

---

## EXPLORING GENERATION Z'S PRE-VISIT PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL TOURISM: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF NON-VISITORS

By

Julian Bongsoikrama<sup>1</sup>, Nexen Alexandre Pinontoan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Universitas Budi Luhur

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[Julian@budiluhur.ac.id](mailto:Julian@budiluhur.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[Nexenalexandre.pinontoan@budiluhur.ac.id](mailto:Nexenalexandre.pinontoan@budiluhur.ac.id)

---

### **Article History:**

Received: 20-01-2026

Revised: 10-02-2026

Accepted: 23-02-2026

### **Keywords:**

Rural tourism;

Generation Z; Pre-

Visit Perception;

Authenticity;

Descriptive analysis

**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore Generation Z's pre-visit perceptions of rural tourism among individuals who have never visited rural tourism destinations. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected from 457 Generation Z respondents through an online questionnaire. The study measured three perceptual dimensions: cognitive perception, affective perception, and perceived authenticity. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations. The findings reveal that overall pre-visit perceptions of rural tourism are positive. Among the three dimensions, perceived authenticity obtained the highest mean score, indicating that rural tourism is primarily associated with genuine local culture, preserved traditions, and natural experiences. Affective perception also showed strong results, suggesting that rural tourism is emotionally framed as relaxing, enjoyable, and meaningful. Meanwhile, cognitive perception, although categorized as high, recorded relatively lower scores in indicators related to facilities and accessibility. These results suggest that rural tourism is positioned more strongly in symbolic and emotional terms rather than functional aspects in the minds of Generation Z non-visitors. The study highlights the importance of strengthening communication strategies that emphasize authenticity while also improving and clearly conveying information about infrastructure and accessibility. Understanding these pre-visit perceptions is essential for designing more effective promotional strategies to attract younger potential tourists.*

---

## INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has emerged as an important strategy for promoting sustainable local development, cultural preservation, and community-based economic growth (Fu & Wang, 2022). Many rural destinations are increasingly positioned as alternatives to mass tourism, offering authentic experiences, natural landscapes, and cultural immersion (Ginancar et al., 2024). Despite these advantages, attracting younger generations particularly Generation Z remains a significant challenge. As digital natives, Generation Z tends to construct their perceptions of destinations primarily through

online exposure rather than direct experience. This shift raises important questions about how rural tourism is perceived before an actual visit takes place (Popşa, 2024).

Perception plays a critical role in shaping travel-related attitudes and future behavioral intentions. For individuals who have never visited a destination, perceptions are often formed through social media content, online reviews, peer recommendations, and digital storytelling. In the context of rural tourism, these mediated impressions may not always accurately reflect the actual characteristics of the destination. Instead, they may emphasize selective aspects such as aesthetics, uniqueness, or sustainability narratives. Understanding these pre-visit perceptions is therefore crucial, as they influence whether rural destinations are considered relevant, attractive, or even desirable among younger audiences (Mottiar et al., 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017).

Generation Z represents a particularly important market segment. Born into a highly connected digital environment, they are characterized by strong visual orientation, preference for authentic experiences, and increasing awareness of environmental and social issues (Deloitte, 2023). However, rural tourism is sometimes perceived as less modern, less accessible, or lacking in facilities compared to urban or mainstream destinations. For those who have never visited rural tourism destinations, their perceptions may be shaped by stereotypes, limited information, or fragmented online representations. This gap between image and reality can affect rural tourism's competitiveness in attracting future visitors.

Although previous studies have widely examined destination image, visit intention, and tourist satisfaction, research focusing specifically on pre-visit perceptions among non-visitors remains limited, particularly in the context of rural tourism (Leković et al., 2020; López-sanz et al., 2021). Most studies tend to analyze post-visit evaluations or behavioral intentions using explanatory models. However, before investigating causal relationships, it is essential to first understand how rural tourism is cognitively and affectively perceived by potential visitors who have no prior experience (López-sanz et al., 2021; Madanaguli et al., 2023).

