

Decoding Gen-Z's Career Choices: Factors Influencing Their Pursuit of Opportunities in the Modern Hospitality Industry.

Mr. Sanket Kale*, Dr. Prajakta Parasnis, Mrs. Ashima Deshpande

Assistant Professor, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Institute of Hotel Management & Catering Technology, Pune, 411043, Maharashtra, India

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry, a dynamic and service driven sector, continues to evolve with globalization, technological innovation, and shifting workforce demographics. Among these changes, Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) has emerged as a key labor force segment. This research paper explores the factors influencing Gen-Z individuals to pursue a career in the hospitality industry. The study identifies motivational factors such as passion for service, career growth opportunities, global exposure, job security, and work life balance. Using a structured questionnaire and review of secondary data, the research aims to understand both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that affect career choices among young professionals. The findings highlight that Gen-Z values flexibility, recognition, meaningful work, and innovation. The study concludes by offering recommendations to educational institutions and hospitality organizations for attracting and retaining this new generation workforce.

Keywords: Gen-Z, hospitality career, career motivation, workforce, job perception, career choice factors

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is one of the world's largest employment sectors, encompassing hotels, restaurants, travel, tourism, and event management. Traditionally, this industry has been labor-intensive and heavily reliant on interpersonal skills. With the entry of Generation Z into the workforce, hospitality organizations are witnessing a paradigm shift in employee expectations and work culture.

Generation Z, often characterized by their digital fluency, entrepreneurial mindset, and desire for purpose driven work, is redefining career priorities. Unlike previous generations, Gen-Z individuals seek employment that provides both personal satisfaction and professional growth. The hospitality industry, offering a mix of human interaction and global opportunities, can be an attractive career path—but only if it aligns with Gen-Z's values and expectations.

However, the industry faces challenges such as perceived low wages, long working hours, and limited work life balance, which can discourage potential entrants. Hence, understanding the factors influencing Gen-Z to pursue a hospitality career becomes essential for educators, employers, and policymakers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of existing literature provides valuable insights into the changing trends of career motivation and workforce behavior, particularly among Gen-Z.

1. Richardson (2009) examined student perceptions toward hospitality careers and found that intrinsic factors like passion and interest were strong motivators, whereas poor working conditions discouraged long term commitment.
2. Solnet & Hood (2008) noted that younger generations seek more structured training programs, clear career pathways, and international mobility when choosing hospitality as a profession.

3. Nieves & Quintana (2018) highlighted that Gen-Z's decision making is strongly influenced by digital media, peer networks, and social validation rather than traditional career counseling.
4. Ng & Parry (2016) studied generational differences and found that Gen-Z employees value flexibility, diversity, and work environments that respect individuality and innovation.
5. Pizam (2019) emphasized the importance of employer branding, mentorship, and ethical leadership in attracting Gen-Z to hospitality roles.
6. Ramanathan (2021) pointed out that hospitality management education plays a vital role in shaping perceptions and preparing Gen-Z for sustainable careers in service sectors.
7. Kim & Park (2022) explored Gen-Z's post pandemic career attitudes, noting a shift toward job security, stability, and hybrid work preferences.

Summary of Literature Review:

Most studies agree that while Gen-Z finds hospitality attractive due to its dynamic nature and global exposure, the sector must adapt to their expectations—particularly concerning technology integration, flexibility, and meaningful work culture.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present research aims to analyze the motivational factors that influence GenZ to pursue a career in the hospitality industry.

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing GenZ's choice of a hospitality career.
2. To understand GenZ's perception of career opportunities in the hospitality industry.
3. To study the role of educational institutions and social media in shaping career decisions.
4. To examine challenges or barriers that discourage GenZ from joining the hospitality sector.
5. To suggest strategies for attracting and retaining GenZ talent in hospitality organizations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research follows a descriptive and exploratory design. It focuses on understanding opinions, perceptions, and motivational patterns among GenZ students and young professionals.

Sampling Technique

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling

Sample Size: 120 respondents (students pursuing hospitality management or related courses aged 18–25 years)

Area of Study: Pune, Mumbai, and Bangalore (India)

Data Collection

Primary Data: Collected through an online structured questionnaire using Google Forms.

Secondary Data: Gathered from journals, textbooks, reports by hospitality associations, and research databases (e.g., ResearchGate, Elsevier).

