

Generation Z's sharing of travel-related content on social media: The role of personality traits

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Abstract.

The study investigates the relationship between Generation Z's personality traits and their sharing of travel-related content on social media. The sharing of travel-related content captures aspects such as posts of travel content and selfies as well as conspicuous consumption and status-seeking. Based on a literature review, 13 hypothesised relationships between personality traits and sharing of travel-content on social media are suggested. Online-survey data from 314 Generation Z respondents was collected through a convenience sample.

Results confirm our suggested adaption of existing grandiose and vulnerable narcissism measures to a travel-related context. Additionally, a significant portion of Generation Z share travel-related content on social media. Results reveal several noteworthy correlations, as well as a lack of correlations, providing valuable insights for both academic researchers and tourism practitioners.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Travel Experience, Social Media Sharing

Track: Tourism Marketing

1. Introduction

Social media have become integral components of contemporary travel experiences. The act of sharing personal travel experiences on social media is now considered standard travel behaviour among travellers. However, the utilization and perception of social media vary significantly across different demographic groups and personality traits. This study aims to investigate the relationship between Generation Z's (Gen Z) self-reported personality traits and their propensity to share travel-related content on social media.

Gen Z, encompassing individuals born from the late 1990s to 2010, is widely recognized as the most digitally adept generation globally. As a significant consumer segment, Gen Z represent the tourists of tomorrow. This cohort exhibits a pronounced tendency to utilize online sources for travel inspiration (Popsa, 2024) and for sharing travel-content on social media before, during and after their trip (Hjalager & Jensen, 2012; Hasan & Neela, 2022). Research indicates a preference among tourists for sharing visual content over textual content (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014), with travel selfies and videos gaining popularity (Taylor, 2020).

The motivations for sharing travel experiences are diverse, encompassing the documentation of memories, entertainment, connect with other travellers, altruism, status, and self-presentation (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Mulvey et al., 2020; Arica et al., 2022)

Thorstein Veblen (1899) introduced the theory of conspicuous consumption, positing that individuals purchase and exhibit goods and services to signal economic power and social status. In a similar vein, travellers often share their travel experiences on social media to assert their superiority or mitigate feelings of inadequacy in social comparisons (Siepmann et al., 2022)

This study incorporated and applied psychological insights from two widely recognized personality assessment tools: the "Big Five personality model" and the narcissism dimensions. Both measures are instrumental in evaluating travel-related social media behaviour. More specifically we investigate how those personality traits relate to Gen Z's sharing of travel content (travel-posts in general and selfie-post in particular) and their inclination for conspicuousness consumption and status-seeking.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

The Big Five personality model comprises five personality traits: Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness/Intellect (Zajenkowski & Szymaiak, 2021). Extroverted individuals are characterized by their sociability and

talkativeness (Engvik & Clausen, 2011) and found to be the most active on social media (Tan & Yang, 2014; Taylor, 2020). Consequently, we hypothesise that extroversion is positively correlated with the frequency of travel-posts and selfie-posts (H₁, H₂).

Agreeable individuals are, according to the Big Five model, characterised with affection, empathy, and prosocial behaviours.

Control pertains to the individuals' capacity to regulate their own conscience, engage in meticulous planning, and attend to pertinent details. We expect level of control to be positively correlated with conspicuous consumption (H₃).

Openness/Intellect is linked to creativity and the pursuit of novel experiences.

Neuroticism encompasses negative characteristics such as anxiety, depression, and embarrassment. Given that individuals with high levels of neuroticism tend to exercise greater caution in social interactions, we anticipate that they will less likely share their travel experience with others (H₄), particularly in the context of posting travel-selfies (H₅).

Existing literature identifies two distinct forms of narcissism: grandiose and vulnerable, as delineated by Zajenkowski and Szymaniak (2021). Grandiose narcissists exhibit an inflated sense of self and self-importance, a propensity for exploitative practices, and an intense need for admiration. Conversely, vulnerable narcissists are characterized by diminished self-esteem, defensiveness, and hypersensitivity. Empirical evidence indicates that grandiose narcissists typically score higher on measures of extroversion, control, and openness, while scoring lower on neuroticism and agreeableness, in comparison to their vulnerable counterpart.

