DIGITALIZATION AND TOURISM: HOW X, Y, AND Z GENERATIONS MAKE TRAVEL DECISIONS IN THE ONLINE ERA

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the impact of digitalisation on the travel decision-making process of Generation X, Y, and Z, as well as to identify generational differences in tourism consumer behaviour. The research places particular emphasis on the role of information sources and variations in decision-making preferences. The study employs a quantitative research approach, analysing the travel decision-making habits of different generations through survey-based data collection. A literature review was conducted to examine intergenerational differences and the relationship between digitalisation and travel-related decision-making. Results and discussions: The findings indicate that digitalisation influences travel decisions across all generations, albeit in different ways. Trust and personal recommendations play a crucial role for Generation X, whereas Generation Y relies more heavily on online reviews. In the case of Generation Z, social media and digital channels have a decisive influence. The study also highlights that price remains a key factor for all generations; however, expectations regarding quality and information-seeking behaviours differ. Generation Y and Z exhibit a higher demand for visual content and real-time information, while Generation X tends to value reliability and detailed planning. Furthermore, the results show a clear trend toward mobile-first decision-making among younger users, especially within Generation Z. The study's findings contribute to the development of tourism marketing strategies by enabling the more effective application of generation-specific communication tools. Based on the results, recommendations can be made for tourism service providers regarding the optimisation of their digital presence and customer communication. The insights gained can also support designing personalised digital campaigns, enhance customer engagement, and foster loyalty among different generational segments in the evolving digital tourism landscape.

Keywords: digitalisation, generational differences, tourism consumer behaviour, impact of social media, travel decision-making, dtc, tourism marketing

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has undergone significant transformations over the past decades, largely influenced by the advancement of digitalisation and the increasing generational differences in consumer behaviour. The integration of digitalisation into everyday life has reshaped the way individuals plan, search for, and make travel decisions, with online platforms and digital content becoming dominant sources of information (Orabi, 2022; Panoiu & Foris, 2024; Mamengko et al., 2024; Bilan et al., 2024; Kantar, 2025). Simultaneously, the distinct preferences of different generations have become key factors for stakeholders in the tourism industry. This study aims to explicitly examine how digitalisation influences travel decision-making processes across three generations—X, Y, and Z—by identifying key generational differences in the use of digital information sources. The research seeks to determine the extent to which each generation relies on digital versus interpersonal sources when making travel-related decisions. Research on consumer behaviour has demonstrated that generational differences manifest not only in information processing but also in decision-making and value orientation (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2010; Törőcsik, 2011; Orabi, 2022). Younger generations have grown up using digital technologies from birth, while older age groups have gradually adapted to these tools. This divergence significantly influences the extent to which different generations rely on various information sources when making travel-related decisions. To achieve this, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How does digitalisation influence the travel decision-making of Generation X, Y, and Z?

2. What generational differences can be observed in tourism consumer behaviour among Generation X, Y, and Z in terms of the factors influencing travel decisions?

The hypotheses tested in this research, formulated based on the literature review, are as follows:

- **H1:** Generation Y and Z rely more heavily on digital information sources when making travel decisions compared to Generation X.

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- **H2:** The older generation (Generation X) is more influenced by personal recommendations (friends and family), whereas younger generations (Generation Y and Z) are more influenced by online reviews.

This study contributes to the fields of tourism marketing and consumer behaviour research by providing a detailed insight into the digital behaviour of different generations. The findings offer practical implications for tourism service providers aiming to develop generation-specific marketing strategies and optimise their digital presence.

The research is based on an empirical study utilising survey-based data collection to support the proposed hypotheses. The analysis of the collected data enables an in-depth understanding of the extent and manner in which each generation uses digital tools in their travel decision-making processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Generations

Tourists' consumer behaviour is influenced by numerous factors, some of which are demographic, such as age, gender, education level, and income. Age can be a determining factor in decision-making, as each generation has unique expectations, experiences, lifestyles, values, and demographic characteristics that shape their purchasing habits (Williams & Page, 2011; Orabi, 2022). According to Törőcsik (2016), generations are linked by shared experiences, life events, and ultimately, common values. Even if these connections are not strong, they remain significant. Values create an opportunity to connect decisions across a generational framework, reinforcing the idea that differences exist between generations while also highlighting the internal similarities that influence decision-making among members of the same generation (Törőcsik, 2011; Törőcsik, 2014; Törőcsik, 2016, in: trendinspiracio.hu/generacios-kutatas/ 2016; Orabi, 2022).

