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Generation Z and Intention to Travel: Effects of the Perception of COVID-19

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Abstract

Previous studies have investigated the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on different aspects of tourism behaviour. However, research on a specific generational group, Generation Z, is still limited. This exploratory study aims to examine, for members of this generation, the effect of the perceived risk of COVID-19 and non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) on their intention to travel and, in turn, whether this intention influences their willingness to pay extra to benefit from additional safety measures. With this approach, a Structural Equations methodology has been applied based on 629 surveys received and using SmartPLS 3.0 to analyse them. The results showed that the higher the travel intention of Gen Z, the higher the individual's willingness to pay for additional security measures, the perceived risk of COVID-19 positively influences the NPI taken and in turn, these NPI influence a higher travel intention. However, the authors have not found a significant effect between the perceived risk and Gen Z's intention to travel. Finally, they discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the results, providing suggestions for the recovery of Gen Z tourism after the pandemic.

Keywords: intention to travel, perceived risk, Generation Z, COVID-19, PLS

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La Generación Z y la Intención de Viajar: Efectos de la Percepción de la COVID-19

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Resumen

Estudios anteriores han investigado los efectos de la pandemia de coronavirus en diferentes aspectos del comportamiento turístico. Sin embargo, la investigación sobre un grupo generacional específico, la Generación Z, sigue siendo limitada. Este estudio exploratorio pretende examinar, para los miembros de esta generación, el efecto del riesgo percibido de COVID-19 y de las intervenciones no farmacéuticas (NPI) sobre su intención de viajar y, a su vez, si esta intención influye en su disposición a pagar más para beneficiarse de medidas de seguridad adicionales. Con este enfoque, se ha aplicado una metodología de Ecuaciones Estructurales basada en 629 encuestas recibidas y utilizando SmartPLS 3.0 para analizarlas. Los resultados mostraron que cuanto mayor es la intención de viaje de la Generación Z, mayor es la disposición del individuo a pagar por medidas de seguridad adicionales, el riesgo percibido de COVID-19 influye positivamente en los NPI tomados y, a su vez, estos NPI influyen en una mayor intención de viaje. Sin embargo, los autores no han encontrado un efecto significativo entre el riesgo percibido y la intención de viajar de la Generación Z. Por último, discuten las implicaciones teóricas y prácticas de los resultados, aportando sugerencias para la recuperación del turismo de la Generación Z tras la pandemia.

Palabras clave: intención de viajar, riesgo percibido, Generación Z, COVID-19, PLS

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The health crisis caused by COVID-19 has had a substantial economic impact on all sectors globally, albeit with an uneven distribution of its effects (UNWTO, 2021a). In the case of the tourism sector, international tourist arrivals fell by 74% in 2020, representing an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in global tourism expenditure (UNWTO, 2021b).

However, the recovery speed in different economic sectors is very different (UNWTO, 2021a). Among the other characteristics of the tourism sector, we can highlight a great sensitivity to changes in the economic cycle, presenting a greater resilience of tourism to the adversities of the environment and a faster response to crises. Thus, the tourism sector will take at least a couple of years to recover to pre-pandemic levels, while the outlook for much of the rest of the economic sectors remains unpredictable (UNWTO, 2021a).

The so-called Millennials (people born between 1980 and 2000 who share similar attitudes, perceptions, values and behaviours) play a key role in previous recoveries in the tourism sector (Cresnar & Nedelko, 2020).

Today, Generation Z (hereafter Gen Z) has taken over from Millennials and is leading future tourism trends (Oh et al., 2021), as it is one of the age groups most open to travel (Torocsik et al., 2014). Although there is no consensus in the literature on the years that comprise this generational cohort, we can say that it encompasses those born from 1994 or 1995 until approximately 2010 or 2012 (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019; García-del Junco et al., 2021; Janssen & Carradini, 2021). This generation represented 27.6% of the Spanish population on 1 January 2021 (INE, 2021). Among their main defining characteristics, we can mention their high technological knowledge (INJUVE, 2016), their high educational level (Su et al., 2019), creative, critical, eager to change the world (García-del Junco et al., 2021), they are an individualistic, self-directed, demanding, acquisitive and materialistic generation (Agarwal & Vaghela, 2018). It is a generation continuously exposed to war and terrorism (via the Internet and social media) (Read & Truelove, 2018, Op. Cit. in Robinson & Schänzel, 2019), so they crave security and fear catastrophes and financial tragedies (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Azimi et al. (2021) found that among the top two concerns of this generation were the health of others and economic security.