We hypothesize that grandiose narcissism will exhibit a positive correlation with the posting of travel-related content and selfie-posts (H₆, H₇). Furthermore, we predict that grandiose narcissists will be more likely to exhibit with conspicuous consumption and status-seeking, (H₈, H₉). Conversely, we anticipate that vulnerable narcissists will be less inclined to post travel-related content and travel-selfies (H₁₀, H₁₁), but also more likely to exhibit conspicuous consumption and seeking status (H₁₂, H₁₃),

Recent research has shown distinct relationships between the two forms of narcissism and fundamental personality traits, specifically the Big Five dimensions (Zajenkowski and Szymaniak, 2021). Furthermore, these narcissism dimensions and The Big Five traits have been shown to be interrelated and exhibit correlations with social media usage (Casale & Banchi, 2020) and self-presentation in travel photography (Christou et al., 2021).

3. Method

The data for this study were collected through an online survey, using convenience sampling, checking only for year of birth between 1995 and 2010 to align with the Generation Z demographic. Invitations to participate in the study were disseminated by requesting undergraduate students enrolled in a quantitative data analysis course at the University of Southern Denmark to share a link to the online survey via mail and through their social media platforms. Following the exclusion of incomplete questionnaires and respondents not born in the specified years, a total of 314 valid responses were obtained for analysis. The sample exhibited a gender imbalance, with approximately 80% of respondents being female. Most of the participants were students (63.1%) and aged between 20 and 24 years (65.6%), reflecting the distribution method via university students. Additionally, 27.7%, 76.8%, and 61.8% of respondents reported sharing travel-related content on social media before, during and after their trips, respectively.

To achieve reasonably accurate measurements, most constructs in this study were measured using multiple-item scales adapted from previous studies. The Big Five personality traits were measured using items from Engvik & Clausen's (2011) Norwegian version of BFI-20, employing a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1= very much disagree to 7= very much agree. Grandiose narcissism was measured by adapting three of the five items proposed by Taylor & Strutton (2016). Vulnerable narcissism was assessed using four items from the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (Hendin & Cheek, 1997). Items in both narcissism scales were contextualized to a travel related setting (e.g. "*when it comes to travel, I know that I am an extraordinary person*" replaced "*I know I am an extraordinary person*"). Both narcissism scales were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1= very much disagree to 5 = very much agree).

Conspicuous consumption was assessed using a four-item scale that evaluated travellers' propensity to share their travel experiences on social media, with particular emphasis on their intentions to highlight the most positive aspects of these experiences. Status was evaluated through three-item scale that examined the importance of attaining status as motive for sharing travel-related experiences. Both scales were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1= very much disagree to 5 = very much agree).

The extent of sharing travel-related content on social media was measured using three items, which captured posts before, during the trip and those made post-trip, respectively. The practice of selfie-posting was measured with three items that assessed the frequency of posting of pure selfies and other photographs and videos from the destination where the

respondent where part of the photo or video. Respondents were asked to specify the number of trips between 2020 and 2024 where they have posted those kind of travel-posts

The precise wording of each item is presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

3. Results

Prior to examining the relationship between personality traits sharing of travel-related content on social media we created summated scales for each of the twelve subscales by calculating the average score of the variables loaded against each dimension. Cronbach's alpha was also calculated to check the internal consistency within each subscales. Mean scores and corresponding standard deviations along with the reliability of outcome and predictor constructs are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. All reliability scores are above or close to the .7 level, indicating satisfactory reliability for the constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1: Outcome constructs, corresponding items, and scale statistics

Constructs and corresponding items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean (SD)
<i>Conspicuous consumption</i> ¹⁾	.73	2.83 (1.37)
I like to share my travel experiences with others on social media		
I'm more likely to share my travel experiences with others on social media if I know they will provide me with likes/recognition		
I always choose the most prestigious/positive images when sharing travel experiences on social media		
What I share on social media probably portrays my holiday experiences a little better than they are		
<i>Status</i> ²⁾	.81	1.88 (.88)
I probably also do it to 'brag' a little/make others a little envious		
I somehow feel that it gives me status		
I share travel experiences to receive recognitions/likes		
<i>Posts of travel-content on social media</i> ³⁾	.66	2.11 (.90)
Posted prior to the trip		
Posted/shared during the trip		
Posted/shared after the trip		
<i>Posted travel-selfies and/or pictures including myself</i> ³⁾	.81	2.05 (.98)
Posted travel-selfies from the destination		
Posted pictures from the destination where I'm in the picture myself (not selfies)		
Posted videos from the destination where I'm in the video myself		

Note: ¹⁾ 5-point Likert Scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree ²⁾ 5-point scale from 1 = Not at all to 5 = To a very high degree ³⁾ 1=None of the trips, 2=1-2 trips, 3=3-4 trips, 4 = 5-6 trips 5 = 6+ trips

