

Article

Understanding Generation Z's Motivations and Behavioral Intentions in Dark Tourism: A Study from Albania

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Highlights

What are the main findings?

- This study provides empirical evidence on Generation Z's intentions toward dark tourism in Albania, an under-researched post-communist destination.
- Motivation, social media and attitude significantly predict behavioral intentions, while the perceived psychological risk showed a negative relationship with Behavioral Intentions; however, the effect was relatively weak compared to Motivation, Attitude and Social Media Influence.

What are the implications of the main findings?

- The findings suggest that dark tourism experiences for younger visitors should emphasize learning, cultural memory, ethical interpretation, and respectful storytelling.
- Destination managers should use digital communication channels to engage younger visitors.

Abstract

The concept of dark tourism has obtained significant attention in recent years, and its appeal to younger generations is a topic of great interest. This study examines the behavioral intentions of Generation Z towards dark tourism in Albania, a country with a strong cultural and historical heritage. Using a quantitative research design, the study collected data from 312 respondents and analyzed them using exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression. The results found several key variables that influence the behavioral intentions of Generation Z towards dark tourism, including attitude, motivations, social media, and perceived psychological risk. Interestingly, the study found that attitude is the strongest predictor of behavioral intentions towards dark tourism. This suggests that if young people have a positive attitude towards dark tourism, they are more likely to visit dark tourism sites. On the other hand, the variable of perceived psychological risk was found to have a negative influence on the behavioral intentions of Generation Z to visit dark tourism sites. This implies that if young people perceive dark tourism as risky or threatening, they are less likely to participate in it. The study contributes to dark tourism research by offering empirical evidence from Albania and by highlighting the importance of educational, reflective and ethically sensitive interpretation for Generation Z visitors. The findings of the study reveal the importance of developing tourism experiences that are not only educational and emotionally engaging, but also ethically based. This is particularly relevant for emerging destinations like Albania, where dark tourism remains underdeveloped despite its significant cultural and historical potential. By shaping tourism experiences for younger audiences, destinations like Albania can tap into the potential of dark tourism and offer unique, meaningful experiences for visitors.



Academic Editor: Maximiliano
Korstanje

Received: 25 May 2026

Revised: 11 June 2026

Accepted: 16 June 2026

Published: 26 June 2026

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Keywords: Generation Z; dark tourism; behavioral intentions; motivations; social media; Albania

1. Introduction

Dark tourism refers to travel to places associated with death, tragedy, disaster, conflict and suffering. Although the concept has been widely discussed in heritage and tourism studies, recent debates increasingly emphasize the need to move beyond descriptive accounts and examine how visitors interpret, evaluate and intend to engage with such sites. This is particularly important in destinations where difficult heritage is linked to political repression, collective memory and contested interpretations of the past. One of the fastest-growing niche tourism segments in recent decades is dark tourism, defined as the visitation of places associated with death, suffering, disasters, or historically significant tragic events (Lennon & Foley, 2000). Such destinations include battlefields, memorials, prisons, concentration camps, genocide museums, and sites related to political oppression. According to P. R. Stone (2006), dark tourism reflects contemporary society's fascination with mortality and its desire to engage with difficult aspects of human history.

The growing popularity of dark tourism has attracted considerable academic attention. Researchers have explored visitors' motivations, emotional experiences, ethical considerations, and behavioral outcomes associated with visits to dark tourism sites (Biran et al., 2011; Sharpley & Stone, 2009). Previous studies suggest that tourists are motivated by educational interests, historical curiosity, remembrance, empathy, and the search for authentic experiences rather than merely by morbid fascination (Kang et al., 2012; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014). As a result, dark tourism has become increasingly recognized as a means of preserving cultural heritage, fostering historical awareness, and promoting collective memory.

Among contemporary tourist segments, Generation Z has emerged as a particularly important market. Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is characterized by high digital literacy, extensive social media engagement, and a strong desire for meaningful and authentic experiences (Priporas et al., 2017). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z travelers often seek destinations that provide educational value, emotional engagement, and opportunities for self-reflection (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). Their travel decisions are heavily influenced by online information, peer recommendations, and social media content, which shape their perceptions and behavioral intentions toward destinations.

Previous studies have highlighted that motivations play a crucial role in determining individuals' attitudes and intentions to visit dark tourism sites (Biran & Hyde, 2013; Zheng et al., 2018). Visitors are often driven by a desire to learn about historical events, understand human suffering, and connect with the past. These motivations contribute to the formation of favorable attitudes toward dark tourism experiences and may ultimately influence behavioral intentions. At the same time, tourists may perceive psychological risks associated with visiting sites connected to death, tragedy, or trauma. Such risks may include feelings of discomfort, sadness, anxiety, or emotional distress (Cheal & Griffin, 2013). Consequently, perceived psychological risk may negatively affect attitudes and reduce individuals' willingness to engage in dark tourism activities.

Social media has further transformed how tourists discover and evaluate destinations. User-generated content, online reviews, and visual storytelling on digital platforms can significantly influence destination image and travel decisions (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Recent studies indicate that social media plays an increasingly important role in shaping younger generations' perceptions of dark tourism destinations by providing information,

emotional narratives, and virtual exposure to historical sites (Raine, 2013; Light, 2017). For Generation Z in particular, social media serves as a primary source of travel inspiration and information, making it an important factor in understanding behavioral intentions.

Generation Z is an important segment for this field because its members are digital, experience-oriented and often interested in authentic and meaningful encounters. In Albania, many members of Generation Z were born after the communist period and therefore engage with this history through education, family narratives, media and heritage interpretation rather than direct experience. Understanding how this cohort evaluates dark tourism can help destination managers develop experiences that are educational, respectful and relevant to younger visitors.

The main problem addressed in this study is the limited empirical evidence on Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism in Albania. In the Albanian context, dark tourism represents an emerging but relatively underexplored tourism niche. Albania's communist past, political persecution, labor camps, prisons, and sites of historical trauma provide significant potential for dark tourism development. Destinations such "The House of Leaves", "Bunk Art" and "The Museum of Witness and Memory" have increasingly attracted both domestic and international visitors interested in understanding Albania's political history and collective memory. Albanian scholars such as Gjoci (2018), Dollma (2021) and Dhora and Bushi (2023) have emphasized the growing role of heritage interpretation and memory-based tourism in promoting historical awareness and destination diversification. However, empirical research examining how Albanian Generation Z perceives dark tourism and what factors influence their behavioral intentions remains limited. Post-communist countries possess a wide range of sites associated with political repression, ideological control, and collective memory. Former prisons, surveillance facilities, monuments, and memorial sites increasingly function as spaces of heritage interpretation and dark tourism. Such places often reflect contested narratives of the past and play an important role in shaping collective memory and historical understanding (Fawcus, 2022).

Although previous international studies have investigated motivations, attitudes, and risk perceptions in dark tourism contexts (P. R. Stone, 2006; Biran et al., 2011; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014), limited attention has been devoted to Generation Z in post-communist countries. Furthermore, little is known about how motivations, social media influence, and perceived psychological risk jointly shape attitudes and behavioral intentions toward dark tourism destinations in Albania. Addressing this gap is important both theoretically and practically, as understanding the behavioral mechanisms underlying dark tourism participation can support destination managers, policymakers, and heritage institutions in designing more effective visitor experiences.

Existing studies have examined dark tourism motivations, heritage interpretation and emotional responses in other contexts, but fewer studies focus on young visitors in the Western Balkans and post-communist Albania. This study therefore addresses both a geographical gap and a generational gap in the literature.

The aim of the study is to examine how motivation, social media and attitude influence Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism in Albania. Based on the available dataset, the study also describes respondents' prior awareness and experience of dark tourism. The study contributes by providing empirical evidence from an under-researched destination and by clarifying which constructs can be supported by the available data.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Dark Tourism and Generation Z

Recent research suggests that Generation Z demonstrates a strong preference for authentic, meaningful, and culturally enriching experiences. Cultural heritage, identity, and

opportunities for learning are increasingly important factors influencing travel decisions among younger tourists (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2025).

Recent scholarship highlights the growing complexity of dark tourism research and the need for updated theoretical perspectives. P. Stone (2013) emphasized that dark tourism should not be understood solely as travel to places associated with death and tragedy but also as a social and cultural phenomenon shaped by memory, interpretation, and visitor experience. More recently, Saha and Husain (2025), through a systematic review of dark tourism studies, concluded that motivations, ethical considerations, emotional responses, and behavioral intentions remain among the most important research themes. Their review also identified a growing interest in understanding younger generations and their decision-making processes regarding dark tourism experiences.

Furthermore, James and Cronin (2026) argue that dark tourism is increasingly expanding beyond physical destinations into digital and virtual spaces, where online narratives and virtual experiences influence visitor perceptions and destination interest. This evolution is particularly relevant for Generation Z, whose travel behavior is strongly influenced by digital technologies and online content.

Dark tourism refers to travel to places associated with death, tragedy, suffering, and historical suffering (Foley & Lennon, 1996; P. R. Stone, 2006). These destinations include former prisons, battlefields, genocide memorials, disaster sites, and locations associated with political repression. Dark tourism has increasingly attracted academic attention because it combines educational, emotional, cultural, and commemorative dimensions.

While previous studies consistently identify motivation as a key determinant of dark tourism participation, findings differ regarding the relative importance of educational, emotional, and commemorative motives across cultural contexts. Hoang et al. (2026) found that the quality of dark tourism experiences significantly influences Generation Z tourists' behavioral outcomes, including satisfaction, recommendation intentions, and future visitation intentions.

Generation Z represents a particularly relevant segment for dark tourism research. As digital natives, members of Generation Z are identified by their extensive use of technology, preference for authentic experiences, and interest in socially meaningful activities (Wee, 2019). Unlike previous generations, they frequently seek experiences that combine education, emotional involvement, and personal development. Consequently, dark tourism offers opportunities for historical learning and reflection. By examining the behavioral intentions and motivations of Generation Z, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the appeal of dark tourism sites and how to develop them to meet this segment's needs. The study of Generation Z's engagement with dark tourism can yield valuable insights and guide the development of tourism sites that are both instructive and emotionally meaningful for identity formation. Existing research provides mixed evidence regarding the role of psychological risk, with some studies reporting a significant negative effect on visitation intentions, while others suggest that emotional discomfort may coexist with educational interest.

Recent studies suggest that Generation Z is increasingly interested in destinations that offer meaningful, life-changing experiences instead of purely recreational activities (Seyfi et al., 2025). Therefore, understanding the factors modifying their behavioral intentions toward dark tourism has become increasingly important.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is primarily grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991), which is one of the most widely applied frameworks for explaining and predicting human behavior in tourism research. According to TPB, behavioral intention

represents the immediate antecedent of actual behavior and is influenced by individuals' attitudes toward a specific activity. Attitude reflects a person's overall positive or negative evaluation of a behavior and has consistently been identified as a significant predictor of travel intentions.

In the context of dark tourism, attitude reflects visitors' perceptions regarding the educational value, historical significance, ethical acceptability, and emotional relevance of dark tourism experiences. Individuals who perceive dark tourism positively are more likely to develop stronger intentions to visit such destinations. Therefore, attitude is expected to play a central role in explaining Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

Although TPB emphasizes the importance of attitude, recent tourism studies suggest that behavioral intentions are also shaped by additional motivational, social, and psychological factors. Motivation has been widely recognized as a key driver of tourism behavior, particularly in dark tourism contexts where visitors are motivated by historical learning, curiosity, remembrance, and personal reflection (Biran et al., 2011). Social media influence has become increasingly relevant for Generation Z because digital platforms shape destination awareness, destination image, and travel-related decision-making processes (Singh & Chauhan, 2022). Furthermore, perceived psychological risk may influence behavioral intentions by creating emotional concerns related to visiting places associated with death, suffering, or tragedy (Korstanje & Ivanov, 2012).

Based on this theoretical perspective, the present study applies the TPB framework and incorporates motivational, social, and psychological factors to explain Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism in Albania.

Although the Theory of Planned Behavior includes attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as key determinants of behavioral intention, the present study focuses primarily on attitude and complementary motivational, social, and psychological factors. Therefore, the model represents a partial application of TPB rather than a full operationalization of all TPB constructs.

2.2. Motivation and Behavioral Intentions

Motivation remains one of the most important determinants of dark tourism participation. Previous studies have demonstrated that visitors are motivated by historical learning, curiosity, emotional engagement, remembrance, and personal reflection. Dark tourism experiences may encourage reflection and meaning-making processes that extend beyond the visit itself (Dunkley, 2016), while recent studies highlight the continuing importance of emotional engagement and historical learning in shaping visitors' behavioral intentions (Saha & Husain, 2025). Motivation is widely recognized as one of the most important drivers of tourism behavior. In dark tourism contexts, motivations extend beyond mere interest to include educational interests, historical learning, emotional involvement, commemoration, and moral reflection (Biran et al., 2011; Balbuena & Criscione-Naylor, 2024).

Their findings suggest that visitors increasingly seek meaningful experiences that contribute to personal growth and historical awareness rather than merely satisfying curiosity.

For Generation Z, these motivations may be particularly important because younger travelers increasingly value experiences that provide authenticity, emotional engagement, and opportunities for self-development. Therefore, motivation is expected to positively influence behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

Previous research suggests that visitors are motivated to understand historical tragedies, connect with common memory, and participate in meaningful experiences (Isaac & Budryte-Ausiejene, 2015). For Generation Z, these motivations are frequently connected to self-development, social awareness, and experiential learning.

Studies have consistently reported positive relationships between motivation and tourism-related behavioral intentions. Individuals with stronger educational, emotional, and historical motivations are more likely to visit dark tourism sites. Motivation is a key determinant of Generation Z's willingness to engage in dark tourism experiences, particularly when destinations provide opportunities for learning, reflection, and meaningful engagement with history (Hoang et al., 2025).

H1. *Motivation positively influences Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.*

2.3. Social Media Influence and Behavioral Intentions

The role of digital communication in tourism decision-making has become increasingly significant. Florido-Benítez (2022) demonstrated that tourism promotion through digital channels and social media significantly influences destination visibility, tourist engagement, and travel intentions. Social media platforms enable destinations to communicate emotional narratives, visual content, and visitor experiences that shape destination image and attractiveness. Digital technologies are increasingly shaping how younger generations interact with heritage and historical sites. Nicolaidou et al. (2022) found that virtual tours can enhance young people's engagement with historical conflicts by providing immersive, educational, and emotionally meaningful experiences. These findings suggest that digital platforms may play an important role in increasing awareness and interest in dark tourism destinations among Generation Z.

Similarly, James and Cronin (2026) highlighted the growing influence of online storytelling and digital narratives in shaping perceptions of dark tourism destinations. For Generation Z, social media functions not only as a source of information, but also as a platform for social validation and experience sharing. Consequently, exposure to dark tourism content through social media is expected to positively affect behavioral intentions toward visiting such destinations. Social media has become a critical source of information in tourism decision-making, particularly among Generation Z. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and travel blogs influence destination awareness, image formation, and travel intentions (Singh & Chauhan, 2022). As digital natives, Generation Z increasingly interacts with cultural heritage through digital platforms and immersive technologies. Research indicates that technology-enhanced experiences can strengthen cultural engagement and motivate visits to heritage attractions, particularly among younger audiences (Prole et al., 2025). This trend is especially relevant for dark tourism destinations, where digital interpretation and interactive storytelling can enrich visitors' understanding of historical events.

Research indicates that visually impressive content and user-generated experiences significantly affect destination choice. In dark tourism, social media contributes to destination visibility by posting stories, images, and affective narratives associated with historical sites (Chen, 2025).

Because Generation Z relies heavily on online communication channels when planning travel, exposure to social media is likely to positively influence their intention to visit dark tourism destinations.

H2. *Social media positively affects Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.*

2.4. Attitude and Behavioral Intentions

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) identifies attitude as one of the strongest predictors of behavioral intention. Attitude reflects an individual's overall evaluation of a behavior and influences the likelihood of performing that behavior.

Positive perceptions of the educational and commemorative value of dark tourism may foster stronger emotional connections with destinations, thereby increasing visitors' intentions to engage with similar sites in the future (Dandotiya & Aggarwal, 2023).

In dark tourism, attitudes are shaped by perceptions of educational value, historical significance, emotional involvement, and cultural significance. Positive attitudes toward dark tourism increase the likelihood of participation because visitors perceive these experiences as meaningful and worthwhile.

Previous studies have demonstrated that favorable attitudes significantly predict intentions to engage in tourism-related activities, notably among younger holidaymakers seeking authentic experiences.

H3. *Attitude positively influences Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.*

2.5. Perceived Psychological Risk and Behavioral Intentions

Perceived psychological risk refers to the possibility that an experience may generate emotional discomfort, sadness, anxiety, or ethical issues. Dark tourism frequently involves exposure to difficult historical events, death, suffering, and human tragedy, which can create emotional challenges for visitors (Korstanje & Ivanov, 2012). Although psychological risk is generally considered a barrier to participation, some studies suggest that emotional discomfort may increase visitors' curiosity and reflective engagement with dark tourism experiences (Sigala & Steriopoulos, 2022).

Although many visitors appreciate the educational value of dark tourism, some may avoid these destinations because they anticipate negative emotional reactions. Research has shown that perceived risk often acts as a barrier to tourism participation and negatively affects behavioral intentions.

For Generation Z, psychological risk may be particularly relevant because they are highly sensitive to ethically related issues and emotional experiences. Recent research suggests that emotions represent an important component of tourism decision-making among younger generations. Kumar Walia et al. (2026) found that emotional factors significantly influence behavioral intentions among Generation Z travelers. Given that dark tourism experiences often involve emotional reactions such as empathy, sadness, reflection, and discomfort, perceived psychological risk may play an important role in shaping visitors' willingness to engage with such destinations.

H4. *Perceived psychological risk negatively influences Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.*

2.6. Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

Despite the growing dark tourism literature, three important gaps remain. First, empirical evidence from post-communist destinations remains limited. Second, Generation Z has received considerably less attention than other visitor segments. Third, few studies have simultaneously examined motivation, social media influence, attitude and perceived psychological risk as predictors of behavioral intentions. This study addresses these gaps using evidence from Albania. Albania's communist past has left a complex legacy of memory and heritage, including former prisons, surveillance facilities, labor camps, and memorial sites. These places represent important spaces through which society negotiates historical memory and collective identity. Understanding how younger generations engage with such sites is particularly relevant in post-communist contexts, where memories of political repression continue to influence contemporary heritage interpretation (Gjoci, 2018). Most existing studies focus on established dark tourism destinations in Western Europe and Asia, while evidence from the Balkan region is scarce.

Furthermore, few studies have simultaneously investigated the influence of motivation, social media influence, attitude, and perceived psychological risk on Generation Z's behavioral intentions. Albania provides a particularly significant context due to its communist heritage, former political prisons, surveillance facilities, and extensive bunker system. Albania represents a particularly relevant case because its communist legacy has generated a range of potential dark tourism attractions, including former prisons, surveillance facilities, bunkers and memory museums. However, empirical evidence regarding visitors' perceptions of these sites remains scarce. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by examining the determinants of Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism in Albania and by proposing a conceptual model that encompasses motivational, attitudinal, social, and psychological factors.

Recent studies have expanded the geographical scope of dark tourism research. For example, Assylkhanova et al. (2024) examined the potential of former concentration camps in Kazakhstan as dark tourism destinations and emphasized the importance of historical memory, interpretation, and visitor engagement in emerging destinations. However, similar empirical studies remain scarce in the Balkan region, particularly in Albania. This highlights the need for further research examining behavioral intentions toward dark tourism within post-communist contexts. Figure 1 presents the theoretical model used in this study.

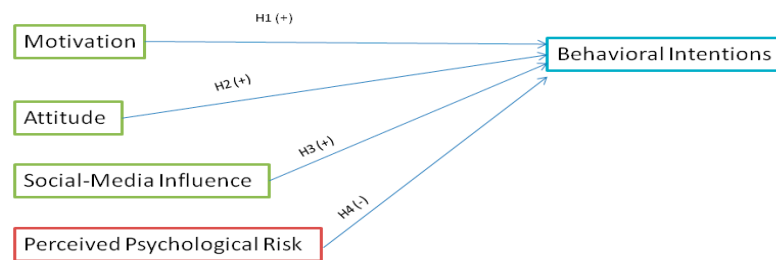


Figure 1. Theoretical conceptual model. Source: Author's elaboration.

2.7. Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Motivation positively influences Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

H2: Social media influence positively affects Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

H3: Attitude positively influences Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

H4: Perceived psychological risk negatively influences Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

The study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate for examining relationships among psychological and behavioral constructs at a single point in time. The questionnaire measured demographic characteristics, social media influence, motivation, attitude, perceived psychological risk and behavioral intentions.

3.2. Study Area

Albania represents a particularly relevant context for dark tourism due to its communist past and the existence of numerous sites associated with political repression, surveillance, imprisonment, and collective trauma. Following the fall of the communist regime in

1991, several locations have been transformed into museums and memorial attractions that preserve historical memory and educate visitors about the country's past.

Among the most prominent dark tourism attractions are:

House of Leaves (Tirana), former headquarters of the communist secret police (Sigurimi), now functioning as a museum documenting surveillance practices and political persecution.

Bunk'Art 1 and Bunk'Art 2 (Tirana), large underground bunkers transformed into museums that present the history of the communist regime, civil defense structures, and political control mechanisms.

The Museum of Witness and Memory (Shkodra), located in a former detention center, which preserves testimonies, documents, and artifacts related to political imprisonment and human rights violations during the communist period.

These sites represent important examples of dark tourism attractions because they combine historical interpretation, collective memory, education, and reflection on difficult heritage. Their increasing popularity among domestic and international visitors makes Albania an appropriate setting for investigating Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

3.3. Sampling and Data Collection

The available dataset contains 312 responses collected through an online questionnaire. Respondents were recruited from the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi" through convenience sampling. The online questionnaire was distributed among undergraduate and graduate students belonging to Generation Z via university communication channels and student networks. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the survey. A non-probability sampling approach was used because the study targeted Generation Z respondents who were reachable through digital channels and student networks. Participants were eligible if they belonged to the Generation Z age range represented in the questionnaire and were able to answer questions about dark tourism perceptions and travel intentions. Data were collected between January and April 2026.

The sample size of 312 respondents exceeds the minimum recommendations for multivariate statistical analyses. According to Hair et al. (2019), a sample above 200 observations is generally considered adequate for exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression. Therefore, the sample size used in this study was sufficient to ensure statistical reliability and robustness of the findings.

Scale-based analyses were conducted with 312 complete cases after excluding observations with missing values on the relevant items.

3.4. Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire included Likert-scale items measured from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Motivation was measured through six items capturing historical learning, unique travel experiences, cultural heritage interest, understanding past events, meaningful experiences and curiosity. Attitude was measured through five items capturing the perceived educational value, preservation of history, awareness raising, respectfulness to victims and ethical acceptability of dark tourism. Behavioral intentions were measured through five items capturing intention to visit, recommendation, inclusion in travel plans, revisit intention and likelihood of visiting within two years. The study employed validated scales adapted from the literature to assess motivation, attitude, and behavioral intentions toward dark tourism. Motivation items were adapted primarily from Biran et al. (2011) and Isaac and Çakmak (2014), which examined motivations related to historical learning, curiosity, remembrance, and meaningful engagement in dark tourism contexts. Behavioral

intention items were adapted from Ajzen (1991) and tourism behavioral intention studies, focusing on future visitation intentions, recommendation intentions, and revisit intentions. Social media influence items were adapted from Singh and Chauhan (2022), while perceived psychological risk items were adapted from Korstanje and Ivanov (2012). Table 1 presents the operationalization of the research constructs and the measurement items used in this study.

Table 1. Operationalization of research constructs.

Construct	Code	Measurement Item
Motivation	M1	I am interested in learning about historical tragedies.
Motivation	M2	I seek unique travel experiences.
Motivation	M3	I am interested in cultural heritage.
Motivation	M4	I want to understand past events.
Motivation	M5	I seek meaningful travel experiences.
Motivation	M6	Curiosity motivates me to visit dark tourism destinations.
Attitude	A1	Dark tourism is educational.
Attitude	A2	Dark tourism preserves history.
Attitude	A3	Dark tourism raises awareness.
Attitude	A4	Dark tourism is respectful to victims.
Attitude	A5	Dark tourism is ethically acceptable.
Behavioral intentions	BI1	I intend to visit dark destinations/attractions in the future.
Behavioral intentions	BI2	I would recommend dark tourism destinations/attractions to others.
Behavioral intentions	BI3	I would include dark tourism in my travel plans.
Behavioral intentions	BI4	I would revisit dark tourism destinations/attractions.
Behavioral intentions	BI5	I intend to visit a dark tourism destination/attraction within the next two years.
Social Media Influence	SM1	Social media content increases my interest in dark tourism destinations
Social Media Influence	SM2	Posts and videos on social media encourage me to visit dark tourism sites
Social Media Influence	SM3	Reviews shared on social media influence my decision to visit dark tourism destinations
Social Media Influence	SM4	Social media makes dark tourism destinations appear more attractive
Social Media Influence	SM5	I often search social media for information about dark tourism destinations
Perceived Psychological Risk	PPR1	Visiting dark tourism destinations may cause emotional discomfort
Perceived Psychological Risk	PPR2	I may feel anxious when visiting places associated with death and tragedy
Perceived Psychological Risk	PPR3	Dark tourism destinations may have a negative emotional impact in me
Perceived Psychological Risk	PPR4	I am concerned about the psychological effects of visiting dark tourism sites

Source: Adapted from (Biran et al., 2011; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014; Ajzen, 1991; Singh & Chauhan, 2022).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and provided informed consent prior to participation. Data were collected anonymously and used exclusively for academic purposes.

4. Results

This research examines how Generation Z views dark tourism in Albania. To do this, it uses a survey to collect information from a group of people at a single point in time. This approach is useful because it helps measure how different psychological factors, such as attitudes, motivations, and intentions, are related, and it allows the findings to be applied to a larger group of people. A questionnaire was created to gather data on what motivates people to engage in dark tourism, their intentions to do so, the risks they perceive, their overall attitude towards it, and some basic information about who they are. The survey was aimed at young people, known as Generation Z, living in Albania. Because this age group is very comfortable using digital technology, it was easy to reach them and ask for their

opinions. The survey was sent via Google Forms, making it easy for people to take part. All the survey questions were answered on a five-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The final dataset contained 312 valid responses from people in Generation Z in Albania.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 24 Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to assess construct validity. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine relationships among variables. Finally, multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the factors influencing Generation Z’s behavioral intentions toward dark tourism.

4.1. Respondent Profile

A total of 312 valid responses were collected from Generation Z individuals in Albania. Female respondents represented 60.3% of the sample, while males accounted for 39.7%. The largest age group was 18–21 years (45.5%), followed by 22–24 years (33.0%) and 25–27 years (21.5%). Regarding education, most respondents held a Bachelor’s degree (59.6%), followed by a Master’s degree (23.7%) and high school education (16.7%). In terms of employment status, students constituted the largest group (53.5%), followed by employed respondents (34.6%) and unemployed respondents (11.9%). These characteristics suggest that the sample reflects the demographic profile of Generation Z individuals targeted in this study. Table 2 summarizes the demographic profile of the respondents included in this study.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	188	60.3
	Male	124	39.7
Age	18–21 years	142	45.5
	22–24 years	103	33.0
	25–27 years	67	21.5
Education	High School	52	16.7
	Bachelor Degree	186	59.6
	Master Degree	74	23.7
Employment Status	Student	167	53.5
	Employed	108	34.6
	Unemployed	37	11.9

4.2. Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Before testing the research hypotheses, reliability and statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the measured scales and to provide an overview of the respondents’ perceptions regarding the study constructs. Cronbach’s alpha was used to assess the reliability of each construct, while mean and standard deviation values were calculated to examine the central tendency and variability of respondents answers. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and reliability analysis of the study constructs. The results indicate satisfactory internal consistency for all constructs, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.846 to 0.893, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. This confirms that the measurement scales used in this study are reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Among the examined constructs, Motivation recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.95$), suggesting that the respondents were strongly motivated by factors such as learning about historical events, cultural heritage, and meaningful experiences

associated with dark tourism. Social Media Influence showed the second-highest mean ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.91$), indicating that social platforms play an important role in shaping Generation Z's interest in dark tourism destinations.

Table 3. Reliability and descriptive statistics.

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Motivation	6	3.78	0.95	0.893	Good reliability
Attitude	5	3.59	0.96	0.879	Good reliability
Behavioral intentions	5	3.41	0.89	0.875	Good reliability
Social Media Influence	5	3.67	0.91	0.881	Good reliability
Perceived Psychological Risk	4	3.22	0.93	0.846	Good reliability

Attitude toward dark tourism demonstrated a moderately positive evaluation ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.96$), suggesting that participants generally perceived dark tourism as educational, historically important, and ethically acceptable.

In contrast, Perceived Psychological Risk recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.93$), indicating that although respondents acknowledged potential emotional discomfort associated with visiting sites related to death and tragedy, these concerns were not sufficiently strong to outweigh their interest in dark tourism experiences.

4.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to assess the underlying structure of the measurement items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.842, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1456.32$, $p < 0.001$), indicating the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Four factors were extracted, explaining 68.4% of the total variance, which demonstrates satisfactory construct validity. The results of the exploratory factor analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

Indicator	Result
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure	0.842
Bartlett's test of sphericity	$\chi^2 = 1456.32$, $df = 120$, $p < 0.001$
Extraction approach	Exploratory factor analysis/principal components screening
Interpretation	The data were suitable for factor analysis. Items loaded strongly on their respective factors, supporting the proposed measurement structure.

The KMO value of 0.842 exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.60, indicating very good sampling adequacy. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1456.32$, $df = 120$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis. The EFA results supported the extraction of the proposed latent constructs, demonstrating satisfactory construct validity.

4.4. Correlation Analysis

Table 5 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables. Motivation, social media influence, and attitude were positively correlated with behavioral intentions, whereas perceived psychological risk showed a negative correlation. The strongest positive relationship was observed between attitude

and behavioral intentions ($r = 0.67, p < 0.001$), followed by motivation ($r = 0.61, p < 0.001$) and social media influence ($r = 0.49, p < 0.001$). Perceived psychological risk was negatively associated with behavioral intentions ($r = -0.44, p < 0.001$).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Motivation	3.78	0.95	1				
2. Social Media Influence	3.67	0.91	0.42 **	1			
3. Perceived Psychological Risk	3.22	0.93	−0.36 **	−0.28 **	1		
4. Attitude	3.59	0.96	0.58 **	0.46 **	−0.40 **	1	
5. Behavioral Intentions	3.41	0.89	0.61 **	0.49 **	−0.44 **	0.67 **	1

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients are reported. ** $p < 0.001$.

4.5. Regression Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

To test the proposed hypotheses and examine the effects of motivation, attitude, social media influence, and perceived psychological risk on behavioral intentions toward dark tourism, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Behavioral intentions were specified as the dependent variable, while motivation, attitude, social media influence, and perceived psychological risk were included as independent variables. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Multiple regression analysis predicting behavioral intentions.

Predictor	Unstandardized B	SE	Standardized β	t	p	Decision
Motivation	0.327	0.098	0.347	3.333	0.001	H1 supported
Social Media Influence	0.450	0.097	0.256	4.630	<0.001	H2 supported
Attitude	0.214	0.082	0.483	2.610	<0.01	H3 supported
Perceived Psychological Risk	−0.189	0.076	−0.218	−2.487	0.014	H4 supported

Model Summary $R^2 = 0.590$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.579$, $F = 53.99$, $p < 0.001$.

The multiple regression model was statistically significant ($F = 53.99, p < 0.001$) and explained 59.0% of the variance in behavioral intentions ($R^2 = 0.590$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.579$). Attitude ($\beta = 0.483, p < 0.01$), motivation ($\beta = 0.347, p = 0.001$), and social media influence ($\beta = 0.256, p < 0.001$) positively correlated with behavioral intentions. In contrast, perceived psychological risk negatively affected behavioral intentions ($\beta = -0.218, p = 0.014$). Attitude emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioral intentions, followed by motivation, social media influence, and perceived psychological risk. Therefore, all four hypotheses were supported. Table 7 presents the VIF values for all independent variables included in the regression model.

Table 7. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values.

Variable	VIF
Motivation	1.78
Social Media Influence	1.54
Attitude	2.01
Perceived Psychological Risk	1.33

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.33 to 2.01, well below the recommended threshold of 5.0, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern in the regression model.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of dark tourism literature by providing empirical evidence from Albania, an under-researched post-communist destination. While previous studies have primarily focused on established dark tourism destinations in Western Europe and Asia, this research extends current knowledge by examining Generation Z's behavioral intentions in a context characterized by political repression, collective memory, and difficult heritage.

The findings support the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) in explaining behavioral intentions toward dark tourism. Attitude emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioral intentions, confirming the central role of positive evaluations in shaping travel-related decision-making. In addition, the study demonstrates that motivational factors and social media influence are important determinants of behavioral intentions among Generation Z. These findings highlight the importance of combining attitudinal, motivational, social, and psychological perspectives when examining dark tourism behavior.

Furthermore, the negative effect of perceived psychological risk suggests that emotional concerns may reduce willingness to engage with dark tourism experiences, although this influence appears weaker than the positive effects of attitudes, motivation, and social media. This finding contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how younger generations evaluate destinations associated with difficult historical events and collective trauma.

5.2. Practical Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for destination managers, heritage institutions, and tourism policymakers. Since attitude emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioral intentions, dark tourism sites should focus on creating meaningful, educational, and ethically interpreted visitor experiences. Historical narratives should be presented in a respectful manner that promotes learning, reflection, and historical understanding rather than sensationalizing suffering.

The positive influence of social media suggests that digital communication strategies can play a significant role in attracting Generation Z visitors. Heritage institutions should actively utilize social media platforms, digital storytelling, virtual tours, and interactive content to increase awareness and engagement among younger audiences.

In the Albanian context, sites such as the House of Leaves, Bunk'Art, and the Museum of Witness and Memory can benefit from enhanced interpretation, digital engagement, and educational programming designed specifically for younger visitors. By combining historical authenticity with contemporary communication approaches, these sites can strengthen their appeal while preserving the integrity of historical memory and cultural heritage. The Albanian context provides a particularly relevant setting for interpreting these findings. Several sites associated with the communist period, including the House of Leaves in Tirana, Bunk'Art, and the Museum of Witness and Memory in Shkodra, represent important examples of dark tourism attractions that preserve and communicate difficult aspects of the country's past. The results suggest that Generation Z visitors are more likely to engage with such sites when they are presented as educational and meaningful spaces for historical learning rather than merely as locations associated with suffering and repression. This finding highlights the importance of heritage interpretation,

storytelling, and historical contextualization in enhancing visitor engagement. Furthermore, the significant role of social media indicates that these institutions could strengthen their visibility and attractiveness through digital communication strategies, virtual content, and interactive storytelling designed specifically for younger audiences.

The findings also provide implications for educational institutions and policymakers. Integrating dark tourism sites into educational programs may enhance historical awareness among younger generations. Furthermore, heritage managers should develop interpretation strategies that balance educational value with ethical sensitivity, ensuring that historical suffering is communicated respectfully and authentically.

6. Conclusions

This study examined Generation Z's behavioral intentions toward dark tourism in Albania using the available survey dataset. The results show that motivation, social media and attitude positively influence behavioral intentions. Attitude is the strongest predictor, indicating that favorable evaluations of dark tourism as educational, respectful and historically meaningful are central to young visitors' intentions and perceived psychological risk negatively influenced Behavioral Intentions.

The study contributes to tourism literature by providing empirical evidence from Albania, an under-researched post-communist destination. It also offers practical implications for tourism stakeholders. Dark tourism experiences aimed at Generation Z should emphasize education, cultural memory, ethical storytelling and respectful interpretation. These elements can help transform difficult heritage into meaningful learning experiences.

This study has several limitations, including its exclusive focus on Generation Z in Albania, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other groups. Future research could compare across different generations.

Third, the cross-sectional design does not capture changes in attitudes and intentions over time. Future research should use larger samples, validated multi-item scales, and comparative designs involving different generations and visitor groups.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, R.D. and A.A.; methodology, R.D.; formal analysis, R.D.; investigation, R.D.; data curation, R.D.; writing—original draft preparation, R.D.; writing—review and editing, R.D. and A.A.; visualization, A.A.; supervision, R.D.; project administration, R.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: The authors declared that financial support was not received for this work or its publication.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to get an exemption from the Academic Ethics Committee in University of Shkodra.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments: The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi” in enabling the publication of this article. During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.5) for language editing, grammar checking, and improving the clarity and readability of the text. The authors reviewed and edited all generated content and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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