Tourist behaviour during the pandemic is vital not only to revive a sector severely affected by the restrictions suffered in the aftermath of COVID-19 but also to limit its spread (UNWTO, 2020). Furthermore, it is necessary to

consider the defining characteristics of each generation to understand purchasing behaviour about tourism. Cohort effects influence tourism consumption decisions (Baltescu, 2019), age determines such important tourism variables as intention and attitudes (Gardiner et al., 2013), travel behaviour (Bojanic, 2011) or preferences and demand (Prideaux, 2004). Lebrun et al. (2021) found significant differences in holiday intention between generations. Therefore, studies and research on each generation are necessary to respond effectively to the needs and demands of each generation (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019).

So far, there are very few studies on Gen Z and its tourism influence in pandemic-risk settings (these include Robinson & Schänzel, 2019; Jiang & Hong, 2021; Lebrun et al., 2021). With this paper, we aim to contribute to this gap in the literature, whose findings seek to understand the tourism behaviour of this Gen Z during an unusual situation such as a health pandemic. According to Kement et al. (2020), global health risks, such as pandemics, directly affect the attitudes and behaviour of tourists. Understanding this behaviour would not only be a contribution to the academic literature. Still, it would also help the different tourism agents to adapt more effectively to this situation of a supervening pandemic, with modifications to their offer that respond to the new requirements of tourism demand and the design of practical actions for its recovery.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

The Influence of Perceived Risk on Intention to Travel

Factors such as anxiety, worry or fear are highly correlated with risk perception (Yang & Nair, 2014), which in turn affects tourists' travel planning decisions (Karl, 2016). That is, it can change their decision to travel in cases where risk perception may exceed an acceptable level for the individual (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006).

For the specific case of tourism, Fuchs & Reichel (2006) define risk perception as the potential danger associated with travel. In this sense, we can consider a large number of risks when establishing a travel plan, such as those related to natural disasters, human acts or health risks (Khan et al., 2019). The pandemic situation due to COVID-19 would fall into the latter group, leading

to changes in consumption patterns, such as increased interest in health and wellness tourism (Wen et al., 2021), proximity tourism (Lebrun et al., 2021) or sustainable travel (O'Connor & Assaker, 2021).

The influence of the risk factor in the tourist's decision-making process has attracted so much academic interest that it has led to the existence of numerous studies that address the relationship between risk perception and travel intention in different spheres of tourism, such as air travel (Cho et al., 2018) or medical tourism (Farrukh et al., 2020). Other papers analyse the relationship between the two variables from the point of view of responsible tourism (Chen et al., 2021) or the intention to revisit a destination (Rather, 2021). These studies generally find this type of negative relationship. In fact, Cahyanto et al. (2016) found that perceived risk is the strongest predictor explaining the propensity to avoid travel.

The meaning of this relationship for the specific case of the risk situation analysed in this paper, the COVID-19 pandemic, is validated by works such as Sánchez-Cañizares et al. 2020, which analyses the impact of perceived risk on the intention to travel during the pandemic. The study by Neuburger & Egger (2020) also analyses the perception of COVID-19 and the intention to travel to destinations with reported cases or Liu et al. (2021), who find that the perception of COVID-19 harms the post-pandemic travel intentions of Chinese residents. In the post-COVID-19 period, the likelihood of coronavirus infection in the destination also influences risk perception (Farrukh et al., 2020).