In examining Generation Z's pre-visit perceptions of rural tourism, this study focuses on three interrelated perceptual dimensions: cognitive perception, affective perception, and perceived authenticity (Marques et al., 2025; Sadu et al., 2024). These dimensions are considered highly relevant in understanding how rural tourism is positioned in the minds of young individuals who have never directly experienced it. Since non-visitors rely primarily on mediated information such as social media content, online narratives, and peer discussions their perceptions are shaped more by constructed images than by lived experiences (Zaim et al., 2024). Therefore, identifying these perceptual components is essential to capture how rural tourism is cognitively understood, emotionally interpreted, and symbolically valued prior to visitation.

The first dimension, cognitive perception, represents the knowledge-based and attribute-oriented evaluation of rural tourism (Leković et al., 2020). It reflects how Generation Z forms beliefs regarding the functional and structural characteristics of rural destinations. In this study, cognitive perception is operationalized through indicators such as perceptions of attractive natural scenery, unique cultural experiences, interesting traditional activities, adequacy of visitor facilities, accessibility, educational

value, and contributions to local community development (Duan et al., 2020). These indicators illustrate how non-visitors mentally assess the tangible and intangible attributes of rural tourism, even without direct exposure. By measuring these elements, the research seeks to understand whether rural tourism is perceived as appealing, organized, and socially meaningful from a rational standpoint.

The second dimension, affective perception, captures the emotional impressions associated with rural tourism (Weichbrodt & Hoang, 2019). Unlike cognitive perception, which is grounded in beliefs and knowledge, affective perception reflects feelings and emotional reactions. For Generation Z, emotional resonance often plays a decisive role in shaping interest toward a destination. This dimension is measured through perceptions that rural tourism seems enjoyable, relaxing, unique, meaningful, and potentially exciting. These indicators reveal the emotional tone attached to rural tourism in the minds of non-visitors. Understanding this affective layer is important because positive emotional associations may indicate openness to future engagement, whereas neutral or negative emotions may signal perceptual barriers.

The third dimension, perceived authenticity, is particularly significant in the context of rural tourism. Rural destinations are frequently promoted as spaces of originality, cultural preservation, and community-based experiences. For young individuals who value genuineness and meaningful interaction, authenticity becomes a central evaluative lens (Popşa, 2024). In this study, perceived authenticity is reflected through beliefs that rural tourism represents genuine local culture, preserves traditional lifestyles, offers natural rather than artificial experiences, and enables real interaction with local communities. By including this dimension, the research acknowledges that rural tourism is not only evaluated based on facilities or enjoyment but also on its perceived cultural integrity.

Together, these three dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for capturing Generation Z's pre-visit perceptions of rural tourism (Mair, 2023). Rather than examining behavioral intention or post-visit satisfaction, this study emphasizes how rural tourism is currently imagined, interpreted, and emotionally framed by non-visitors. Such an understanding is fundamental for identifying perceptual strengths and weaknesses in the current image of rural tourism among younger generations.

Therefore, this study aims to explore Generation Z's pre-visit perceptions of rural tourism through a descriptive quantitative approach. By focusing on non-visitors, this research seeks to provide a clearer picture of how rural destinations are currently positioned in the minds of young potential tourists. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for destination managers and policymakers in designing more targeted communication strategies that align with Generation Z's expectations, preferences, and value orientations.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a descriptive statistical approach to explore Generation Z's pre-visit perceptions of rural tourism. The focus was not to examine causal relationships but to provide a systematic overview of how rural

tourism destinations are perceived by individuals who have never visited them. A cross-sectional survey design was applied to collect data at a single point in time.

The target population consisted of Generation Z individuals who have never visited a rural tourism destination. Generation Z in this study refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with the main criterion being respondents' confirmation that they had never visited any rural tourism destination. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms to ensure accessibility and relevance to digitally active respondents.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on destination image and perception literature. All measurement items were adapted to capture pre-visit perceptions rather than post-visit evaluations. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage distributions. Each dimension was categorized into low, moderate, and high perception levels based on mean score interpretation. Additionally, ranking analysis was conducted to identify which aspects of rural tourism were perceived most positively or negatively by Generation Z non-visitors.