McCrindle & Wolfinger (2010) suggest that generations are to sociologists what artefacts are to archaeologists, as they provide a clear picture of the values and lifestyles of people born within the same time interval in a given nation. This is because they have lived through the same era and have been shaped by the same societal influences (Ivancsóné Horváth et al., 2017; Varadzhakova & Naydenov, 2024; Orabi, 2022). Danyi et al. (2020) also highlight in their study that generational differences serve as a fundamental approach to examining tourism consumer behaviour and segmenting consumer groups. The application of generational attributes in consumer behaviour research is widely recognised in academic literature (Danyi et al., 2020; Aina & Ezeuduji, 2021; Kökény & Jászberényi, 2022; Orabi, 2022). For the classification of generations, this study adopts the age group definitions established by Törőcsik (2011) (Table 1). Additionally, Table 1 includes the Beta Generation, which consists of individuals born after 1 January 2025 (https://www.vg.hu/vilaggazdasag-magyar-gazdasag/2023/07/hetvegere-a-felgyorsulo-vilagban-nonek-a-generacios-kulonbsegek). In international literature, there is no complete consensus regarding the exact birth years of each generation; however, a variance of one or two years in age classification is generally acceptable for research purposes (Farkas et al., 1995, in: Zsarnóczky, 2018).

Table 1. Definition of each generation based on Törőcsik (2011) Source: Own editing (Törőcsik, 2011; https://www.vg.hu/vilaggazdasag-magyar-gazdasag/2023/07/hetvegere-a-felgyorsulo-vilagban-nonek-a-generacios-kulonbsegek)

Generations	Date of birth	Age (in 2025)
Silent generation	1925-1945	80-100
Baby boomers	1946-1964	61-79
Generation X	1965-1979	44-60
Generation Y	1980-1994	31-45
Generation Z	1995-2009	16-30
Alpha	2010-2024	1-15
Beta	2025-2039	

The naming conventions for generations are not uniform across different authors. In this study, we adopt the classifications used by Törőcsik (2011). According to this categorisation, the following generational groups can be distinguished: the Silent Generation (born between 1925 and 1945), the Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1979), Generation Y (1980–1994), Generation Z (1995–2009), and the youngest group, Generation Alpha (born after 2010). The Beta Generation, comprising individuals born after 1 January 2025, is still too young to be meaningfully included in academic research.

Generational differences manifest in various aspects, including:
- Adaptability to sudden changes,
- General attitudes towards life situations and the surrounding environment,
- Approach to lifelong learning and further education,
- Career-building based on personal preferences,
- Leisure activities and recreational habits,
- Development of cultural and social behaviours influenced by financial status,
- Effective use of social media for different purposes,
- Perspectives on the world of work and professional life (Zsarnóczky, 2018),
- Acceptance and use of new technologies.

For the purposes of this study, the latter—the acceptance and use of digital technology—is of primary importance.

Digitalisation exerts a significant influence across all aspects of life, including tourism, where it affects both the accessibility of information and the decision-making processes on both the supply and demand sides (Happ & Ivancsó,

2018; Happ et al., 2020). Generational differences in the acceptance and use of digital technology play a crucial role in shaping tourism-related consumer behaviour and segmentation strategies (Kupi et al., 2023). In order to examine how different generations interact with digitalisation, it is essential to first understand their key characteristics.

Members of the Silent Generation grew up in an era shaped by war and economic crises, where adaptability was crucial for success. Their values are strongly influenced by the importance of close family ties and adherence to traditional family roles (Zsarnóczky, 2018). Many members of this generation spent their entire careers with a single employer and within a single profession. They tend to avoid digital tools whenever possible, often feeling unfamiliar or uncomfortable with them.

Born in a period of post-war demographic expansion, Baby Boomers experienced intense competition throughout their lives, shaped by political and economic transformations, including mass unemployment and economic instability (Zsarnóczky, 2018). While they generally prefer traditional travel agencies and printed travel guides, an increasing number of Baby Boomers use the internet for information gathering and booking purposes. They tend to favour social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, particularly for video-based content. Simplicity and reliability are key factors in their use of digital technologies (Becker Digital, 2023). Members of Generation X were often raised in dual-income households, which fostered a strong sense of independence and adaptability (Zsarnóczky, 2018). Frequently referred to as the "latchkey generation" (Kissné, 2014), they developed high levels of self-reliance from an early age. This is the first generation that was exposed to computers in their youth, though their use was not as widespread as it is today. Over time, their adaptability has allowed them to effectively integrate technological advancements into their daily lives (Zsarnóczky, 2018).

In terms of tourism, Generation X frequently uses email and the internet to plan and book travel. While they appreciate the convenience of digital tools, security and reliability remain key concerns. They actively seek discounts and special deals online and tend to conduct thorough research before making travel-related decisions (Becker Digital, 2023).

Generation Y is highly receptive to technological innovations and seeks to differentiate itself from previous generations by pursuing a fast-paced lifestyle (Zsarnóczky, 2018). They spend a significant portion of their lives online but still value real-life social experiences (Becker Digital, 2023). Known as "digital natives," Generation Z members have been immersed in digital technologies since childhood (Zsarnóczky, 2018). They manage most aspects of their lives online, leveraging digital tools for social interactions, information-seeking, and transactions. Generation Z travellers are more likely to trust peer-generated content and online reviews than traditional advertisements (Orabi, 2022). For Generation Z, the quality of digital interaction is as important as the quality of the physical service itself, especially in hospitality contexts (Yamagishi et al., 2024). Moreover, Generation Z travellers are increasingly influenced by immersive technologies, such as virtual reality, which enhance their travel inspiration and decision-making processes (Assiouras et al., 2024).