To these findings, we can add those contributed by Schroeder et al. (2013), who indicate that tourists of different age groups also perceive destination risks differently. Lebrun et al. (2021) also find a generational difference in the impact of COVID-19 on travel intention in their case study. Moreover to these results, we can add characteristic factors of the target population group (Gen Z), such as being a cohort concerned about the health of others, craving security and fearing catastrophes and financial tragedies, which makes it very likely that the perceived risk of the global pandemic situation caused by COVID-19 of these individuals will negatively affect their travel behavioural intention.

Thus, based on the above analyses, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: The higher the perceived risk of COVID-19, the lower Gen Z's intention to travel.

Intention to Travel and Willingness to Pay More

Ramdas & Mohamed (2014) define the willingness to pay (WIL) as the monetary amount or cost that an individual would commit to paying for an increase or improvement in the quality of a good or service. As reported by Namkung & Jang (2017), in the hospitality industry, behavioural intentions have been used as a proxy measure of actual behaviour.

Some empirical evidence in hospitality and tourism looks at customers' behavioural intention and willingness to pay. For example, in the case of ecotourism, Hultman et al. (2015) suggest that intention has a direct and positive influence on WIL. Zemke et al. (2015) study show that tourists agree to pay more in exchange for more sanitised hotel rooms. Cro & Martins (2017) find that guests are willing to pay a higher price and/or a higher price premium in European countries with the highest crime rates if a hostel has higher levels of security, cleanliness, and location. However, these results are not in line with the findings of Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020), who find that a higher intention to travel does not necessarily indicate a higher willingness to pay for additional security measures during the trip due to COVID-19.

Agag et al. (2020) explain this divergence of results and suggest that no single factor is sufficient to drive travellers' willingness to pay more. It combines demographic variables, values, normative influence, personality traits, and beliefs to stimulate the desire to pay more. Thus, research such as Gyehee et al. (2019) indicates that the main variables influencing WIL of the Mt. Baekdu avion tourism product through North Korea were offers, age, average monthly household income and importance of safety. Ivanov & Webster (2021) report that willingness to pay for robot-delivered services in travel, tourism and hospitality was negatively related to the frequency of travel, age and education. Lamsal et al. (2016) found for the case of wetland tourism that age, distance, knowledge and desire to visit other lakes negatively affected their willingness to pay.

The literature, therefore, reveals the importance of demographic characteristics in understanding tourists' willingness to pay for specific products. First, in terms of age, studies show that older cohorts are more

willing to pay an additional price for certain tourism product features, such as safety and security. With this assertion, we can remark the work of Jeon & Yang (2021). From the data provided in their work, we can see how specifically the young people belonging to Gen Z have a lower willingness to pay than the older group. At the same time, age is not a significant variable for other facilities or tourist destinations without this safety certification. Cro et al. (2019) also assess the impact of safety in the hostel sector on customers' willingness to pay, concluding that, in general terms, customers are willing to pay a higher price premium in the least peaceful countries in the world for a hostel room with higher levels of safety. For older guests, the compensation they are willing to pay is higher.

Secondly, works such as Ying & Li (2020) and Durán-Román et al. (2021) mention that income is among the main factors influencing willingness to pay for studies in the field of tourism. Since we focus our work on Gen Z, specifically on a group of university students as representatives of it, we can infer that their income level is lower than that of older cohorts, which could explain, in part, their willingness to pay for greater security in the tourism product, but to a lesser extent than people with greater purchasing power. There is previous literature on Gen Z's willingness to pay in non-tourism settings (Chaturvedi et al., 2020) or on willingness to pay in tourism, but most are pre-pandemic and for concrete case studies (Wen & Leung, 2021).

Therefore, the present study aims to fill this research gap by formulating the following hypothesis:

H2: The greater Gen Z's intention to travel during the COVID-19 pandemic, the greater the individual's willingness to pay for additional security measures.

Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions, their Relationship with Perceived Risk and Intention to Travel

Faced with a global pandemic, such as COVID-19, there were various measures to try to limit the spread of the disease, including pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) (Rizzo & Degli Atti, 2008). Among the main NPI implemented to try to curb the spread of the virus are: isolation of sick people and quarantine of people who may have had contact

with infected people, as well as tracing measures, social distancing and personal hygiene (Chung et al., 2021).