This descriptive approach allows the study to provide a structured overview of how rural tourism is currently positioned in the minds of Generation Z before actual visitation. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for future explanatory or structural modeling research.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 457 Generation Z respondents who had never visited a rural tourism destination. The descriptive analysis reveals that overall pre-visit perceptions toward rural tourism are positive across all three measured dimensions: cognitive perception, affective perception, and perceived authenticity.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive Perception (N = 457)**

No	Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
1	Attractive natural scenery	4.32	0.71	High
2	Unique cultural experiences	4.18	0.76	High
3	Interesting traditional activities	4.05	0.82	High
4	Adequate visitor facilities	3.42	0.91	Moderate
5	Easy accessibility	3.38	0.95	Moderate
6	Educational value	4.11	0.78	High

No	Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
7	Supports local community development	4.26	0.74	High

Table 1 shows that the overall cognitive perception of rural tourism among 457 Generation Z non-visitors is categorized as high (Mean = 3.96). This indicates that respondents generally hold a positive rational evaluation of rural tourism, even without prior visitation experience.

The highest mean scores were found in attractive natural scenery (4.32), support for local community development (4.26), and unique cultural experiences (4.18). These results suggest that rural tourism is strongly associated with environmental beauty and cultural richness. Educational value (4.11) and traditional activities (4.05) also received high evaluations, reinforcing the perception that rural tourism offers meaningful and enriching experiences.

However, adequate facilities (3.42) and accessibility (3.38) were rated moderately, indicating some uncertainty regarding infrastructure and convenience. Overall, Generation Z cognitively perceives rural tourism positively, particularly in terms of nature and culture, while practical aspects remain less convincing.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Affective Perception (N = 457)**

No	Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
1	Seems enjoyable	4.14	0.80	High
2	Seems relaxing	4.29	0.72	High
3	Appears unique and different	4.21	0.75	High
4	Feels meaningful	4.07	0.83	High
5	Would be exciting to visit	4.16	0.79	High

Table 2 indicates that the affective perception of rural tourism among Generation Z non-visitors is categorized as high (Mean = 4.17). This suggests that rural tourism is emotionally framed in a positive manner, even among those who have never visited.

The highest mean score was found in the perception that rural tourism seems relaxing (4.29), followed by appears unique and different (4.21) and seems enjoyable (4.14). These findings show that rural tourism is emotionally associated with calmness, distinctiveness, and pleasure. The indicators feels meaningful (4.07) and would be exciting to visit (4.16) also fall within the high category, reinforcing the presence of positive emotional anticipation.

Overall, the results suggest that Generation Z not only cognitively recognizes the attributes of rural tourism but also emotionally responds to it in a favorable way. Rural tourism is perceived as enjoyable and refreshing, strengthening its affective appeal despite the absence of direct experience.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Authenticity (N = 457)**

No	Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
1	Reflects genuine local culture	4.34	0.69	High
2	Preserves traditional lifestyles	4.27	0.73	High
3	Natural rather than artificial	4.19	0.77	High
4	Offers real interaction with local communities	4.12	0.81	High

Table 3 shows that perceived authenticity obtained the highest overall mean score (4.23), indicating a strong positive perception among Generation Z non-visitors. This suggests that rural tourism is primarily associated with genuineness and cultural originality.

The highest-rated indicator was reflects genuine local culture (4.34), followed by preserves traditional lifestyles (4.27) and natural rather than artificial experiences (4.19). These findings indicate that respondents strongly believe rural tourism represents authentic cultural and environmental elements. The perception that rural tourism offers real interaction with local communities (4.12) also falls within the high category, reinforcing the image of meaningful community engagement.

Overall, the results demonstrate that authenticity is the strongest perceptual attribute of rural tourism in the minds of Generation Z non-visitors. Even without direct experience, rural tourism is imagined as culturally rooted and naturally genuine, making authenticity a central component of its pre-visit image.

**Table 4. Overall Dimension Ranking (N = 457)**

Dimension	Mean	Category	Rank
Perceived Authenticity	4.23	High	1
Affective Perception	4.17	High	2
Cognitive Perception	3.96	High	3

The overall dimension analysis indicates that all three perceptual dimensions are categorized as high, confirming that Generation Z non-visitors generally hold a positive pre-visit image of rural tourism. Among the dimensions, perceived authenticity ranks first (Mean = 4.23), followed by affective perception (Mean = 4.17), and cognitive perception (Mean = 3.96).