Additionally, the integration of the metaverse into tourism experiences offers Generation Z personalized and engaging interactions, aligning with their expectations for innovative and interactive digital environments (Buhalis et al., 2023) They tend to form stronger bonds with friends and classmates rather than with their home cities or towns (Tóth-Kaszás, 2018). In education and learning environments, they prefer visual and interactive formats. Multitasking is a defining trait of this generation, as they frequently use multiple digital devices simultaneously. The Alpha Generation is the first to have never known life without the internet. They are adept at using multiple technological devices simultaneously and can integrate different perspectives in problem-solving. The Walt Disney Company EMEA identified this cohort as "Generation XD" in a pan-European study, describing them as the tech-savvy children of Generation X. Their key trait is multitasking, allowing them to navigate various digital platforms seamlessly while engaging with others (Zsarnóczky, 2018).

Members of Generation Alpha are fully aware of the risks associated with artificial intelligence and other virtual processes. The Disney study also revealed that while they are entirely comfortable with technology, they prefer using it for social connections rather than replacing face-to-face interactions. Despite their digital fluency, in-person meetings remain their preferred form of social engagement (30%), followed by text messaging (15%), online chat (14%), and mobile calls (8%) (https://archive.nytimes.com/schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/19/generation-xd/).

Digitalisation

Digitalisation has become a cornerstone of the modern travel industry, enabling instant access to tailored information and services, especially valued by younger generations (Bilan et al., 2024). In today's world, the significance and presence of the digital sphere continue to expand, driven by an increasing demand for information and the widespread availability of digital content across multiple platforms (Varga, 2023a; Varga, 2023b; Vu et al., 2025). A new concept has emerged—digital literacy—which is commonly defined as the ability to use digital technology, communication tools, and networks to locate, evaluate, utilise, and create information (Martzoukou & Elliott, 2016; Issakov et al., 2023; Bilan et al., 2024).

For younger generations, particularly those belonging to Generation Z and Alpha, the use of digital tools is second nature, and they engage with new technologies with remarkable proficiency (Garai-Fodor & Csiszárik-Kocsir, 2018; Garai-Fodor, 2020; Berényi & Csiszárik-Kocsir, 2023; Rudež, 2023). In contrast, earlier generations, such as Generation X and Y, were introduced to digital literacy through formal learning, as they experienced a world without digital technologies. This distinction may explain why they tend to exhibit greater scepticism and caution towards online content compared to younger generations. For Generation Z and Alpha, digital tools offer both advantages and drawbacks. They increasingly rely on online reviews and user-generated content as trusted sources when making travel decisions (Orabi, 2022).

These tools are not only a means of communication and information gathering, but also integral components of smart tourism environments that increasingly shape travel experiences and consumer expectations (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014; Rudež, 2023; Ivancsóné Horváth et al., 2025). While their ability to acquire information almost instantly is a significant benefit, it also means that a substantial portion of their lives is spent in the online or "virtual" sphere, which may

present challenges in maintaining a balanced interaction with the physical world (Rudež, 2023; Csiszárik-Kocsir, 2024). Although generational differences in digital tool usage and travel decision-making are clearly outlined according to the literature, it is important to note that generational categories do not always accurately reflect individual behaviours.

Another limitation lies in the fact that research on the impact of digitalisation often overlooks cultural, economic, and regional variations, all of which significantly influence technology adoption and consumer choices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted using an online survey, which participants could complete in a digital environment. As a result, a basic level of digital proficiency was required to access and fill out the questionnaire. A key limitation of this methodology stems from potential biases associated with online surveys, such as unequal internet access among certain population groups. Additionally, voluntary participation may have introduced selection bias, as respondents who chose to complete the survey might have a stronger interest in travel than the general population.

The survey was anonymous and voluntary, and it remained open for responses between 1 March and 30 April 2024. There was no obligation to share or redistribute the questionnaire, and its distribution relied on volunteers. Although the dataset is large, it is not fully representative. The questionnaire successfully reached all generational groups (shown in Table 2.); however, Generation Z was overrepresented, while Baby Boomers and Generation Alpha were underrepresented. Consequently, the study primarily focuses on Generations X, Y, and Z.