Data Analysis Tools

Quantitative analysis is performed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution. Qualitative responses were coded and analyzed thematically.

Limitations of the Study

The sample is limited to specific urban areas.

Respondents may exhibit response bias due to social desirability.

Findings may not represent the entire GenZ population.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile

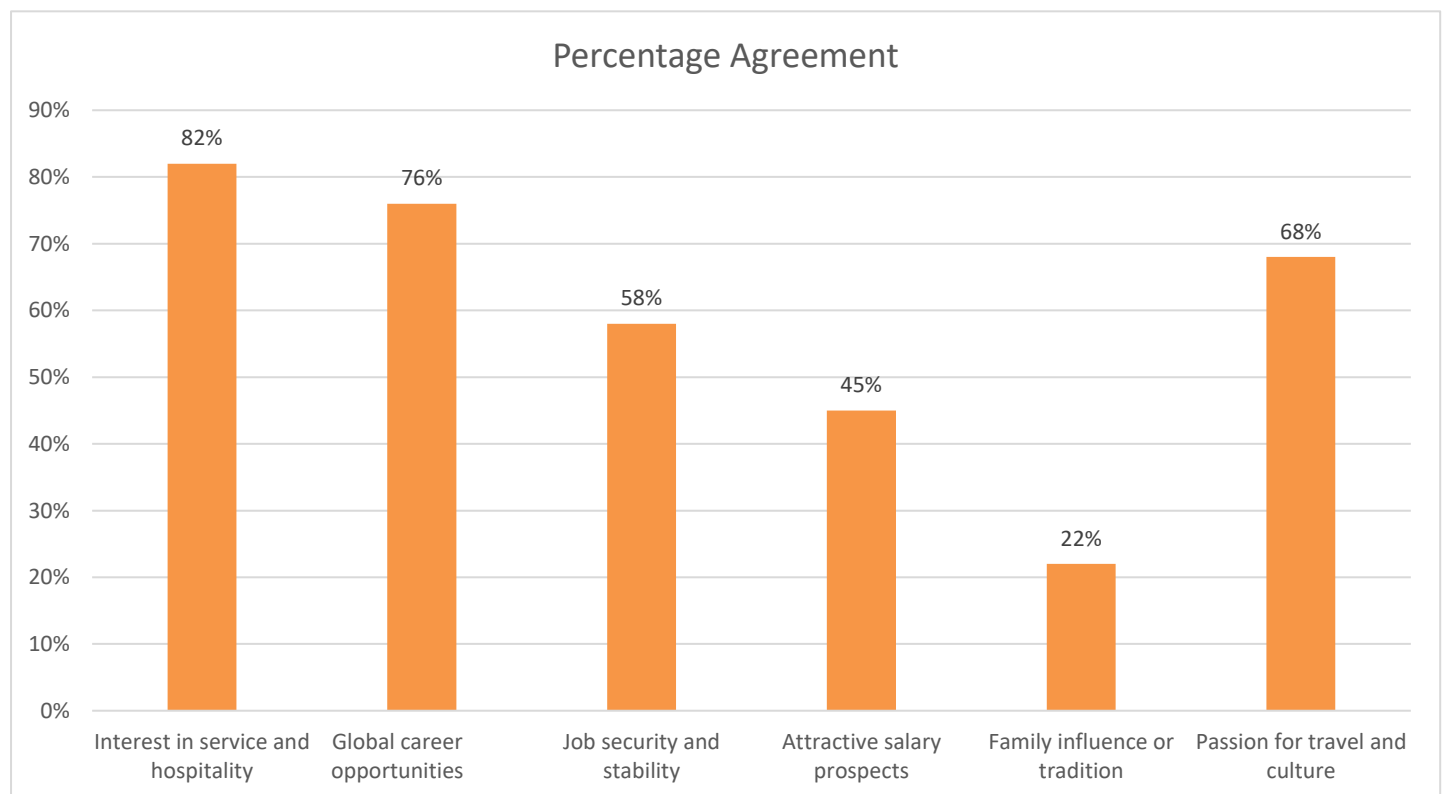
Gender: 56% female, 44% male

Age Group: Majority (82%) between 19–23 years

Educational Background: 75% pursuing B.Sc. or BBA in Hospitality and Hotel Administration