Table 2: Predictor constructs, corresponding items, and scale statistics

Constructs and corresponding items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean (SD)
<i>Extrovert</i> ¹⁾	.87	4.55 (1.38)
Is talkative in the company of others		
Tends to be quiet in the company of others*		
Is outgoing and social		
Can be a little shy and inhibited*		
<i>Agreeable</i> ¹⁾	.70	5.67 (.90)
Can be cold and dismissive of others*		
Is sometimes rude to others*		
Is considerate and friendly to almost everyone		
Try to be understanding of others		
<i>Control</i> ¹⁾	.66	5.06 (1.06)
Is thorough/diligent in work or study		
Is not always as conscientious as others*		
Tends to be disorganized*		
Makes plans and following them up		
<i>Openness/Intellect</i> ¹⁾	.77	5.26 (.95)
Is original, comes up with new ideas		
Wants to try/experience something new		
Likes to reflect and play with new ideas		
Is open to new experiences		
<i>Neurotic</i> ¹⁾	.71	4.12 (1.17)
Is sometimes depressed/depressed		
Is mostly relaxed, handles stress well*		
Is easy to put off my cool		
Rarely gets nervous*		
<i>Grandiose Narcissism</i> ²⁾	.67	2.57 (.82)
When it comes to travel experiences, regards him/herself to be an		
Is better to choose/plan trips than most people in the social circle		
Knows that he/she is good at choosing/planning travel experiences		
<i>Vulnerable Narcissism</i> ²⁾	.71	2.08 (.77)
I often feel that other people's travel experiences are better than mine		
I only shares travel experiences if I know they will provide		
I take others' negative comments about sharing my travel experiences		
I sometimes regret sharing travel experiences on social media		

Note: * = reversed scale

¹⁾ Scale: 7-point Likert Scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree 0

²⁾ Scale: 5-point Likert Scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

3.1.Relationships between the two Types of Narcissism and the Big Five Personality Traits

Table 3 presents the zero-order correlations between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, as well as the correlations between the two types of narcissism and the Big Five personality traits. Initially, examining the relationship between the two types of narcissism, the results

indicate that the two dimensions are independent ($r = -.048$; $p > .05$), suggesting that a high score on one dimension does not necessarily predict a high or low score on the other. Both types of narcissism exhibited correlations with personality traits consistent with previous research (Zajenkowski & Szymaniak, 2021). Grandiose narcissism correlated positively with extroversion ($r = .157$; $p < .01$), Control ($r = .106$; $p < .05$) and Openness/Intelligence ($r = .299$, $p < .01$), and negatively with Neurotism ($r = -.100$; $p < .05$). Conversely, vulnerable narcissism correlated negatively with Extroversion ($r = -.300$; $p < .01$) and Openness/Intelligence ($r = -.217$; $p < .01$) and positively with Neurotism ($r = .400$; $p < .01$). Neither dimension showed significant correlations with Agreeableness ($r = -.057$; $p > .05$, and $r = .005$; $p > .05$, respectively).

Table 3 Relationship between the two types of Narcissism and the Big Five personality traits

	GRN	VUN	EXT	AGR	CON	NEU	OP/IN
GRN	1	-.043	.144**	-.023	.137**	-.077*	.276***
VUN	-.048	1	-.300**	.005	-.068	.400***	-.217***

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

3.3. Relationships between the personality traits and posting of travel-related content

The relationship between the personality trait factors and sharing of travel-related content on social media was analysed using a series of four multiple regression analyses, with the seven personality traits as independent variables and, in each of the four analyses, the dependent variables were travel-posting, selfie-posting, conspicuous consumption, and status-seeking.

Table 4 Relationships between the personality traits and posting of travel-related content.

	Travel-Posting		Selfie-Posting		Conspicuous Consumption		Status-Seeking	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Constant	.282	.528	.907	.568	-.307	.468	.601	.473
Extroversion	.092*	.043	.140***	.046	.050	.038	-.013	.038
Agreeableness	-.046	.056	-.051	.060	.065	.050	.002	.050
Control	.039	.049	-.041	.052	.068	.043	.006	.043
Openess/Intellect	.074	.059	-.035	.052	.021	.043	-.062	.043
Neurotic	.016	.049	.010	.063	.055	.052	-.021	.053
Grandiose Narcissisme	.254***	.069	.341***	.073	.228***	.060	.278***	.061
Vulnerable Narcissisme	.174**	.071	.126*	.076	.615***	.062	.561***	.063
F	5.623***		6.170***		21.572***		14.744***	
Adj. R ²	.094		.104		.315		.235	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The variance inflation factor (VIF) for the seven independent variables ranges between 1.101 and 1.464, indicating multicollinearity does not exist among the predictor variables (Hair et al., 2019). F-values in Table 4 shows that all four regressions were significant at a .001-level. Adj R² shows that the seven personality traits explain 9%, 10%, 33%, and 23%, respectively, of travel-posting, selfie-posting, conspicuous consumption, and status-seeking. Extroversion exhibited a positive relationship to travel-posting and selfie-posting ($\beta = .092$; $p < .05$ and $\beta = .140$; $p < .001$, respectively), supporting H₁ and H₂. Control was not positively correlated with conspicuous consumption ($\beta = .062$; $p > .05$), thus not supporting H₃.