This ranking suggests that rural tourism is primarily imagined as authentic and culturally genuine, which becomes its strongest perceived attribute. Emotional responses such as feeling relaxed, excited, and finding the destination enjoyable also play a significant role in shaping positive impressions. Meanwhile, although cognitive perception remains high, it is comparatively lower, particularly regarding infrastructure-related aspects.

Overall, the findings indicate that rural tourism is positioned more strongly in symbolic and emotional terms rather than in functional considerations. For Generation

Z non-visitors, rural tourism is seen as authentic and emotionally appealing, yet some practical concerns remain regarding accessibility and facilities.

The findings reveal that Generation Z non-visitors hold an overall positive pre-visit perception of rural tourism, with perceived authenticity emerging as the strongest dimension. This suggests that rural tourism is primarily positioned in the minds of young individuals as culturally genuine, natural, and community-based (Zielinski et al., 2021). Even without direct experience, respondents strongly associate rural destinations with original local culture and preserved traditions. This indicates that the symbolic value of rural tourism particularly its authenticity plays a dominant role in shaping its image among digitally connected youth (Amin & Rahmiati, 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Nair et al., 2020).

The high affective perception further reinforces this positioning. Rural tourism is emotionally framed as relaxing, enjoyable, unique, and meaningful. For Generation Z, who often seek experiences that provide emotional resonance and personal meaning, this positive emotional framing is significant. It suggests that rural tourism already carries a favorable emotional appeal, potentially lowering psychological barriers to future visitation. The emotional attractiveness may also reflect the growing desire among younger generations to escape urban routines and seek restorative environments (Jepson & Sharpley, 2014; Tang et al., 2024; Yang & Tang, 2020).

However, the comparatively lower scores within the cognitive dimension particularly regarding facilities and accessibility highlight a perceptual gap. While respondents appreciate the natural and cultural attributes of rural tourism, they express moderate confidence in its infrastructure and convenience. This suggests that although rural tourism is perceived as authentic and emotionally attractive, it may still be associated with limited amenities or logistical challenges. Such perceptions could influence future travel decisions, especially for Generation Z, who are accustomed to digital convenience and seamless mobility.

Taken together, the findings indicate that rural tourism's strength lies in its authenticity and emotional appeal rather than its functional image. For destination managers and policymakers, this implies that communication strategies should maintain and strengthen narratives of cultural originality and meaningful experiences, while simultaneously improving and clearly communicating information regarding accessibility and facilities. Addressing these functional concerns may help transform positive pre-visit perceptions into actual visitation behavior among Generation Z.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored Generation Z's pre-visit perceptions of rural tourism among individuals who have never previously visited such destinations. The findings indicate that overall perceptions are positive across cognitive, affective, and authenticity dimensions. Among these, perceived authenticity emerged as the strongest attribute, suggesting that rural tourism is primarily imagined as culturally genuine, natural, and community-oriented. Affective perception also scored highly, reflecting that rural tourism is emotionally associated with relaxation, enjoyment, and meaningful experiences.

Although cognitive perception remains in the high category, relatively lower evaluations were observed in aspects related to facilities and accessibility. This suggests that while rural tourism is symbolically and emotionally attractive, some uncertainty persists regarding its functional readiness and infrastructure.

