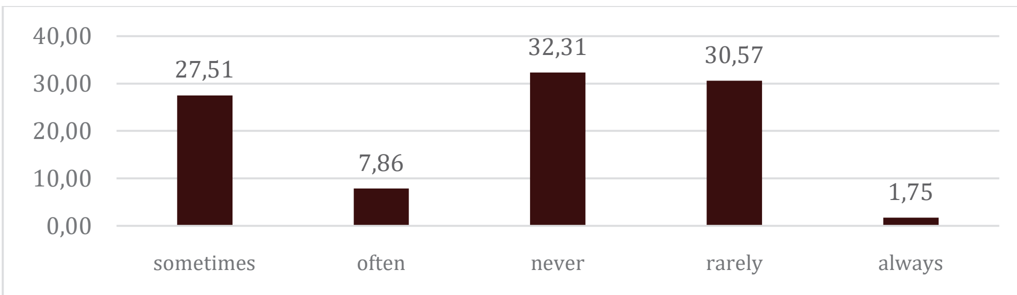
Figure 10. Local coffee shops vs. international chains in the choices of Generation Z representatives (%)



Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

For many travellers, especially young ones, tourist trips involve taking selfies, photos, stories in various places and sharing them on their social media profiles. Coffee shops are also considered such a place. The survey identified preferences in that regard. While 1/3 of them do not publish these kinds of stories in social media, almost as many do so rarely, but as many as ¼ do so sometimes (Figure 11). Sharing photos is meant to build their image. The research recognised that for 65% of people photos and stories from coffee shops did not help build their image in social media, although it should be noted that for 35% such a relationship existed.

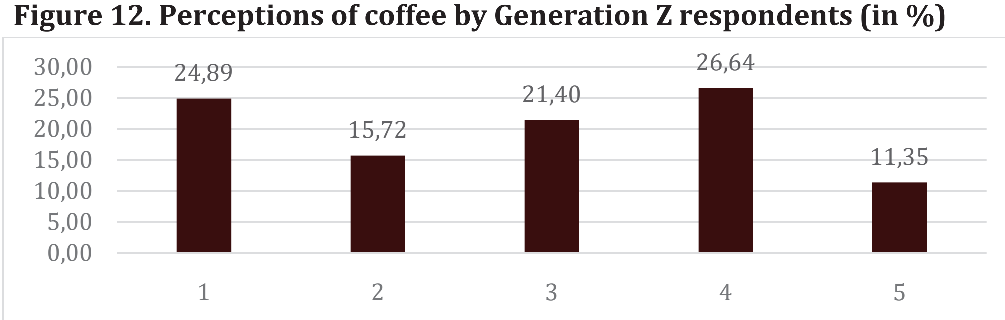
Figure 11. Frequency of publication of photos and stories of visits to coffee shops during the travels of representatives of Generation Z (in %)



Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

In view of the content presented so far, the respondents' perceptions of coffee were recognised (Figure 12). In the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant that coffee was not mandatory every day (and the respondent could do without it) and 5 was interpreted that the assessed beverage was mandatory for the respondent every day (and the respondent themselves could not imagine a day without coffee), the distribution of responses turned out to be quite interesting. Almost as many respondents rated the coffee at 4 and 1 (¼ of indications each). The average score for all respondents was 2.83.

Figure 12. Perceptions of coffee by Generation Z respondents (in %)

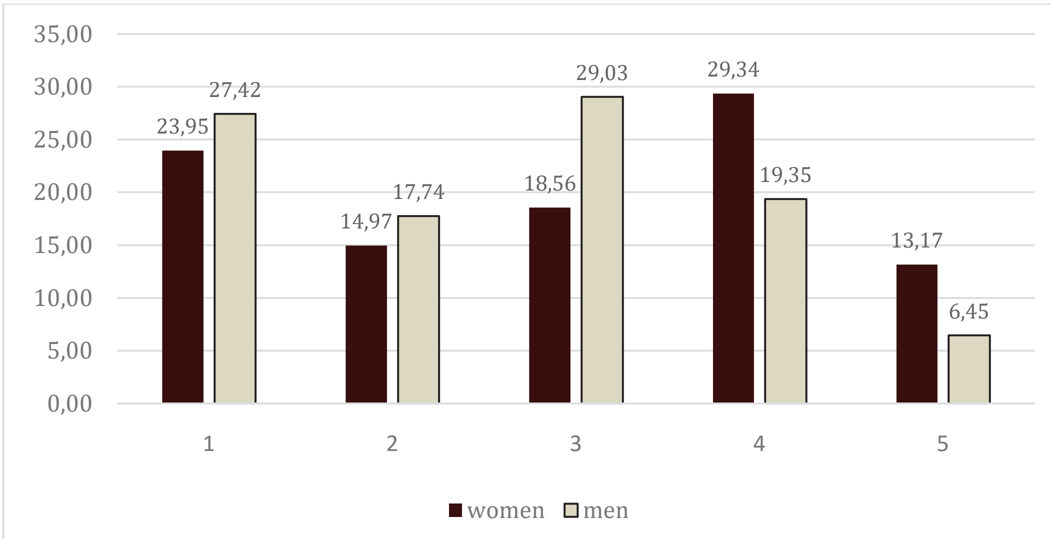


Scale of 1 to 5, where 1 - it is not mandatory for me every day (I can do without it), and 5 - it is mandatory for me every day (I can't imagine a day without coffee).

Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

Significantly more women than men rated coffee at level 4, while more men than women rated it at level 1 (Figure 13). The average grade was 2.92 for women and 2.59 for men. Thus, women rate coffee significantly higher not only compared to men, but also compared to all respondents in general.

Figure 13. Perceptions of coffee by gender of survey respondents (%)



Scale of 1 to 5, where 1 - it is not mandatory for me every day (I can do without it), and 5 - it is mandatory for me every day (I can't imagine a day without coffee).

Source: own study based on the results of conducted surveys.

Discussion

In the literature there are works, mainly by foreign researchers, on the broadly understood relationship between coffee and coffee shops and the tourist behaviour of representatives of Generation Z. They show that the coffee culture present in coffee shops plays an important role in the social life of Generation Z, becoming a place for daily meetings, conversations and establishing relationships (Azahra et al., 2024, p. 6). What is more, Generation Z is eager to engage in various forms of coffee tourism that combine educational and interactive elements, such as plantation tours, participation in coffee bean harvesting and processing, and face-to-face meetings with local farmers or baristas. Although coffee tourism is still a niche form of travel, the researchers underline its considerable potential, especially with the right promotional support. A properly designed thematic offer, taking into account the preferences of the younger generation, can effectively support the promotion of local coffee and the development of regional tourism economy (Dewi et al., 2024, p. 82). In addition, representatives of Generation Z are primarily guided in their choice of coffee shops by the quality of the products, the level of service and the atmosphere of the place, with digital interactions and opinions published in social media being particularly important to them (Mukti et al., 2024).

It should be noted that this topic is taken up regionally, mostly by Asian researchers, and deals with the perceptions of the Asian Generation Z consumers about coffee. It is worth noting that Asia is a continent where several countries have the so-called coffee regions famous for their crops, as well as for the culture of consumption that develops around them, including: Indonesia, Vietnam, India and the Philippines.

The study conducted for the purposes of this article examined the perceptions of coffee and coffee shops in the tourist travel of representatives of Generation Z from Poland, i.e. consumers from Europe. The potential for research on the perception of coffee, coffee shops and coffee tourism in the European market and their perception by young European tourists should be emphasised. The potential for research on the perception of coffee, coffee shops and coffee tourism in the European market and their relevance to young tourists from this area should be emphasised. An example of a country developing coffee offerings in this context is Portugal, where coffee has strong cultural roots and coffee initiatives already in place offer visitors a unique experience. At the same time, the potential for further development is noticeable in such initiatives as integrating activities within the framework of the national tourism strategy (Dinis et al., 2021, pp. 409–410). Another example is Lviv which is an interesting example of using coffee heritage as a tool for rebranding urban identity. In line with the principles of sustainable development, the city is successfully building its position as an important coffee tourism centre in Central and Eastern Europe, developing infrastructure, thematic event offerings, digital forms of promotion, and coffee shop spaces as places for social and cultural integration (Rutynskyi & Kushniruk, 2020, pp. 110–111).

In a broader perspective, it should be noted that the coffee culture in Europe has undergone a marked transformation over the past two decades - not only consumer preferences have changed, but also the function of coffee shops as spaces. Nowadays, they are increasingly seen as lifestyle venues that are aesthetically pleasing, atmospheric, sometimes exclusive, which distinguishes them from traditional dining establishments. This perception is influenced, among other things, by the presence of Italian-type coffees which are treated as products that are more prestigious and closer to a ritual than an everyday beverage made at home (Morris, 2013, p. 882).

In the context of the tourism behaviour of Generation Z representatives, the above examples show that coffee and its associated spaces have the potential to become an important part of the tourism experience. The results of the research conducted in Poland, when juxtaposed with the development trends observed in Europe, indicate the growing importance of coffee shops as culturally embedded places, as well as the need to deepen research on coffee tourism in the European context, highlighting individual countries such as Poland.

Conclusions

The conducted research made it possible to see how coffee shops and the ritual of drinking coffee function in the tourist experience of representatives of Generation Z. The results clearly indicate that coffee is not just a beverage with a stimulating function for this group, but it is increasingly becoming an element of lifestyle, also expressed while travelling. Although only a fraction of respon-dents declare that they regularly drink coffee, for most young tourists, reaching for coffee while travelling stems from habit, the need to relax, curiosity about flavours and the need to participate in pleasant social rituals.

The respondents from Generation Z travel relatively frequently, organise their own trips and eagerly explore regional cuisine, which shows their openness to local culinary experiences. The choice of coffee shops in tourist spaces is mainly determined by location, decor and atmosphere, that is factors closely related to the aesthetics and experience of the place. Coffee shops are, therefore, not only dining establishments but, more importantly, visually appealing social spaces, often chosen as the backdrop for photos and stories shared in social media.

Another interesting aspect revealed in the survey is the respondents' relatively low participation in coffee-related cultural events, such as festivals, trails and coffee brewing shows. This may indicate insufficient promotion of such events among young tourists or a lack of adaptation to their expectations and lifestyles. Nonetheless, the presence of coffee at local fairs and markets was noted by some respondents as an attractive travel feature, suggesting the potential for further development of culinary tourism, particularly coffee tourism.

The study brings a new perspective to research on the consumer behaviour of Polish Generation Z in the context of culinary tourism, expanding knowledge about the role of coffee shops as places that meet not only nutritional needs, but also social, aesthetic and identity needs. The results can also be useful in practice, e.g. for coffee shop owners, organisers of coffee-themed cultural events, and authors of tourist offers addressed to young audiences.

However, the limitations of the study should be emphasised. First of all, it mainly concerned students with Polish citizenship, which limits the possibility of generalising the results to the entire Z generation. In addition, the sampling technique used (snowballing) does not guarantee full representativeness, although it gives a picture of the outlined topic. Another limitation may be the relatively low involvement of the respondents in more specialised forms of coffee tourism, making it difficult to analyse the phenomenon in full. Therefore, it seems reasonable to continue research in this area, especially including the comparisons between various demographic groups and expanding the analysis to include a qualitative aspect (e.g. in-depth interviews) to better understand young tourists' motivations and expectations of coffee shops. It is also worth considering research in the context of different countries and cultures to capture the diversity of attitudes toward coffee in the tourist space and to explore the potential for coffee tourism development in a broader international context.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.N. and M.W.; methodology, A.N.; formal analysis, A.N. and M.W.; investigation, A.N. and M.W.; writing—original draft preparation, A.N. and M.W..; writing—review and editing, M.W..; visualization, A.N. and M.W.; supervision, A.N.

Declaration of competing interest

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Notes on contributors

Agata Niemczyk
is an Associate Professor in the Department of Tourism at the Krakow University of Economics. She researches, writes, and lectures on consumer behavior, cultural and business tourism, tourism marketing, territorial marketing, silver economy, green entrepreneurship, and sustainable development. She is member of national and international research teams. She is member of the Regional Studies Association (RSA) and The Polish Economic Society (PTE). She is the author and co-author of more than 250 publications.
email: niemczya@uek.krakow.pl

Magdalena Wawoczny
PhD student at the Cracow University of Economics, graduate of Tourism (Cracow University of Economics) and Jewish Studies (Jagiellonian University). Author of scientific publications on consumer behavior in the tourism market. Her research interests revolve around tourist behavior, Jewish culture, and the national culture and economic history of Israel.
email: mawawoczny@gmail.com

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