The academic literature is abundant on NPI, especially in science and medicine. In the field of social sciences, and specifically its relationship with the economy and the tourism sector, its study has begun in more recent years due to significant pandemics such as influenza A (H1N1) in 2009 and the more recent COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) in 2019. In this regard, Chung et al. (2021) mention the work of Lee et al. (2012) as the introducers of the NPI concept in the tourism literature. According to these authors, NPI are adaptive behaviours that may allow the potential tourist to reduce the threat of contracting an infectious disease to an acceptable level, reinforcing their desire for purchase intention. Their work found that NPI played a mediating role between the perception of pandemic (H1N1) influenza and the intention to travel abroad. The perception of H1N1 in 2009 had a positive effect on non-pharmaceutical interventions. Ko & Lee (2020) and Youn & Lee (2021) refuted these results years later by finding that NPI has a significant positive impact on intention to travel. Specifically, the work of Liu et al. (2021) points to the mediating role played by NPI between the perception of COVID-19 and intentions to travel abroad.

Coupling this empirical evidence with the defining characteristics of the Gen Z population cohort, which we can consider as enhancing elements of the role of NPI, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: The higher the perceived risk of COVID-19, the more non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) Gen Z will take.

H4: The higher the NPI, the higher Gen Z's intention to travel.

Materials and Methods

This research is exploratory, and we carried out the validation of the hypotheses raised through primary information obtained employing an ad-hoc survey.

To ensure the reliability and robustness of the data obtained through the survey, we have used scales previously validated in the literature. In this sense, we followed perceived risk in tourism through five items based on previous studies such as Kement et al. (2020) and Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020). We analysed intention to travel using four items adapted from Kement et al.

(2020), Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020) and Martínez-González et al. (2021). We measured willingness to pay (WIL) using five items, three of them from Sánchez-Cañizares (2020) and the other two adapted from Han et al. (2010), Wei et al. (2018) and Agag et al. (2020). The last section of the questionnaire refers to non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) in tourism, measured through nine items from studies such as Kement et al. (2020).

To validate the correct understanding and construction of the survey, we conducted a pre-test with 15 people, which did not involve any alteration to the initial survey proposed. The questionnaire was self-administered online and we have shared it on social networks (Kement et al., 2020; Martínez-González et al., 2021). Data collection took place between 15 March and 30 May 2021.

The study population is made up of young university students. Works such as Martínez-González et al. (2021) consider them good representatives of Gen Z. Other studies such as Chaturvedi et al. (2020) use them in the case of residents in Spain.

Given the size of the study population, we applied convenience sampling (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020), obtaining 629 valid responses. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile of the sample.

Table 1.
Sample profile

Gender	%	Work	%	Gross income per month (€)	%
Female	74.4	Unemployed	73.4	< 100	41.5
Male	25.3	Part time job	20.2	100 - 199	24.0
No answer	0.3	Full time job	6.4	200 - 299	15.1
				300 - 399	7.6
				400 - 499	3.0
				> 500	8.7

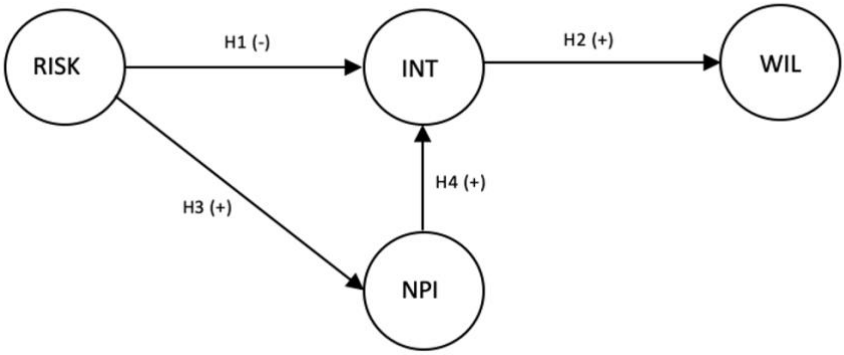
The age variable does not appear in Table 1 as they are all Gen Z, i.e. between 18 and 27 years old (we have used this question as a control variable). We note that women far outnumber men, as we have not controlled any variable for proportional shares of the population. On the other hand, 73.4% of the participants do not work, and 41.5% of the sample have a monthly income of less than 100 euros, while 24% have an income between 100 and 199 euros.

We subjected the data obtained to various statistical analyses to develop the desired model. We used the SmartPLS v.3.2.9 variance-based structural equation models (SEM) statistical software to do this. This method is widely applied in social sciences research (Ringle et al., 2015).

Among the different possibilities of these models, we have used the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. This software allows us to check whether we have adequately measured the theoretical starting concepts through the observed variables of the model, analysing its validity and reliability (Chin, 1998).

Figure 1.

Initial research model



The proposed model, shown in Figure 1, consists of four constructs (perceived risk in tourism (RISK), intention to travel (INT), willingness to pay in tourism (WIL) and non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) in tourism), which respond to the four hypotheses put forward in this research.

Table 2.
General statistics

Construct	Indicator	Description	Mean	Std. dev.
RISK		**Perceived risk in tourism**		
	RISK1	In the current COVID-19 situation, I prefer to travel to small cities.	3.867	1.176
	RISK2	In the current COVID-19 situation, I prefer to stay in small hotels.	3.163	1.353
INT		**Intention to travel**		
	INT1	I intend to travel when the majority of the population of the place I am travelling has received the vaccine.	3.864	1.234
	INT2	I intend to travel when I am vaccinated	3.668	1.357
WIL		**Willingness to pay in tourism**		
	WIL1	I am willing to pay more for additional security measures for the staff attending me.	3.371	1.22
	WIL2	I am willing to pay more for additional security measures in the means of transport I use.	3.498	1.272
NPI		**Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) in tourism**		
	NPI1	I will be quarantined for 14 days after travel	3.272	1.373
	NPI2	I will read and check COVID-19 precautions through doctors or health centres before travelling.	3.995	1.113
	NPI3	I will check information on COVID-19 by visiting the website of the Ministry of Health and/or WHO of the next destination I am travelling to before travel	4.104	1.079

Data Analysis and Results

We have subjected the surveys received to various statistical analyses. Firstly, Table 2 shows the indicators that make up each of the above constructs and their basic statistics. All of them have passed the pre-tests. In each construct, only the representative variables have been included in the final model obtained. Thus, perceived risk, intention to travel and willingness to pay for tourism appear measured with two items and NPI with three.

We have generated a PLS model (Figure 2). We will analyse it in two stages: the assessment of the reliability and validity of the measurement model and the assessment of the structural model (Barclay et al., 1995). We should remark that the SRMR index of the overall model is 0.008, which is the limit set by Hu & Bentler (1998).

Figure 2.

Final PLS model obtained

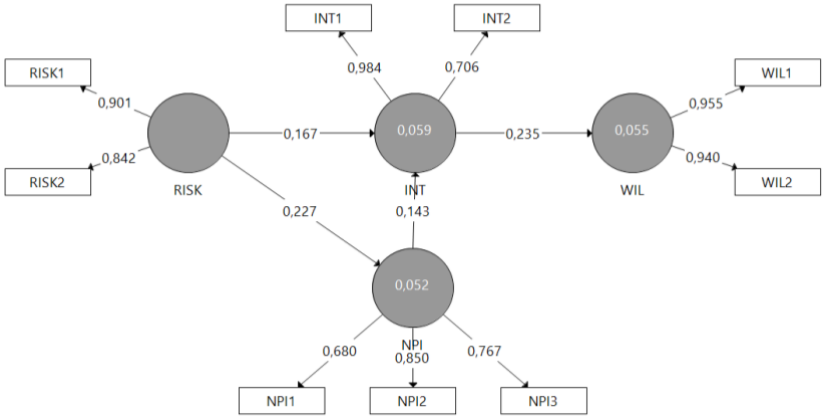


Table 3 presents the composites in mode A - reflective- with the different evaluation indices obtained.

Table 3.
Indices of the composites obtained

	Factor loadings.	Cronbach's alpha	Rho_A	Composite reliability	AVE	Cross-loadings (RISK)	Cross-loadings (INT)	Cross-loadings (WIL)	Cross-loadings (NPI)
RISK		0.688	0.711	0.864	0.760				
RISK1	0.901					**0.901**	0.178	0.244	0.229
RISK2	0.842					**0.842**	0.170	0.177	0.161
INT		0.727	1.932	0.843	0.734				
INT1	0.984					0.223	**0.984**	0.248	0.205
INT2	0.706					0.032	**0.706**	0.097	0.020
WIL		0.886	0.898	0.946	0.897				
WIL1	0.955					0.222	0.236	**0.955**	0.293
WIL2	0.940					0.244	0.206	**0.940**	0.311
NPI		0.650	0.668	0.811	0.591				
NPI1	0.680					0.190	0.095	0.235	**0.680**
NPI2	0.850					0.173	0.195	0.286	**0.850**
NPI3	0.767					0.164	0.115	0.206	**0.767**

Of the initial variables that comprise it, we have kept these 4, eliminating those with values below 0.7 (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Exceptionally, we have kept NPI1 because it has a value close to this target, well above 0.4, the limit set by Hair et al. (2011). Several authors consider that this criterion should not be so rigid (Cepeda & Roldán, 2004).

Internal consistency or construct reliability, measured by Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and the Dijkstra-Henseler Rho_A index, should also be considered, all of which should be above the target value of 0.7 (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). At the outset, Cronbach's alpha exceeds this minimum acceptable limit, except in the cases of RISK and NPI, which fall slightly below. Still, we believe that their inclusion favours the overall outcome of the model. The Rho_A index also presents a value above the minimum required except in the case of NPI, which is slightly lower.

About convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds the 0.5 limit set by Fornell & Larcker (1981) in all cases. Finally, being Mode A composites, the discriminant validity study focuses on cross-loadings, assessing no relationship between an indicator and other non-indicator constructs. We can accept the result of this index as it does not load any item more strongly on another construct than on the one it is trying to measure (Barclay et al., 1995).

Thus, we can see that in the tables presented. We do not observe strange values in the calculated indicators, all within the required limits. Therefore,

according to these indicators, we can consider that the measurement model is appropriate.

At this point, we proceed to examine the proposed structural relationship. We have used the bootstrapping technique (Roldán & Sánchez-Franco, 2012).

Table 4.
Hypothesis testing

	Original sample	Sample mean	t-statistic	p-value	Interval 2.5%	Interval 97.5%	Supported?
H1 (RISK -> INT)	0.167	0.165	3.447	0.000	0.079	0.241	No
H2 (INT -> WIL)	0.235	0.236	5.621	0.000	0.162	0.303	Yes
H3 (RISK -> NPI)	0.227	0.233	5.729	0.000	0.164	0.299	Yes
H4 (NPI -> INT)	0.143	0.147	3.169	0.001	0.070	0.222	Yes

The results from table 4 corroborate that the higher the travel intention of Gen Z during the COVID-19 pandemic, the higher the individual's willingness to pay for additional security measures (H2). The perceived risk of COVID-19 positively influences the non-pharmaceutical interventions taken (NPI) (H3), and in turn, these NPI influence the higher travel intention of this generation (H4). However, the estimated model does not validate H1, with no significant influence (in the negative sense) between the perceived risk of COVID-19 and Gen Z's intention to travel.

Discussion and Conclusions

With the results obtained, we did not find that the perceived risk of COVID-19 for Gen Z negatively influences their intention to travel. The results are consistent with previous studies (Lee et al., 2012; Kement et al., 2020). However, it contradicts the findings of Wang et al. (2020) and Liu et al. (2021), according to which the perception of COVID-19 harms travel intentions. The reasons why, for our case study, Gen Z's perceived risk for COVID-19 is not a direct predictor of their choice to travel may be several. Firstly, the high vaccination rate of the population. At present (November 2021), according to data from the Ministry of Health, 89.1% of the people in Spain has the entire vaccination schedule (out of the target population). According to the European

Documentation Centre of the University of Almeria, in October 2021, 60.24% of the inhabitants of Europe have already received the full schedule of any of the authorised vaccines. These data could induce the population to think about reducing the risk of infection and increase the feeling of security and, therefore, of a return to "normality". Coupled with adopting adaptive behaviours, such as NPI, it positively affects this travel intention (Lee et al., 2012). Secondly, a possible reinforcement of the intention to travel motivated by the restrictions suffered and by the positive evolution of the pandemic with the decrease in the number of cases (Kement et al., 2020). Although we can extrapolate them to the general population, these reasons are even more relevant for Gen Z because of the particular defining characteristics of this generation. In this sense, according to a study by Booking.com (2019), 55% of Gen Z young people plan to visit at least three different continents in the next ten years, and 78% prefer to travel and see the world rather than save for a house or retirement. At the Spanish level, 72% get excited about future trips.

Although our study does not directly relate perceived risk to travel intention, for this generation, this does not mean that they are not willing to pay more for additional security measures during their trip, as we found a positive relationship between the two constructs.

This result is in line with the findings of Hultman et al. (2015) about ecotourism and with the results of Qiu et al. (2020), who adopt the Chinese resident approach. In this case, younger residents were willing to pay more to maintain public health and reduce the risk of infection from tourism activity. However, it differs from other studies such as Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020). Agag et al. (2020) provided a possible explanation for these divergences in their work on green travel products. These authors concluded that no single factor is sufficient to drive higher willingness to pay of travellers, so that WIL derives from the combination of an assortment of factors, such as demographic variables, values, normative influence, personality traits and beliefs of travellers. Similarly, Qiu et al. (2020) found in their study that age, income and employment in the tourism sector significantly affect residents' WIL.

Analyses show that the perceived risk of COVID-19 positively influences NPI. We have found similar results in other studies such as Kement et al. (2020) and Liu et al. (2021) about COVID-19 and in work such as that of Lee

et al. (2012), who found that virus perception has a positive effect on IPN, about 2009 Influenza A.

In turn, these same authors (Lee et al., 2012) found that non-pharmaceutical interventions positively affect behavioural intention and Liu et al. (2021) concluded that non-pharmaceutical intervention behaviours partially mediate the relationship between COVID-19 perception and intentions to travel abroad. For Gen Z, and along the same lines as the findings of this paper, NPI also positively influences the choice to travel. However, previous work, such as that of Kement et al. (2020), obtained a different direction, indicating that NPI does not have a positive effect on intention. The main reason is tourists' belief that NPI is not sufficiently protective to reduce the risk of travelling or to a lack of confidence among tourists due to the lack of clarity of sanctions. We can explain this divergence of results between earlier studies, corresponding to the early stages of the pandemic, and more current studies, by the different epidemiological and virus control situations of tourists at the time of the survey. At present there is a high vaccination rate in the Spanish population. Tourists may have developed the belief that the fact that a large part of the population is already vaccinated reinforces the level of protection offered by NPI and therefore decreases the likelihood of becoming infected, reducing the risk of travel and thus developing their intention to travel.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

On the one hand, although it is an exploratory model based on other models validated in the literature (Lee et al., 2012; Kement et al., 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021), the model proposed through PLS is an original model in which the different constructs used are related for the first time in a single representation.

Moreover, Oh et al. (2021) noted a global shift in tourism and travel trends, with Gen Z at its core. However, there are not many studies on the tourism behaviour of Gen Z, especially in rare contexts such as the current pandemic, which is one of the main novel contributions of this work that aims to provide more information to this knowledge gap. This study revealed Gen Z's intention to travel above and beyond the perceived risk of COVID, which leads, from a theoretical point of view to a more detailed analysis of the particularities of

this population cohort and their behavioural intentions in other risk contexts. From a practical point of view, it provides tourism companies with more information about a proactive travel niche market to target to try to recover from low numbers due to the pandemic.