Overall, rural tourism is positioned more strongly in terms of authenticity and emotional value rather than practical convenience in the minds of Generation Z non-visitors. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening both communication strategies and infrastructural transparency to convert positive pre-visit perceptions into actual visitation in the future.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Amin, G., & Rahmiati, F. (2021). How Community Based Influence Self Esteem in Rural Tourism Development. *Iccd*, 3(1), 40–43. <https://doi.org/10.33068/iccd.vol3.iss1.345>
- [2] Chen, J., Huang, Y., Wu, E. Q., Ip, R., & Wang, K. (2023). How does rural tourism experience affect green consumption in terms of memorable rural-based tourism experiences, connectedness to nature and environmental awareness? *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 54(December 2022), 166–177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.12.006>
- [3] Deloitte. (2023). 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey. *Waves of Change; Acknowledging Progress, Confronting Setbacks*.
- [4] Duan, X., Marafa, L. M., Chan, C. S., Xu, H., & Cheung, L. T. O. (2020). Measuring the gaps in the projected image and perceived image of rural tourism destinations in China's Yangtze River Delta. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 12(12), 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12125121>
- [5] Fu, Y., & Wang, J. (2022). Rural Tourism Development and Eco-Tourism Innovation Path From the Perspective of Tourism Psychology. *Psychiatria Danubina*, 34(1), S504–S505.
- [6] Ginanjar, R., Riani, A. L., & Aini, I. N. Q. (2024). Local Champion: A New Leadership Perspective to Create Sustainable Tourism in Rural Communities. *The Eastasouth Management and Business*, 2(02), 105–117. <https://doi.org/10.58812/esmb.v2i02.196>
- [7] Jepson, D., & Sharpley, R. A. J. (2014). More than sense of place? Exploring the emotional dimension of rural tourism experiences. *Central Lancashire Online Knowledge*.
- [8] Leković, K., Tomić, S., Marić, D., & Ćurčić, N. V. (2020). Cognitive component of the image of a rural tourism destination as a sustainable development potential. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 12(22), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229413>
- [9] López-sanz, J. M., Penelas-leguía, A., Gutiérrez-rodríguez, P., & Cuesta-valiño, P. (2021). Sustainable development and consumer behavior in rural tourism—the importance of image and loyalty for host communities. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13094763>
- [10] Madanaguli, A., Dhir, A., Joseph, R. P., Albishri, N. A., & Group, F. (2023). Environmental sustainability practices and strategies in the rural tourism and hospitality sector : a systematic literature review and suggestions for future research. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2023.2174179>
- [11] Mair, H. (2023). Handbook on Tourism and Rural Community Development. In *Edward Elgar* (Vol. 11, Issue 1).

[http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484\\_SISTEM\\_PEM\\_BETUNGAN\\_TERPUSAT\\_STRATEGI\\_MELESTARI](http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484_SISTEM_PEM_BETUNGAN_TERPUSAT_STRATEGI_MELESTARI)

- [12] Marques, J., Gomes, S., Ferreira, M., Rebuá, M., & Marques, H. (2025). Generation Z and Travel Motivations: The Impact of Age, Gender, and Residence. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 6(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp6020082>
- [13] Mottiar, Z., Boluk, K., & Kline, C. (2018). The roles of social entrepreneurs in rural destination development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 68(December 2017), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.12.001>
- [14] Nair, V., Hamzah, A., & Musa, G. (2020). Responsible rural tourism in Asia. In *Responsible Rural Tourism in Asia*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/NAIR7512>
- [15] Popşa, R. E. (2024). Exploring the Generation Z Travel Trends and Behavior. *Studies in Business and Economics*, 19(1), 189–199. <https://doi.org/10.2478/sbe-2024-0010>
- [16] Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Ringle, C. M., Jaafar, M., & Ramayah, T. (2017). Urban vs . rural destinations : Residents ' perceptions , community participation and support for tourism development. *Tourism Management*, 60, 147–158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.11.019>
- [17] Sadu, I. G. D., Tan, K. R., Setiawan, N. P., & Hendriana, E. (2024). Effect of Social Media Marketing on Visit Intention and Willingness to Pay Premium Price for Ecotourism. *Journal of Management, Economic, and Financial*, 2(4), 140–145. <https://doi.org/10.46799/jmef.v2i4.45>
- [18] Tang, R., Zhao, X., & Guo, Z. (2024). Place perception and restorative experience of recreationists in the natural environment of rural tourism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, May, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1341956>
- [19] Weichbrodt, A., & Hoang, K. N. (2019). Rural tourism in Vietnam. *Bussiness and Economics Program*.
- [20] Yang, Q., & Tang, Y. (2020). The impact of emotional energy on the operational strategy of rural tourism enterprises. *Enterprise Information Systems*, 00(00), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17517575.2020.1778093>
- [21] Zaim, I. A., Styliadis, D., Andriotis, K., & Thickett, A. (2024). Does user-generated video content motivate individuals to visit a destination? A non-visitor typology. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667241268369>
- [22] Zielinski, S., Jeong, Y., & Milanés, C. B. (2021). Factors that influence community-based tourism (CBT) in developing and developed countries. *Tourism Geographies*, 23(5–6), 1040–1072. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1786156>

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK