

DETERMINANTS OF THE BEHAVIOR OF GENERATIONS X, Y, AND Z AS CONSUMERS IN TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

One of the most evident changes can be observed in travel behaviour, as each consumer generation requires a different approach from the tourism industry. The study analyses the tourism preferences and behaviour of Generations X, Y, and Z in the Croatian tourism market. It examines travel habits, motivations, decision-making processes, and the role of digital technologies and social networks in travel planning. Based on a study of 150 respondents, significant differences between generations were identified in travel behaviour patterns. Generation X consumers still rely on traditional media and structure their travel plans in a more systematic way; however, they have also shifted, although to a lesser extent than younger generations, toward the use of various digital tools in recent years. Generation Y travellers are highly travel-oriented, emphasizing the use of digital platforms and social media for planning and booking trips. On the other hand, Generation Z, which is highly connected through social media, prefers spontaneity and unique experiences, while planning trips based on social media content and user-generated reviews. The findings emphasize the need for digitalized tourism offers, particularly for Generations Y and Z, which consider online platforms an integral part of the decision-making process. This paper contributes to understanding shifts in tourism behaviour across generations, thereby offering insights to stakeholders on how to align their products with the evolving needs of consumers. Future research should include a larger sample of respondents and apply more advanced statistical methods to better examine how generational travel behaviour evolves over time.

Keywords: generation X, generation Y, generation Z, consumer behaviour, tourism preferences

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INTRODUCTION

The development of modern tourism is the result of several key factors, including technological progress, socio-economic changes within societies, such as greater availability of leisure time and increased income, as well as the global liberalization of economic relations. Tourism represents a complex form of demand and consumption by foreign visitors, which stimulates the production of various goods and services in destination countries [1]. Knowledge of consumer behaviour can greatly contribute to understanding consumer behaviour, which is highly individual, as not all consumers under the same conditions react in the same way to the influence of various factors. The behaviour of tourist consumers differs significantly from that of other consumers due to several distinctive characteristics, including [2]: intangible and immeasurable purchases, non-impulsive purchases, comprehensive purchase planning, and advance purchases. In the field of tourism, consumer behaviour is even more complex. Tourist services are highly complex, giving rise to certain specific characteristics. The needs that motivate tourists (the need to travel, spend quality leisure time, experience new cultures, have fun, etc.) are not considered basic human needs and depend not only on financial means but also on a person's character, lifestyle, and many other factors. Since consumer behaviour in tourism is influenced by a complex set of elements, studying this type of consumer behaviour is more demanding than in areas where the relationship between needs and consumer behaviour is simple, direct, and clearly observable [3]. Tourist needs are highly diverse and can only be satisfied outside the usual living environment [4]. These include psychological and physical satisfaction, emotional and spiritual enrichment, health, movement, meeting other people (and nations), getting to know other regions and destinations, food, transport, accommodation, entertainment, leisure, and others. Tourist needs arise only after lower-level needs have been satisfied [5]. Tourist demand refers to the number of people who participate in tourist travel or wish to do so by using services outside their everyday environment [6]. A tourist is a consumer who is unique in that they primarily purchase an experience rather than a physical product. This experience directly affects their level of satisfaction. Some of the factors influencing satisfaction can be controlled by the tourist (e.g. the choice of destination or travel companions), others by tourism service providers (e.g. the quality and diversity of the offer), while some cannot be influenced by either the tourist or the provider (e.g. illness during the trip or adverse weather conditions) [3]. Tourist behaviour can only be understood by identifying the factors that influence travel decisions. These decisions are largely affected by forces outside the individual, including the influence of other people. The pressure exerted by others is referred to as social influence [7].

THEORETICAL BASIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The tourism sector remains one of the most dynamic markets worldwide, and the decision-making process of tourists is a key factor influencing the market. Every stakeholder within the tourism industry, including destinations, travel agencies, and providers of diverse services, considers understanding tourists' travel decision-making to be of paramount importance. To properly understand this process, theories of consumer behaviour, socio-economic factors, together with the role of media and digital technologies in shaping tourists' decisions, must be studied. Consumer behaviour theories provide appropriate frameworks for studying tourists' decision-making processes. Among the best-known models in this discipline is the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This model holds that decisions are based on three important factors: attitudes toward a behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control [8]. The application of this theory to tourism suggests that tourists' decisions depend on their attitude towards a destination (for example, the attractiveness or safety of the destination), social pressure (for example, what their friends and family say about the destination), and their perception of their ability to travel (for example, in terms of financial resources or access to information). The travel decision-making process is often described as a multi-phase process consisting of need recognition, information gathering, evaluation of alternatives regarding destinations and services, decision-making, and post-purchase evaluation [9]. Generational cohorts are groups that share birth years, historical experiences, and characteristics shaped by those experiences, resulting in different patterns of behaviour and preferences. Therefore, when discussing generations, it is important to first determine which groups of people belong to which generation and identify their general characteristics. Generation X was born into a world marked by political and economic upheavals, including the Cold War and the global economic downturn of the 1970s and 1980s. This led to the development of specific values and priorities. Members of Generation X were raised in households

with working parents and became some of the first independent thinkers and pragmatists. Compared to older generations, Generation X is more educated, although not to the same extent as Generations Y and Z. Generation X represents the digital pioneers but grew up with traditional media, such as television and radio. Hence, as a "technological bridge" generation, they plan their trips online and through digital platforms; however, their traditional values make them prefer personal recommendations and conducting thorough research before making travel decisions [10]. All generations have reportedly increased their online purchases of travel products, but the largest increase has been recorded among Generation X [11]. Generation X's motivations for travel are largely based on balancing professional life, family obligations, and personal interests. Research shows that tourists from this generation are motivated by a combination of the need to escape everyday stress, spend quality time with their families, and pursue personal enrichment through cultural and educational experiences [12]. Although they are more financially stable than millennials, Generation X carefully considers the price-quality ratio when choosing travel packages. They also prefer safety and comfort and are less inclined to take risks. Therefore, destinations that are safe and offer a high level of service quality are often among their preferred choices [13]. Destinations offering natural beauty, such as national parks or coastal regions, together with adequate infrastructure that ensures comfort and safety, are also popular [14]. What is characteristic of Generation X is their tendency to share their experiences with family and friends, although they are less active on social media than younger generations. This generation prefers more private communication and values personal recommendations more than public reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor or Booking.com. However, although they are less active in sharing reviews, online reviews remain an important factor in their travel decisions [13]. Promotion through a combination of online and offline channels allows for more effective targeting of this market segment, as Generation X uses both types of media for information gathering and decision-making [13]. Generation Y, also known as millennials, includes people born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. This generation grew up in an environment of rapid technological change, globalization, and social media, which has greatly shaped their habits and values. A key characteristic of millennials is their connection with technology; they are the first generation to grow up with the internet, mobile phones, and social media, which has significantly influenced the way they communicate, learn, and spend their leisure time. Millennials are also known for their high level of education and career ambitions. As a market segment in tourism, millennials exhibit unique characteristics in terms of their travel motivations, destination preferences, the role of digital technology in the decision-making process, and interactions with tourism brands. Their approach to travel is driven by a desire for authentic experiences, sustainability, and the use of digital tools to plan and document their trips. Research shows that millennials value authentic experiences and interactions with local communities more than traditional tourist attractions or luxury accommodation [15]. Millennials often travel to "connect" with a destination and its people, gaining a deeper understanding of new cultures [10]. Social media plays a key role in documenting and sharing experiences, which shapes their travel preferences. Research shows that this generation is more sensitive to environmental issues and tends to choose destinations and services that have a positive environmental and social impact [16]. According to research conducted by the UNWTO on millennials, they are open to combining business with leisure while travelling, creating a form of travel known as "bleisure," which helps them balance their professional and personal lives [17]. Research conducted by Expedia states that millennials expect a high level of personalization, both in terms of services and communication. They do not seem to appreciate brands that fail to provide personalized experiences based on their preferences [18]. Generation Z refers to people born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s and is frequently described as the first generation to have truly grown up in a fully digital environment. Their relationship with technology distinguishes them from millennials, whose formative years coincided with the emergence of smartphones, social media, and streaming platforms [19]. A distinctive feature of Generation Z is their adaptability and strong problem-solving skills. They have grown up facing global challenges such as economic crises and climate change; therefore, they are practical and action-oriented. Compared with previous generations, they show greater acceptance of diversity and inclusion. They value individuality and embrace different cultural, ethnic, and gender identities [20]. They value opportunities for continuous learning and personal development in an environment that encourages flexibility and innovation [21].

One of the most striking characteristics of Generation Z's behaviour in tourism is their strong connection with technology. They use digital platforms to plan, book, and share their trips, often relying on apps such as Google Maps, Airbnb, Instagram, and TikTok [22]. Their travel behaviour includes a high level of engagement on social media, where they share their experiences and reviews, creating user-

generated content that often influences the decisions of other travellers. According to a survey conducted by Booking.com, 87% of Generation Z members use social media to plan their trips, and 70% report that the content they see on social media influences their choice of destination [23]. Research shows that more than 60% of Generation Z members prefer environmentally responsible travel options, including sustainable accommodation, green tours, and eco-friendly activities [24]. Research also shows that young people from this generation often choose destinations that are not overrun with tourists, seeking to avoid mass tourism and find authentic and original experiences [25]. They are also inclined to actively participate in travel, whether through volunteering, adventure tourism, or cultural exchange programmes. This generation does not prefer rigidly structured travel arrangements but instead seeks flexibility that allows them to create their own itineraries. They often book flights, accommodation, and activities online, preferring digital platforms that allow them to change plans quickly and easily [17]. Research shows that Generation Z values destinations that use innovative technologies, as this allows them to better prepare for and plan their trips [26].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted on a convenience sample of 150 respondents, evenly distributed across three age groups: Generation X (50 respondents), Generation Y (50 respondents), and Generation Z (50 respondents), in the Republic of Croatia during the period from August 25 to September 14, 2024. Data were collected through an online survey questionnaire created using Google Forms and distributed via social networks and email. The survey questionnaire was developed based on a literature review and previous research and was structured into the following parts: general travel habits, the use of social networks in the context of travel, preferences for active holidays and gaining experiences while travelling, the use of digital technologies in travel planning and the travel process, and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, level of education, employment status, and personal monthly income. The questions were structured as closed-ended questions and statements to which respondents indicated their level of agreement using a Likert scale.

The paper sets out three hypotheses:

- H1: The behaviour of Generations X, Y, and Z in the tourism market of the Republic of Croatia differs with respect to their specific lifestyles and preferences.
- H2: Generation Y shows a greater tendency to travel compared to Generations X and Z, with a stronger interest in digital technologies and more active use of social networks in travel planning.
- H3: Generation Z prefers short, spontaneous trips that offer challenges and unconventional experiences, unlike Generation X, which shows a greater tendency towards traditional tourist destinations and travel planning through traditional media.

The data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. Using the SPSS statistical software, mean values were calculated for each generational group according to the analysed variables (general travel habits, use of social networks in the context of travel, preferences for active holidays and gaining experiences while travelling, the use of digital technologies in travel planning, and the travel process). Reliability analysis, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, confirmed strong internal consistency across all constructs. "General Travel Habits" ($\alpha = 0.703$) reflects travel frequency, trip duration, destination preferences, spontaneity, and seasonal choices, although it shows slightly greater variability. "Detailed Travel Preparation and Booking Process" ($\alpha = 0.754$) demonstrates good reliability, covering information sources, online bookings, reviews, and discount tracking. "Use of Social Media in Travel" ($\alpha = 0.733$) consistently captures the influence of social media on travel inspiration, experience sharing, and decision-making. "Preference for Active Travel and Experience-Gathering" ($\alpha = 0.749$) reflects engagement in cultural, outdoor, and wellness activities with solid reliability. The highest internal consistency was found for "Use of Digital Technologies in Travel" ($\alpha = 0.835$), indicating a consistent reliance on apps, digital maps, reviews, online payments, and free Wi-Fi. All constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold ($\alpha > 0.7$), confirming their suitability for further statistical analyses, such as ANOVA.

The obtained results were then compared across generations to determine statistically significant differences.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The demographic data reveal a balanced generational distribution, with each group (Generation X, Y, and Z) comprising 33.3% of the sample, allowing for equal comparisons across age cohorts (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic data

Generation					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Gen X (1965-1980)	50	33,3	33,3	33,3
	Gen Y (1981-1996)	50	33,3	33,3	66,7
	Gen Z (1997-2012)	50	33,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	150	100,0	100,0	
Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	87	58,0	58,0	58,0
	Female	63	42,0	42,0	100,0
	Total	150	100,0	100,0	
Education					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	High School	57	38,0	38,0	38,0
	Undergraduate study	39	26,0	26,0	64,0
	Graduate study	38	25,3	25,3	89,3
	Postgraduate study	16	10,7	10,7	100,0
	Total	150	100,0	100,0	
Employment status					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Employed	104	69,3	69,3	69,3
	Self-Employed	6	4,0	4,0	73,3
	Unemployed	13	8,7	8,7	82,0
	Student	21	14,0	14,0	96,0
	Retired	6	4,0	4,0	100,0
	Total	150	100,0	100,0	

In terms of gender, the sample is slightly male-dominated (58.0% male and 42.0% female), indicating a moderate gender imbalance. Regarding education, the majority of respondents (38.0%) completed secondary education, followed by 26.0% with an undergraduate degree, 25.3% with a graduate degree, and 10.7% with postgraduate education, reflecting a relatively well-educated sample. Employment status indicates that most respondents (69.3%) are employed, followed by students (14.0%), unemployed individuals (8.7%), self-employed respondents (4.0%), and retirees (4.0%).

Table 2. Tourist travel purpose among generations

	Gen X		Gen Y		Gen Z	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Relaxation and stress relief	13	26,0	2	4,0	9	18,0
Exploring a new culture and tradition	18	36,0	21	42,0	12	24,0
Visiting family and/or friends	6	12,0	7	14,0	16	32,0
Adventure	6	12,0	10	20,0	12	24,0
Business	5	10,0	4	8,0	1	2,0
Broadening horizons	2	4,0	1	2,0	50	100,0

The data on the purpose of tourist trips across generations reveal notable differences in travel motivations. Generation X primarily travels for cultural exploration (36.0%) and relaxation and stress relief (26.0%), with fewer respondents citing adventure (12.0%) or visiting family and/or friends (12.0%) as their primary motivation. Generation Y exhibits a strong preference for cultural exploration (42.0%), followed by adventure (20.0%) and visiting family and/or friends (14.0%), while relaxation and stress relief appear to be significantly less important (4.0%). Generation Z, in contrast, shows the greatest diversity in travel motivations, with a notably high proportion (32.0%) prioritizing visiting family and/or friends, followed by cultural exploration (24.0%), adventure (24.0%), and relaxation and stress relief (18.0%). Business-related travel is most common among Generation X (10.0%), declines in Generation Y (8.0%), and is almost absent among Generation Z (2.0%). Interestingly, all Generation Z respondents (100%) also selected "broadening horizons" as a travel purpose, distinguishing them from the older cohorts. Overall, the results highlight generational differences in travel motivations, with Generation X placing

greater emphasis on relaxation and business-related travel, Generation Y on cultural experiences, and Generation Z on family connections, adventure, and broadening their horizons.

ANOVA and post hoc tests were conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences exist in simple travel habits among Generations X, Y, and Z. Since these generational groups exhibit distinct lifestyles, preferences, and travel behaviours, it was necessary to determine whether these differences were statistically significant rather than occurring by chance (Table 3).

Table 3. Analysis of Generational Differences in Simple Travel Habits – Descriptive Statistics, ANOVA, and Post Hoc Comparisons

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,3429	,59429	,08405	3,1740	3,5118	2,43	4,57
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50	3,8462	,47879	,06771	3,7101	3,9823	2,71	4,71
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50	3,8971	,42520	,06013	3,7763	4,0180	2,71	4,71
Total	150	3,6954	,56034	,04575	3,6050	3,7858	2,43	4,71
	Sum of Squares		df		Mean Square		F	Sig.
Between Groups	9,386		2		4,693		18,447	,000
Within Groups	37,398		147		,254			
Total	46,784		149					

Tukey HSD

(I) Generation	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Gen X (1965-1980) Gen Y (1981-1996)	-,50333*	,10088	,000	-,7422	-,2645
Gen X (1965-1980) Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,55429*	,10088	,000	-,7931	-,3154
Gen Y (1981-1996) Gen X (1965-1980)	,50333*	,10088	,000	,2645	,7422
Gen Y (1981-1996) Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,05095	,10088	,869	-,2898	,1879
Gen Z (1997-2012) Gen X (1965-1980)	,55429*	,10088	,000	,3154	,7931
Gen Z (1997-2012) Gen Y (1981-1996)	,05095	,10088	,869	-,1879	,2898

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Tukey HSD_a

Generation	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,3429	
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50	3,8462	
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50	3,8971	
Sig.		1,000	,869

The results indicate statistically significant differences in simple travel habits across generations, as confirmed by the ANOVA test ($F(2,147) = 18.447, p < 0.001$). Generation X ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.59$) exhibits the lowest mean, suggesting that individuals from this cohort engage less frequently in simple travel habits than younger generations. In contrast, Generation Y ($M = 3.85, SD = 0.48$) and Generation Z ($M = 3.90, SD = 0.42$) demonstrate significantly higher levels of engagement in these habits. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests reveal that Generation X differs significantly from both Generation Y and Generation Z ($p = 0.000$), while no statistically significant difference is observed between Generation Y and Generation Z ($p = 0.869$). This pattern is further supported by the homogeneous subsets analysis, which places Generation X in a separate group from Generations Y and Z, indicating that the two younger generations display similar travel behaviours, whereas the older generation shows significantly lower engagement. These findings suggest a generational shift, with younger cohorts adopting a more active approach to travel and engaging more frequently in simple travel habits than their older counterparts.

Table 4. Analysis of Generational Differences in Use of Social Networks in the Context of Travel – Descriptive Statistics, ANOVA, and Post Hoc Comparisons

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,3400	,71425	,10101	3,1370	3,5430	2,33	4,83
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50	3,5267	,63116	,08926	3,3473	3,7060	2,33	4,67
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50	3,8233	,46341	,06554	3,6916	3,9550	2,50	4,67
Total	150	3,5633	,63974	,05223	3,4601	3,6666	2,33	4,83
	Sum of Squares	df		Mean Square		F	Sig.	
Between Groups	5,941	2		2,971		7,934	,001	
Within Groups	55,041	147		,374				
Total	60,982	149						

Tukey HSD

(I) Generation		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Gen X (1965-1980)	Gen Y (1981-1996)	-,18667	,12238	,282	-,4764	,1031
	Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,48333*	,12238	,000	-,7731	-,1936
Gen Y (1981-1996)	Gen X (1965-1980)	,18667	,12238	,282	-,1031	,4764
	Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,29667*	,12238	,043	-,5864	-,0069
Gen Z (1997-2012)	Gen X (1965-1980)	,48333*	,12238	,000	,1936	,7731
	Gen Y (1981-1996)	,29667*	,12238	,043	,0069	,5864

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Tukey HSD_a

Table 1: ASD ₁			
Generation	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,5267	3,3400
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50		
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50		
Sig.		,282	1,000

The results reveal statistically significant differences in the use of social networks for travel-related purposes among Generations X, Y, and Z, as confirmed by the ANOVA test ($F(2,147) = 7.934$, $p = 0.001$). Generation X ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.71$) exhibits the lowest level of engagement with social media in the context of travel, while Generation Z ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.46$) demonstrates the highest, with Generation Y ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.63$) positioned between the two. Tukey HSD post hoc tests indicate that Generation X and Generation Z differ significantly ($p = 0.000$), as do Generation Y and Generation Z ($p = 0.043$), whereas no statistically significant difference is found between Generation X and Generation Y ($p = 0.282$). This suggests that while Generations X and Y demonstrate comparable engagement with social media for travel purposes, Generation Z relies significantly more on social networks for travel planning, decision-making, and experience sharing. The homogeneous subsets analysis further supports this finding by grouping Generations X and Y together in one subset, while Generation Z forms a separate category. These results highlight a generational shift, with younger travellers (Generation Z) using social networks significantly more than older cohorts, reinforcing the need for digital marketing strategies tailored to younger audiences who rely on social media for travel inspiration and planning.

Table 3. Analysis of Generational Differences in Preference for Active Vacations and Gaining Experience While Traveling – Descriptive Statistics, ANOVA, and Post Hoc Comparisons

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,5920	,65895	,09319	3,4047	3,7793	2,40	5,00
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50	3,8600	,57605	,08147	3,6963	4,0237	2,40	5,00
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50	4,2720	,54475	,07704	4,1172	4,4268	2,60	5,00
Total	150	3,9080	,65441	,05343	3,8024	4,0136	2,40	5,00
	Sum of Squares		df		Mean Square		F	Sig.
Between Groups	11,733		2		5,866		16,559	,000
Within Groups	52,078		147		,354			
Total	63,810		149					

Tukey HSD

(I) Generation		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Gen X (1965-1980)	Gen Y (1981-1996)	-,26800	,11904	,066	-,5499	,0139
	Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,68000*	,11904	,000	-,9619	-,3981
Gen Y (1981-1996)	Gen X (1965-1980)	,26800	,11904	,066	-,0139	,5499
	Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,41200*	,11904	,002	-,6939	-,1301
Gen Z (1997-2012)	Gen X (1965-1980)	,68000*	,11904	,000	,3981	,9619
	Gen Y (1981-1996)	,41200*	,11904	,002	,1301	,6939

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Tukey HSD_a

Generation	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,8600	4,2720
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50		
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50		
Sig.		,066	1,000

The results demonstrate statistically significant differences in preferences for active holidays and experiential travel across Generations X, Y, and Z, as indicated by the ANOVA test ($F(2,147) = 16.559$, $p < 0.001$). Generation X ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.66$) shows the lowest preference for active and experience-oriented holidays, while Generation Z ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.54$) exhibits the highest, with Generation Y ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.58$) positioned between the two. Tukey HSD post hoc tests confirm that Generation X differs significantly from Generation Z ($p = 0.000$), and Generation Y also differs significantly from Generation Z ($p = 0.002$). However, the difference between Generation X and Generation Y is not statistically significant ($p = 0.066$), indicating that these two groups share similar travel preferences, although Generation Y shows a slightly stronger tendency toward experience-oriented holidays.

The homogeneous subsets analysis further reinforces this distinction by grouping Generations X and Y together, while Generation Z forms a separate category, highlighting its significantly stronger preference for active and immersive travel experiences. These findings suggest a generational shift toward adventure-based and experiential tourism, particularly among Generation Z, which seeks unconventional, engaging, and activity-driven travel experiences. This underscores the importance of tailoring tourism products and marketing strategies to meet the evolving demands of younger travellers, who increasingly prioritize dynamic, hands-on experiences over traditional leisure travel.

Table 4. Analysis of Generational Differences in Use of Digital Technologies in Travel Planning and the Travel Process – Descriptive Statistics, ANOVA, and Post Hoc Comparisons

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,9775	,70153	,09921	3,7781	4,1769	2,88	5,00
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50	4,1300	,84589	,11963	3,8896	4,3704	2,38	5,00
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50	3,8525	,37939	,05365	3,7447	3,9603	2,75	4,50
Total	150	3,9867	,67635	,05522	3,8775	4,0958	2,38	5,00
	Sum of Squares		df		Mean Square		F	Sig.
Between Groups	1,931		2		,966		2,143	,121
Within Groups	66,229		147		,451			
Total	68,161		149					

Tukey HSD

(I) Generation		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Gen X (1965-1980)	Gen Y (1981-1996)	-,26800	,11904	,066	-,5499	,0139
	Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,68000*	,11904	,000	-,9619	-,3981
Gen Y (1981-1996)	Gen X (1965-1980)	,26800	,11904	,066	-,0139	,5499
	Gen Z (1997-2012)	-,41200*	,11904	,002	-,6939	-,1301
Gen Z (1997-2012)	Gen X (1965-1980)	,68000*	,11904	,000	,3981	,9619
	Gen Y (1981-1996)	,41200*	,11904	,002	,1301	,6939

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Tukey HSD_a

Generation	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	
Gen X (1965-1980)	50	3,8525	
Gen Y (1981-1996)	50	3,9775	
Gen Z (1997-2012)	50	4,1300	
Sig.		,100	

The ANOVA test ($F(2,147) = 2.143$, $p = 0.121$) indicates that there are no statistically significant differences among Generations X, Y, and Z in their use of digital technologies for travel planning and the travel process. The mean scores suggest slight variations, with Generation Y ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.85$) reporting the highest level of engagement, followed by Generation X ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.70$) and Generation Z ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.38$). However, the p-value exceeds the 0.05 threshold, indicating that these differences are not statistically significant and may have occurred by chance. Since the ANOVA test does not confirm a statistically significant difference, the Tukey HSD post hoc test results should be interpreted with caution. Although the test indicates that Generation Z differs from both Generation X ($p = 0.000$) and Generation Y ($p = 0.002$), the overall ANOVA result suggests that these differences are not sufficiently robust to be considered statistically meaningful. Furthermore, the homogeneous subsets analysis places all three generations within the same statistical subset, reinforcing the conclusion that their use of digital technologies in travel planning is relatively similar.

These findings suggest that the use of digital technologies in travel is widespread across all generational groups, with no statistically significant differences among them. Although younger generations (Generations Y and Z) are generally expected to rely more heavily on digital tools, the results indicate that Generation X also actively integrates technology into the travel planning process, thereby reducing generational differences in this area. This suggests that digitalization in tourism has become a universal trend rather than a generational distinction, emphasizing the importance of digital marketing and technological adaptability for travellers of all age groups.

DISCUSSION

The study results reveal considerable generational differences in travel motivations, social media engagement, and preferences for active holidays, while also indicating a trend toward convergence in the use of digital technologies for travel planning across generations. These findings are consistent with previous studies but also provide new insights into changing travel behaviour. Generational differences are particularly evident in travel motivations. While Generation X primarily seeks cultural exploration combined with relaxation, Generation Y demonstrates a stronger preference for cultural engagement

combined with adventure. In contrast, Generation Z exhibits a broader range of motivations, including adventure, personal growth, and visiting family and friends. These findings support previous studies suggesting that Generation X is more interested in cultural and heritage tourism [27,28], while Millennials (Generation Y) tend to be more active travellers with diverse destination preferences and greater engagement with local cultures [29]. The results also support the view that Generation Z seeks dynamic, interactive, and authentic experiences that often extend beyond conventional tourism [30,31]. A clear generational gap is also evident in travel planning and the use of social media. Generation Z relies most heavily on social media when making travel-related decisions, followed by Generation Y, whereas Generation X continues to rely more on other sources of information. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting Generation Z's dependence on influencers, peer reviews, and digital content when choosing travel destinations [32,33]. Previous studies have also shown that Millennials rely more on user-generated content than on traditional advertising when making travel decisions [34]. These findings suggest that future digital marketing strategies should primarily target younger travellers by emphasizing social media engagement, influencer marketing, and user-generated content related to destinations and accommodation. Another notable generational difference is the preference for active and experience-based holidays. The results indicate that Generation Z demonstrates the strongest preference for adventure tourism and experiential travel, whereas Generations X and Y show comparatively lower levels of interest in these activities. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that younger travellers seek unconventional, hands-on experiences that promote personal growth and adventure [35]. Consequently, the tourism industry should continue to adapt by developing more interactive and immersive travel experiences designed specifically for younger travellers.

Despite clear generational differences in travel motivations and the influence of social media, the results reveal no statistically significant differences in the use of digital technologies for travel planning. Previous studies have identified Generation Z as the most digitally oriented group of travellers [30,36]. In contrast, the findings of this study suggest that digitalization in tourism has become a universal phenomenon rather than a generational characteristic. The absence of statistically significant differences indicates that travellers of all generations now incorporate digital technologies into their travel planning process. These findings have important implications for the tourism industry. Although younger generations continue to shape new travel trends through their preference for adventure and their intensive use of social media, the increasing digital literacy of older generations highlights the need for tourism businesses to adopt comprehensive digital strategies that address the needs of all age groups. The results further emphasize the importance of flexible marketing strategies that combine immersive travel experiences with social media promotion and user-generated content to attract younger travellers while ensuring that older generations have easy access to the digital tools used throughout the travel planning process. Understanding these evolving travel behaviours can help the tourism industry better respond to the changing preferences of contemporary travellers.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study confirm that there are generational differences in the travel behaviour, preferences, and digital engagement of Generations X, Y, and Z in the Croatian tourism market. The findings provide empirical support for the proposed hypotheses through a comprehensive analysis of travel motivations, social media use, engagement with digital technologies, and preferences for active holidays, while also challenging certain assumptions regarding digitalization in travel planning. The first hypothesis (H1), which proposed that the behaviour of Generations X, Y, and Z in the tourism market differs according to their lifestyles and preferences, is strongly supported. Significant differences were identified in travel motivations, with Generation X showing a preference for cultural exploration and relaxation, Generation Y favouring cultural experiences and adventure, and Generation Z demonstrating a broader range of motivations, including personal growth and visiting family and friends. These differences further support H1, as younger generations differ significantly from older generations in their use of social media for travel. The findings also indicate that younger travellers show a stronger preference for active and experience-based tourism, reinforcing the assumption that each generation travels differently according to its values, preferences, and technological influences. The second hypothesis (H2), which proposed that Generation Y has a greater tendency to travel compared to Generations X and Z, together with a stronger inclination toward digital technologies and active use of social networks in travel planning, is only partially

supported. While Generation Y remains highly travel-oriented, the present study shows that it is particularly attracted to cultural and adventure travel. Generation Z is equally active in travelling and demonstrates a strong preference for alternative travel experiences and adventure-based activities. Although Generation Y makes extensive use of digital technologies and social media, the findings indicate that the use of social media for travel purposes is even greater among Generation Z. Whereas members of Generation Y actively use the internet for travel planning, Generation Z's stronger reliance on influencers and digital interactions challenges the assumption that Generation Y is the most digitally engaged cohort in terms of travel behaviour. These findings suggest that although Generation Y remains highly active in travelling, the growing dominance of Generation Z in digital engagement and spontaneous travel habits means that this hypothesis is only partially supported. The third hypothesis (H3), which proposed that Generation Z prefers short, spontaneous trips that offer challenges and unconventional experiences, whereas Generation X is more likely to choose traditional tourist destinations and rely on traditional media when planning trips, is largely supported. The findings indicate that Generation Z strongly prefers adventure-oriented, spontaneous, and experience-based travel, actively seeking unique and unconventional tourism activities. In contrast, Generation X generally prefers more structured travel planning and established tourist destinations. However, the assumption that Generation X primarily relies on traditional media for travel planning is only partially supported, as the results indicate that digital technologies are now widely used across all generations. Although Generation Z remains the most active in using social media for travel planning, the findings also show that Generation X incorporates digital tools into the travel planning process, although to a lesser extent. Therefore, while the hypothesis successfully distinguishes the two generations in terms of travel preferences, it also demonstrates that older generations have become increasingly proficient in the use of digital technologies in tourism. Overall, this study highlights the evolving nature of generational travel behaviour, emphasizing the growing role of digital engagement and changing travel motivations. Although traditional generational differences remain evident, particularly in travel preferences and the use of social media, the convergence observed in the use of digital technologies suggests a broader trend toward the universal digitalization of tourism. These findings have important implications for the tourism industry, emphasizing the need for adaptive marketing strategies that appeal both to the adventure-seeking, digitally native Generation Z and to the more structured, yet increasingly digitally engaged, Generation X. Understanding these generational differences will enable tourism stakeholders to better tailor their products and services to the diverse and continuously evolving preferences of contemporary travellers. When interpreting the findings, the limitations of the study should be taken into consideration. The sample of respondents was limited in terms of demographic characteristics. Although members of Generations X, Y, and Z were included, the sample may not fully reflect the diversity within each generation in a broader context. The study relied on descriptive statistics for data analysis and was conducted at a single point in time. To obtain more representative results, future research should include a larger sample within each generational group and be conducted over longer periods, allowing changes in travel behaviour to be monitored, compared, and analysed using more advanced statistical methods. This study may serve as a basis for future research using appropriate variables and more sophisticated statistical approaches. The aforementioned limitations highlight the need for further research that will provide a deeper and broader understanding of generational differences in tourism behaviour.

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