Tourism providers can develop specific marketing strategies aimed at this target audience (Gen Z), as they can see that their perception of COVID risk does not have a negative impact on their intention to travel. Given the importance of technologies and the use of social networks by Gen Z, tour operators should make greater use of them to promote their tourism products. They should also encourage disseminating the tourist experience through their channels and networks by offering discounts for the next trip, last-minute offers or other types of incentives.

According to the report published by Booking.com (2019), influencers' trips motivate 45% of Gen Z young people, and they take ideas from Instagram to choose a destination. Which is why tourism companies must make a special effort to obtain positive feedback on the tourism experience. If possible, they should link their product or brand image to influencers, YouTubers or gamers recognised and followed among Gen Z members, who act as endorsers and promoters of destinations and their services (Yussof et al., 2018).

However, the industry must make changes concerning the marketing strategy employed and the tourism product offered. We have found that NPI compliance positively impacts travel intentions and that Gen Z would be willing to spend more on their tourism trip for additional security measures in the face of the pandemic.

Accordingly, the different tourist agents should focus their attention on promoting trips adapted to the tastes and motivations of this generation, making particular reference to safety during the trip, which will allow them to justify small price increases. In this sense, this industry should obtain and disseminate to potential tourists the different seals, certifications and compliance with established protocols especially relevant. For example, we can remark the hygiene and safety protocol followed by companies within the framework of the "Protocol and guide of good practices aimed at commercial activity in physical and non-sedentary establishments" and compliance with the "Guide of good practices for establishments and workers in the tourism sector", both published by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, in

collaboration with the Ministry of Health. Or the certification of good practices against COVID-19 by the Spanish Association for Standardisation and Certification (AENOR), reinforced by the publication of the UNE-ISO/PAS 45005 specification "Management of Health and Safety at Work. General guidelines for safe work during the COVID-19 pandemic". Jiang & Hong's (2021) work shows that perceived safety positively affect Generation Z's destination attachment.

Working to mitigate the effects of COVID in the tourism sector is not only something that should involve tourism stakeholders at all levels of the value chain but should be a joint and collaborative effort with public authorities. Despite the high vaccination rate in Spain, the importance that Gen Z tourists continue to attach to compliance with non-pharmaceutical protection measures has been demonstrated. For this reason, among the measures proposed from the results of this study, we support the proposal of Lee et al. (2012) on the establishment of a certification system developed in cooperation between tourism companies and the government that accredits companies that support personal NPI actions in both their staff and their customers. This would create a positive brand identity easily recognisable to the potential tourist.

Limitations and Future Lines of Research

The results obtained in this study are exploratory and should therefore be interpreted with due caution and take into account some of their main limitations.

Firstly, the conclusions drawn here refer to a particular part of the population, i.e., Spanish university students, taken through a convenience sample, as representatives of Gen Z. Despite being a very representative sample of young digital consumers (Gurtner & Soyez, 2016), we could extend the study sample to other young people of this generation with different educational levels, as well as to other countries in which their situation concerning COVID, the measures employed, the management of the pandemic, etc. is different, to generalise the results (Chung et al., 2021). In the same way, it would be convenient to deepen this line of research by analysing other population groups segmented by age or the well-known generations, such as (Díaz-Sarmiento et al., 2017): the Silent Generation or

Swingers, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y or Millennials, in the same way, that Generation Z or Centennials have been dealt with in this paper.

Secondly, we can also consider using additional constructs to the model to provide a complete explanation of the relationships found in this study, which, being exploratory, follows a model constructed according to the so-called principle of parsimony or Ockham's razor (Chung et al., 2021). In future work, we, therefore, propose to introduce the Theory of Planned Behaviour into the model to determine the impact of the three explanatory variables of travel intention (attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control) on Gen Z (Meng & Cui, 2020) and, in turn, the relationship of risk perception by COVID with them.

Finally, we consider complementing this methodology in future works with others so that the final result is enriched and offers a more complete vision.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: M.J.-G.; methodology, M.J.-G. and J.R.-C.; software, J.R.-C; formal analysis, M.J.-G. and J.R.-C.; writing—original draft preparation, A.R.P.-S.; writing— review and editing, A.R.P.-S..; supervision, M.J.-G. and A.R.P.-S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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