Agreeableness, openness/intellect and neurotic were not correlated with any of the four travel-posting factors. Thus, we did not find support for our hypotheses of neurotic individuals being less likely to make travel- and selfie-posts (H₄ and H₅).

Individuals exhibiting grandiose narcissism demonstrated a higher propensity to share travel-related content and post travel-selfies ($\beta = .254$; $p < .001$ and $\beta = .341$; $p < .001$, respectively), thereby supporting H₆ and H₇. A positive correlation was observed between grandiose narcissism and conspicuous consumption ($\beta = .228$; $p < .001$) and status-seeking ($\beta = .278$; $p < .001$), thus validating H₈ and H₉.

Vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with travel-posting and selfie-posting ($\beta = .174$; $p < .01$ and $\beta = .126$; $p < .05$, respectively), thus not supporting our expectation vulnerable individuals being less likely make travel- and selfie-posts (H₁₀ and H₁₁). On the contrary, although showing a weaker relationship when compared to grandiose narcissists, vulnerable persons are indeed more likely to make travel- and selfie-posts. Vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with conspicuous consumption and status-seeking ($\beta = .616$; $p < .001$ and $\beta = .561$; $p < .001$, respectively), thereby confirming H₁₂ and H₁₃. Interestingly, these correlations were markedly stronger in comparison with those associated with grandiose narcissism.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between Generation Z's personality traits, specifically the Big Five and two types of narcissism, and their propensity to share travel-related content on social media platforms. The study offers significant contributions to the body of tourism literature and provides valuable insights for tourism marketing.

The study concentrated on Generation Z, recognizing them as a substantial demographic and the future cohort of tourists. The findings indicate that a significant portion of this group

actively shares travel-related content on social media, particularly during and after their trips. Consequently, insight into this segment is invaluable for both academic researchers and industry practitioners.

To the best of authors' knowledge, this study represents one of the pioneering efforts to concurrently examine the relationship between the Big Five and Narcissism traits in the context of sharing travel-related content on social media. Also, the study is the first to adapt measures of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism specifically to a travel-related context. The reliability of these two dimensions was found to be acceptable and good, respectively. Additionally, the two types of narcissism correlated with the Big Five traits in a manner consistent with previous research (i.e., grandiose narcissists being more extroverted, whereas vulnerable narcissists were less extroverted), suggesting good criterion validity of the measures. Interestingly, the two narcissism measures were uncorrelated, suggesting that travellers with grandiose narcissism traits can also exhibit vulnerable traits, and vice versa.

The findings reveal several noteworthy correlations, as well as a lack of correlations, between personality traits and the sharing of travel-related content on social media. These insights present valuable opportunities for tourism managers and highlight areas of calls for future research. Extroverted travellers were found to be more likely to post travel-content and selfies on social media, but not more inclined to engage in conspicuous consumption and status-seeking. None of the other four Big Five traits were correlated with sharing of travel-related content on social media. Thus, we did not find support for our hypothesised positive relationship between control and conspicuous consumption, nor for our hypothesised negative relationship between neuroticism and the posting of travel-content and selfies. This contradictory finding warrants further investigation.

Grandiose narcissists demonstrated a higher tendency post travel-related content and travel-selfies on social media, driven primarily by motives of conspicuous consumption and status-seeking. Contrary to our expectations, vulnerable narcissists were not less likely, but indeed more likely, to post travel-related content and travel-selfies on social media. As hypothesised, they were also more inclined to engage in conspicuous consumption and status-seeking, even to a stronger extent than their narcissistic counterparts. Thus, tourism managers may target those two narcissism types to co-create promotional content for their travel products.

To address some of the limitations of this study, future research may use a more generalisable sample and add more variables as predictors for sharing of travel-related content.

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