Table 2. Distribution of the generations in the sample, source: own source

Generation	n
X-generation	112
Y-generation	154
Z-generation	410

The questionnaire utilised closed-ended questions and Likert scales to gather responses. During the evaluation process, numerical recoding was performed where necessary, and all analyses were conducted using numerical scales (nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio). In rare cases where the overrepresentation of Generation Z could have distorted the sample, weighting adjustments were applied to ensure interpretability. The following steps were undertaken to ensure data integrity:
- Initial data inspection identified missing values and invalid responses.
- Handling missing values:
- o For numerical data, missing values were replaced with the median or mean of the responses for that particular question.
- o For categorical data, missing values were substituted with the most frequent response.
- Exclusion of incomplete responses: Any responses where missing data exceeded 30% were removed to minimise potential bias.
- Consistency and logical checks: The dataset was reviewed to ensure internal consistency, and any contradictory responses were identified and either corrected or excluded.
- Removal of duplicate responses to eliminate bias from multiple submissions.
- Validation of data reliability included anomaly detection and extreme value identification to ensure the dataset's accuracy.
The dataset was analysed using JMP PRO 17 statistical software and Excel for data management.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines and data protection regulations. Participants took part in the research voluntarily and anonymously, and all collected data was handled confidentially in accordance with relevant privacy policies.

The primary objective of the research was to conduct a foundational study on generational differences, providing an overview of respondents' behaviours and preferences through a generational breakdown.

Application of Decision Trees in Modelling Travel Decisions

Decision trees serve as an effective tool for analysing the travel-related decision-making processes of different generations. These models allow researchers to explore the preferences and influencing factors that shape generational differences in tourism behaviour. A recent study by Mamengko et al. (2024) applied decision tree analysis to examine how Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y, and Z make tourist destination decisions based on cultural, social, personal, psychological, and marketing factors. The findings revealed significant differences across generations, highlighting the importance of tailored marketing strategies for each group. Similarly, a study by Yılmaz (2024) utilized decision trees to model destination choice priorities among Generations X, Y, and Z. The analysis identified distinct factors influencing each generation's destination selection, providing valuable insights for destination marketing organizations.

Decision trees are machine learning algorithms that represent decision-making processes in a hierarchical structure. These tools are particularly useful for understanding complex decision mechanisms and uncovering relationships between various influencing variables. A relevant study by Tang et al. (2015) applied a decision tree approach to model the dynamic behavioural process of travel mode shifts. Their research used decision trees to identify rules and factors influencing travellers' decisions when switching from one mode of transport to another. While this study did not specifically focus on generational differences, the methodology can be adapted to examine travel decisions across different generations.

For example, Wang & Wang (2022) utilised gradient boosting decision trees to compare car usage habits between Millennials and Generation X in the United States. Their findings highlighted significant generational differences in car usage patterns and the varying importance of influencing factors. The application of decision trees provides researchers

with deeper insights into the travel decision-making processes of different generations. Although the number of specific publications in this area remains limited, existing studies demonstrate the methodology's adaptability and relevance. As a result, decision trees are considered a promising analytical tool for further research in this field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Generation X
An attitude assessment was conducted among the respondents, requiring them to answer questions related to their impressions and underlying motivations. Responses were recorded on a five-point interval scale. Since the attitudes of frequent travellers differ from those who travel less often and may not have established platform preferences, travel frequency was recoded into two categories: "relatively rarely" and "relatively frequently" when mapping the decision-making sequence. In the DTC analysis, which can be interpreted as a form of decision tree construction, both categories were included in the study. Travel frequency was thus expressed on a nominal scale to understand the preferences and perspectives of both those who travel relatively rarely and those who travel relatively frequently. Therefore, this question served as the starting point for the DTC analysis, while attitude-related statements remained within interval dimensions.

Before examining the DTC, it is important to determine the significance of the individual statements. In this respect, it becomes evident that: Price comparison: For Generation X, comparing prices is a fundamental factor. This indicates that they are conscious consumers who focus on cost optimisation and make decisions only after carefully comparing prices.

The high level of price sensitivity suggests that this group actively seeks the best deals and discounts, reflecting their financial awareness and focus on cost efficiency.

- **The role of price in service selection:** Price, as the most important factor, indicates that travel costs are one of the most decisive elements for Generation X. Their price sensitivity influences their decision-making process. Cost efficiency and financial planning are key considerations when choosing a travel service. This suggests that service providers must offer competitive prices to appeal to them, as they are likely to compare prices across providers before making a decision.
- **A well-designed website increases trust in travel services:** The design and professionalism of websites play a significant role in building trust. Generation X respondents highly value well-structured, user-friendly websites. Digital presence and online visibility are therefore crucial, and service providers must ensure that their websites are professional, informative, and easy to navigate in order to enhance customer trust and booking intent.

However, these are not the only influencing factors. Among the **less significant factors**, the following can be noted:
- **The impact of social media:** Social media advertisements have some effect on travel decisions but are not a dominant factor. In fact, they rank at the lower end of preference lists. For Generation X, such advertisements are likely to serve as supplementary sources of information rather than primary influences. While social media ads are present and may play a role in decision-making, Generation X tends to prefer other sources, such as **detailed information and personal recommendations**. As a result, online advertising serves a **supportive rather than leading** role in their decision process.
- **Scepticism towards first impressions:** Generation X often exhibits **scepticism regarding first impressions**, particularly when they come from advertisements or superficial information. This suggests that many in this generation feel that first impressions do not always reflect reality. It also indicates that they conduct thorough research to avoid **misleading first impressions and potential disappointment**. This implies a need for **deeper and more credible** sources of information in their decision-making process.
- **Low trust in influencers:** The recommendations of influencers and opinion leaders are considered **less credible** by Generation X compared to traditional advertisements. The low average score in this category suggests that Generation X respondents prefer to rely on other **trusted sources**. Many do not necessarily trust influencers or even engage with their content; instead, they depend on **their own research and reliable information sources** when making travel decisions.

The significance of pricing is also evident in the decision-making sequence. When an X-generation respondent enters the decision-making process, the first question they face is whether they are willing to pay more for higher-quality services. This question has the highest primary splitting capacity in the main branch (G2 = 88.20) (n = 112). If the answer is no, the decision tree becomes fragmented, and other unmeasured factors influence a small proportion of the sample (n = 13).

However, if the respondent answers yes (n = 91), meaning they are willing to pay more for better quality, the next attitudinal level considers whether they are influenced by social media advertisements. A significant portion of the sample (n = 78) is receptive to this influence, meaning that once the quality and corresponding price have been determined, they actively engage with social media, allowing themselves to be influenced by its promotions and offers.

If, at this point, price does not remain a primary decision factor (< 4) (n = 25), a branching occurs, where users make decisions based on website impressions. If we continue along the main branch and price remains an important consideration (> 4) (n = 53) (G2 = 41.37), price comparison follows. This question generates another branch where a small portion of the sample (n = 12) does not prioritise price comparison but instead makes decisions based on quality. In this case, the sample becomes fragmented, and this branch runs out. Returning to the main branch, it becomes evident that a significant portion of the sample (n = 41) considers user reviews and ratings a key factor, with relatively high explanatory power (G2 = 26.21). This stage represents the final decision point in the main branch; beyond this, the sample fragments, and travel decisions are made based on a few individual preferences. This DTC model also has a secondary branch, which focuses on those who do not consider "higher price for higher service" a decisive factor (< 3) (n = 21). For them, first impressions become the dominant factor, which carries relatively low risk but is strongly influenced by a well-designed website.

The analysis reveals that the primary driving forces behind Generation X's travel decisions are the balance between price and quality, the influence of social media, and user reviews and ratings. Well-designed websites and first impressions

also play a significant role, especially among those who are not willing to pay more for higher-quality services. These factors collectively shape their destination choices and booking behaviours.
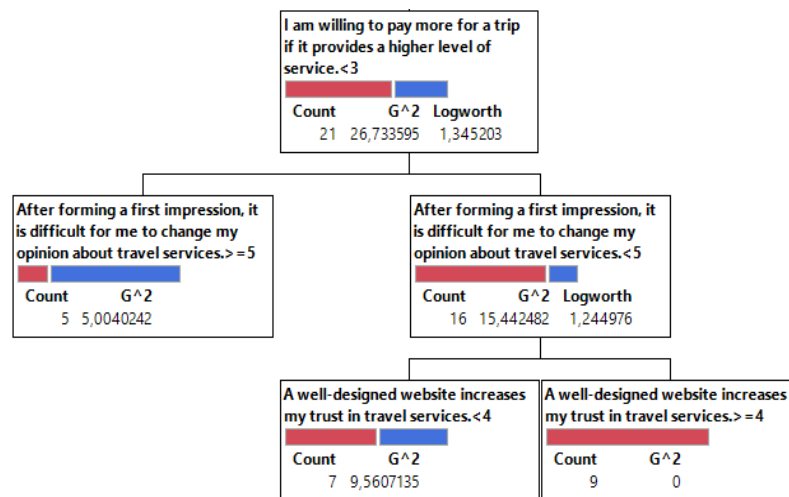

Figure 1/a. The real decision situation: decision tree (DTC) for Generation X fillers, way 1. source: own analysis output
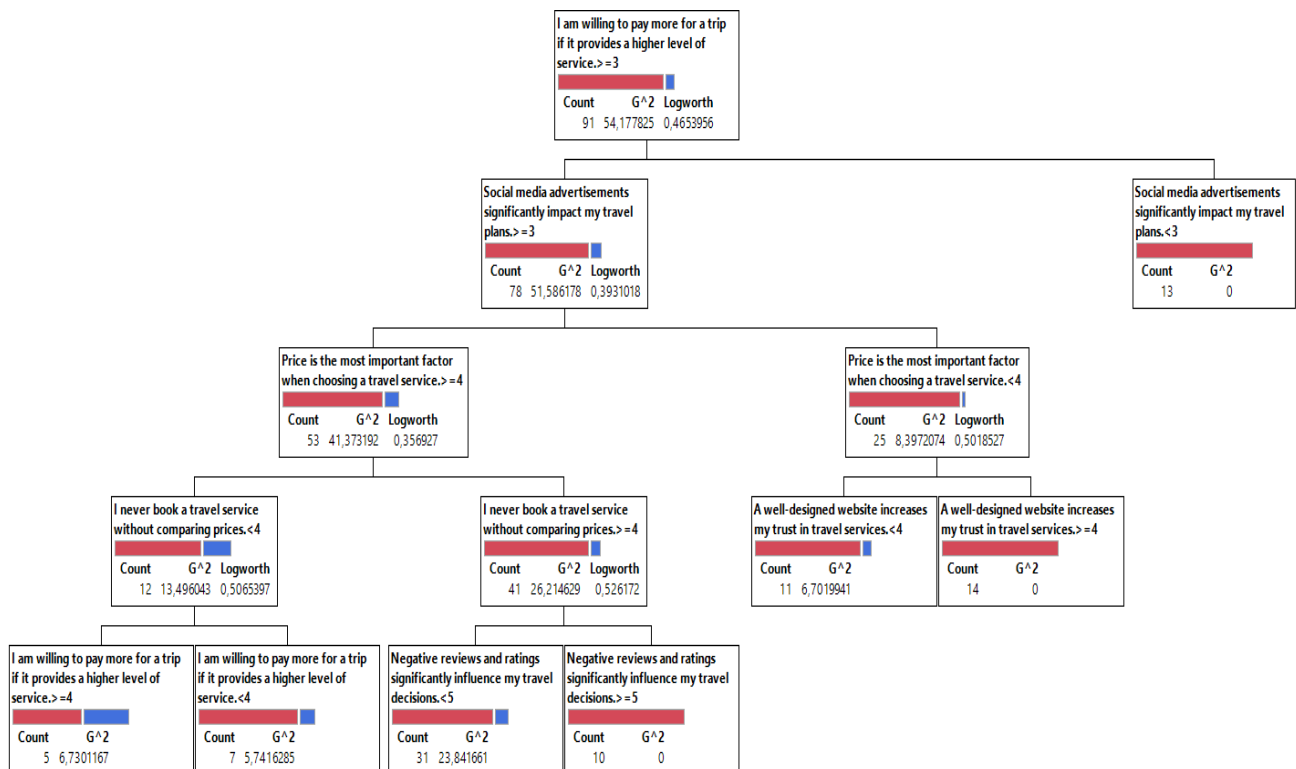

Figure 1/b. The real decision situation: decision tree (DTC) for Generation X fillers, way 2. (Source: own analysis output)

During the decision tree analysis (Figure 1/a and Figure 1/b), impressions and quality frequently emerged as key factors. One of the most influential elements shaping these perceptions is hotel branding, which is communicated through various aspects such as websites, staff uniforms, building facades, and other visual elements. Examining these components in detail (on a scale of 1–5), it becomes clear that for Generation X respondents, the following factors are particularly significant:

- I usually check online photos of accommodations:
- o Viewing images of accommodations online is of high importance for Generation X.
- o The high average score ($\bar{x}$ = 4.61) and low standard deviation (σ = 0.75) suggest that this is one of the most defining factors for them, making it a clearly positive variable in the analysis.
- o Visual content, such as photos, plays a critical role in their decision-making process.
- o Hotels should ensure that they publish high-quality, appealing images online to attract potential guests.
- I can recall the colour scheme of a hotel later on:
- o Generation X respondents often remember a hotel's colour scheme.
- o The average score ($\bar{x}$ = 3.79) and relatively higher standard deviation (σ = 1.19) indicate that while this factor is relevant, there are individual differences in how it is perceived.

- o A hotel's colour scheme and interior design can leave a lasting impression on guests.
- o This finding suggests that hotels should pay attention to interior aesthetics and overall visual appeal.
- The appearance of a hotel's website influences my choice of accommodation:
- o A strong online presence is essential for hotels.
- o A well-designed, user-friendly website enhances trust and facilitates customer decision-making.

Additional findings indicate that background music in hotels and staff uniforms are still part of guests' expectations and brand perception. However, hotel logos are less memorable to respondents.

Generation Y

An attitude assessment was conducted among Generation Y respondents, requiring them to answer questions related to perceptions and underlying motivations. Responses were recorded on a five-point interval scale. This was examined both independently and through a DTC analysis, where travel frequency was also recoded into "relatively rarely" and "relatively frequently" categories to map out decision-making patterns. Before analysing the DTC, the statements were evaluated, revealing that the following factors are particularly important for Generation Y:

- Price sensitivity:
- o For Generation Y, price is the most important factor when selecting travel services.
- o Travel providers must offer competitive pricing and communicate value-for-money propositions effectively.
- o Discounts, package deals, and promotions can increase interest among price-sensitive travellers.
- o Interestingly, unlike Generation X, who tend to compare prices first, Generation Y appears to set a reservation price first based on the responses. They then operate within this limit, considering other aspects once their price threshold has been defined.
- Demand for quality:
- o Generation Y is willing to pay more for higher-quality services.
- o The average score ($\bar{x} = 3.82$) and relatively high standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.21$) indicate that while many appreciate quality, there are individual differences in willingness to pay more.
- o Travel service providers should emphasise premium offerings, unique experiences, and luxury services, which can be attractive to quality-conscious travellers.
- Impact of user reviews:
- o Generation Y places significant emphasis on negative reviews and ratings, considering them more influential than Generation X does.
- o Travel service providers must proactively manage negative feedback, respond quickly and efficiently, and minimise potential negative effects.
- o Encouraging positive reviews and providing high-quality customer service can increase consumer trust, based on the survey results.

For the Generation Y sample, deal sensitivity is a less important factor. Members of Generation Y do not frequently change their travel plans based on promotions and discounts. An additional notable factor is that Generation Y finds influencers and opinion leaders less credible than traditional advertisements. Therefore, travel service providers should carefully handle the involvement of influencers in their marketing strategies. Selecting authentic and relevant influencers can enhance campaign effectiveness, but it does not replace traditional, reliable marketing methods. All of this reflects Generation Y's increased awareness and critical thinking. Generation Y's travel decisions are significantly influenced by pricing, demand for high-quality services, and user reviews. Price sensitivity and cost comparison are key factors, while negative reviews have a significant impact on decision-making. Well-designed websites and professional online appearances increase trust and booking willingness. Travel service providers must offer competitive prices, high-quality services, and reliable user reviews to appeal to Generation Y. Promotions and discounts provide flexibility, while the credibility of influencers shows mixed effects. Therefore, while involving credible influencers may be beneficial, traditional marketing methods remain important. The importance of statements assessed in isolation increases at multiple points when decision-making situations are involved. The starting point of the DTC analysis is the most decisive classification factor, focusing on whether the professionalism of a hotel or travel service provider's website directly influences the booking willingness of Generation Y respondents. Among the respondents, 34 people strongly agreed with this statement (value >= 5), while 120 respondents did not consider it to be such a significant factor (value < 5). Among those who believe that the professionalism of the website influences booking willingness, the next question examined was: "Are the recommendations of opinion leaders and influencers considered more credible than traditional advertisements?"

- 20 respondents agreed (value >= 3).
- Within this group, those who found influencer recommendations credible were further filtered by asking: "Do they frequently change their travel plans based on travel offers and discounts?"
- o 14 respondents often change their travel plans based on offers and discounts (value >= 3).
- o 6 respondents do not frequently alter their plans due to discounts and promotions (value < 3).

This reveals an impulsive segment within the sample, explaining the relatively higher variance in the independent assessment of these factors. Among those for whom professionalism is an influencing factor, but influencer recommendations are not considered more credible (value < 3), 14 respondents were identified. However, further segmentation is not possible due to sample fragmentation, and for them, the decision-making process concludes at this point.

On the other branch of the decision tree, that is, the main branch, all those who do not consider website professionalism to influence their booking willingness face the next decision point:

- Are they willing to pay more for a trip if it provides a higher level of service?
  o For most respondents, the decision is made at the point of finding the right price-value balance.
  o 46 respondents are not willing to pay more (value < 4).
  o Within this group, the next decision factor is whether they prioritize the opinions of friends and family over online reviews when making travel decisions.
    - 26 respondents consider friends' and family's opinions more important (value >= 4).
    - 20 respondents do not prioritize friends' and family's opinions (value < 4), logically leading them to rely on online reviews.
    - For 16 respondents, negative reviews have a significant impact (value >= 4).

The decision tree (Figure 2/a; Figure 2/b.) indicates that website professionalism significantly impacts booking willingness. Those who find it important are more likely to trust influencer recommendations and adjust their travel plans based on promotions and discounts. For those who consider professionalism less relevant, service quality and personal recommendations from acquaintances play a larger role. Negative reviews and ratings also have a significant impact on this group's decisions.
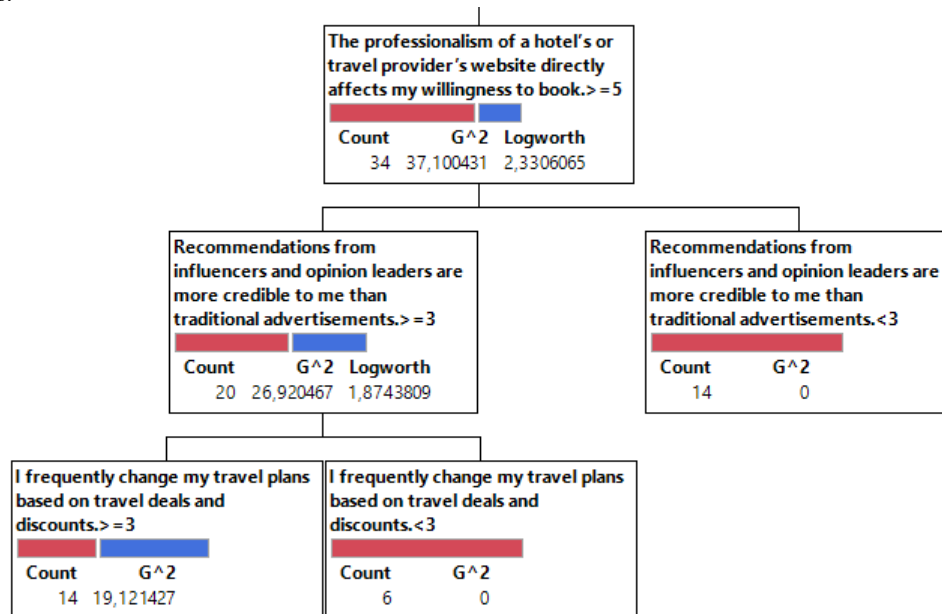