Motivational Factors

Motivational Factor	Percentage Agreement
Interest in service and hospitality	82%
Global career opportunities	76%
Job security and stability	58%
Attractive salary prospects	45%
Family influence or tradition	22%
Passion for travel and culture	68%

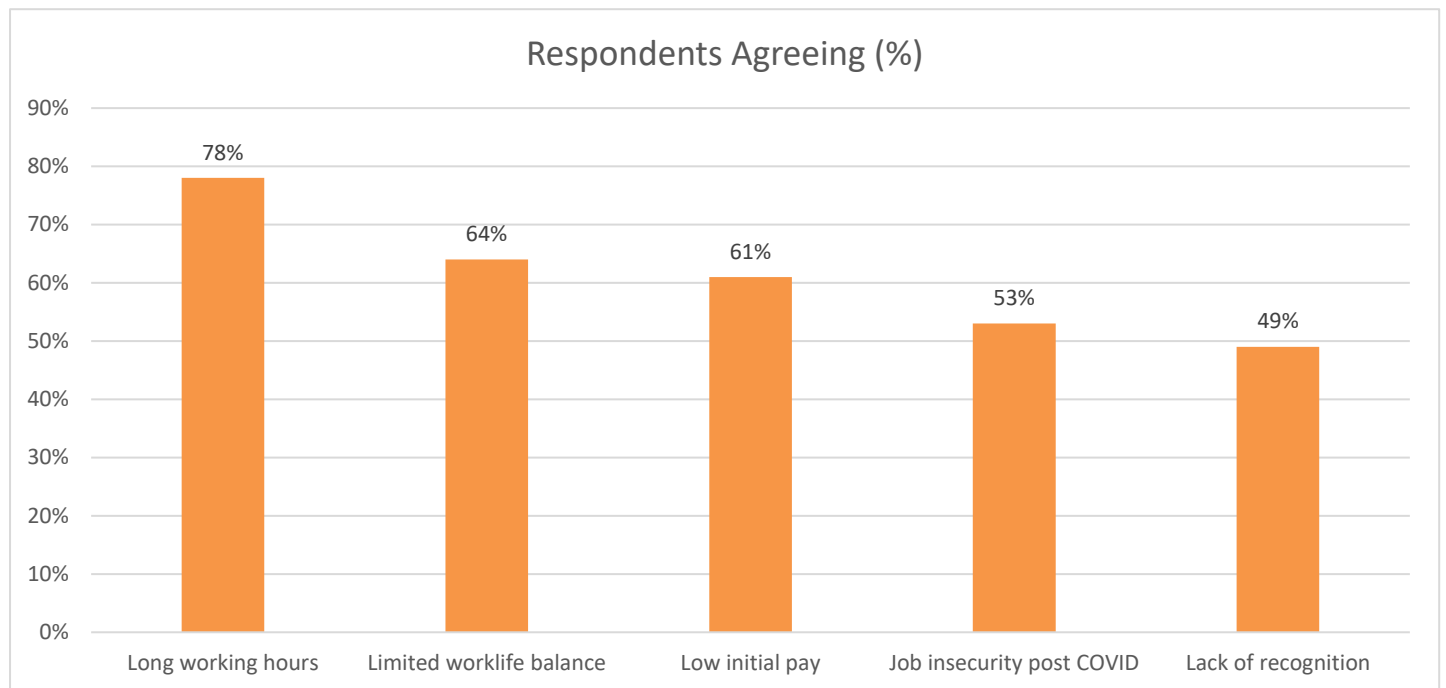


Interpretation:

Passion for service, global exposure, and travel are primary motivators. Financial rewards and family influence are comparatively less significant among GenZ.

Perception toward Industry Challenges

Challenge	Respondents Agreeing (%)
Long working hours	78%
Limited work-life balance	64%
Low initial pay	61%
Job insecurity post COVID	53%
Lack of recognition	49%



Interpretation:

Respondents expressed concern about long working hours and low initial salaries, suggesting the need for improved HR practices and employee wellbeing initiatives.

Influence of Education and Media

70% of respondents said college faculty and training programs influenced their career decision.

64% mentioned social media platforms (LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube) as major sources of industry awareness.

42% said internship experiences were decisive in confirming their interest in hospitality.

Workplace Expectations

GenZ respondents emphasized the following workplace features as essential:

Fair compensation and recognition (78%)

Opportunities for innovation and leadership (74%)

Technological advancement and digital tools (68%)

Positive organizational culture and inclusivity (82%)

Career growth and mentorship programs (69%)

DISCUSSION

The data indicates a generational shift in work values. GenZ prioritizes meaningful experiences and development opportunities over short term monetary gains. They view hospitality as more than service — as a platform for creativity, networking, and personal growth.

QUESTIONNAIRE (SAMPLE COPY)

Section A – Demographic Details

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Educational Qualification:
4. City/Location:

Section B – Career Motivation

5. What motivated you to choose the hospitality industry? (Multiple choice)
6. Rate the following factors influencing your decision (1 = Least important, 5 = Most important):
 - Job stability
 - Salary package
 - Passion for service
 - Career growth
 - Global exposure
7. Did your family or peers influence your career decision?
8. Have you been inspired by any hospitality professional or brand?

Section C – Perception & Challenges

9. What challenges do you associate with hospitality careers?
10. Do you believe the industry provides sufficient work life balance?
11. What improvements would you suggest for attracting GenZ talent?

Section D – Educational and Media Influence

12. Have your college curriculum or faculty inspired you to pursue hospitality?
13. How much influence does social media have on your perception of the industry?
14. Would you recommend this career to others in your generation?

FINDINGS

1. GenZ's primary motivation stems from personal passion, global exposure, and interest in people oriented jobs.
2. Work life balance and initial compensation remain major concerns.
3. Social media and internship experience strongly shape career perceptions.
4. Hospitality is perceived as a dynamic and creative field, offering cultural learning and leadership opportunities.
5. To attract GenZ, organizations must adopt flexible schedules, career mentoring, and digital integration in work processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educational Institutions:

Strengthen industryacademia linkages through guest lectures, live projects, and mentorship programs.

Showcase successful GenZ professionals to inspire students.

2. Hospitality Organizations:

Offer flexible scheduling, transparent growth pathways, and recognition systems.

Promote technology based work processes appealing to GenZ's digital mindset.

Foster inclusive and creative work environments.

3. Government and Industry Bodies:

Conduct awareness campaigns to highlight the economic and social value of hospitality careers.

Support internship and skill development schemes under "Skill India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Generation Z's pursuit of careers in the hospitality industry is largely shaped by their desire for personal fulfillment, creative expression, and opportunities for international exposure. Unlike earlier generations who often viewed hospitality primarily as a stable source of employment, Gen Z perceives it as a dynamic career pathway that allows them to explore their passions, engage with diverse cultures, and build meaningful professional identities. The industry's inherently people-oriented nature, combined with opportunities for innovation and global mobility, strongly resonates with this generation's aspirations for purposeful and experiential work.

However, the findings also highlight that Gen Z professionals bring evolving expectations that challenge traditional hospitality work structures. Flexibility in working hours, work-life balance, timely recognition, and transparent career growth opportunities are no longer optional but essential factors influencing their career commitment. Additionally, Gen Z's familiarity with digital technologies has reshaped their expectations of workplace efficiency. They seek technologically advanced environments where digital tools, automation, and data-driven decision-making are seamlessly integrated into daily operations. Organizations that fail to modernize their systems and managerial approaches risk disengagement and higher attrition among young professionals.

The study further emphasizes the importance of meaningful work experiences in attracting and retaining Gen Z talent. This generation values continuous learning, mentorship, and opportunities for skill development over rigid hierarchical structures. Investing in structured training programs, leadership development initiatives, and

platforms for innovation can significantly enhance employee engagement and long-term loyalty. Recognition of individual contributions, open communication, and inclusive organizational cultures also play a vital role in meeting Gen Z's professional expectations.

Ultimately, Gen Z views hospitality not merely as a service-driven industry but as a platform for purpose, innovation, and global connection. Their mindset reflects a shift toward value-driven careers where social impact, creativity, and professional growth coexist. Therefore, the future sustainability and competitiveness of the hospitality industry depend on the alignment of institutional policies and organizational strategies with Gen Z's values and aspirations. By embracing digital transformation, fostering flexible and supportive work environments, and actively investing in young talent development, the hospitality industry can successfully build a resilient, motivated, and future-ready workforce.

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