Figure 2/a The real decision situation: decision tree (DTC) for Generation Y fillers, way 1. (Source: own analysis output)
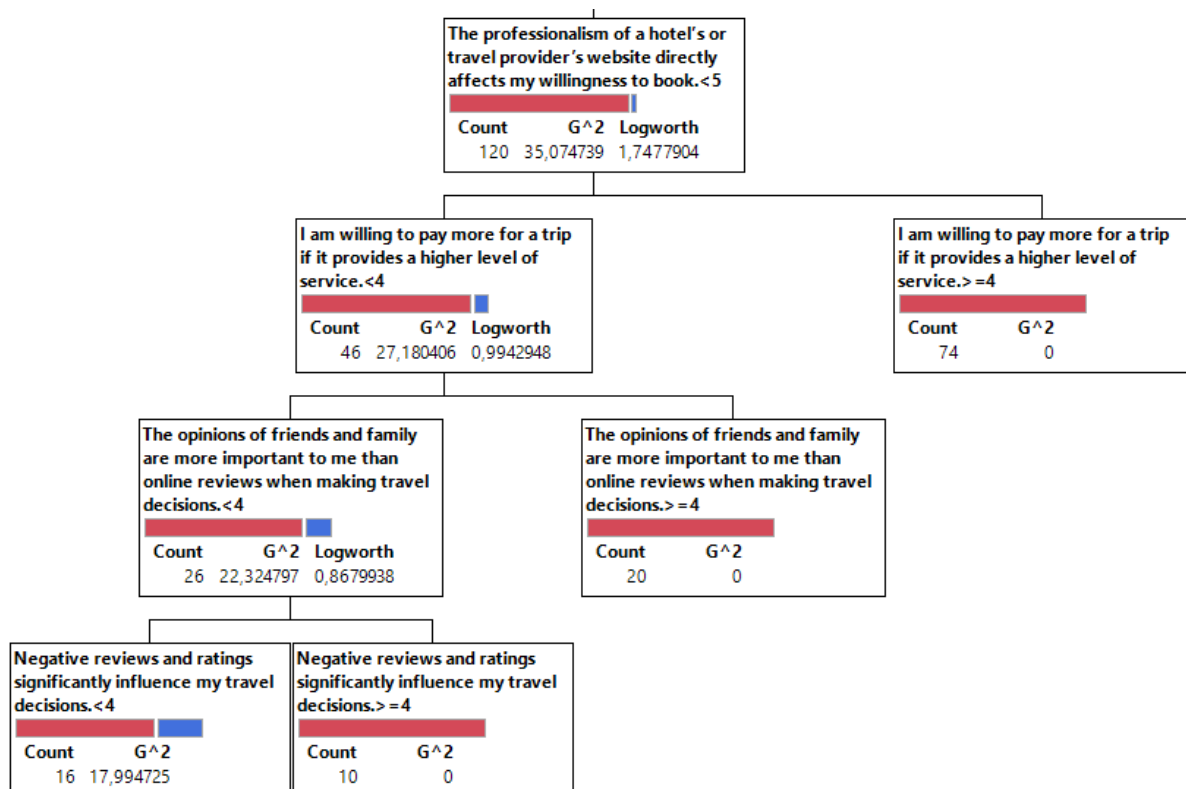

Figure 2/b . The real decision situation: decision tree (DTC) for Generation Y fillers, way 2. (Source: own analysis output)

Generation Z

For the Generation Z sample, an attitude analysis was also conducted, in which respondents had to answer questions aimed at mapping underlying motivations and impressions. Responses were recorded using a 5-point interval scale, which was examined independently as well as through DTC analysis. During the decision sequence mapping, travel frequency was recoded into "relatively rarely" and "relatively frequently" categories. Before analyzing the decision tree, examining the statements reveals that the following factors are considered important:

- Price sensitivity and price comparison:
- For Generation Z, price comparison is the most important factor when selecting travel services, similar to Generation X.
- As a result, travel service providers must offer competitive pricing and clearly communicate price-value ratios.
- The importance of digital presence:
- For Generation Z, a well-designed website increases trust in travel services.
- The results indicate that professional and user-friendly websites are crucial in building trust.
- Travel service providers must place great emphasis on website design and usability.
- As this was also an important factor for Generation X, modern, intuitive, and mobile-friendly websites can increase both booking willingness and consumer trust.
- Price sensitivity:
- Price remains a key consideration for Generation Z when selecting travel services.

Generation Z members do not frequently change their travel plans based on offers and discounts; in fact, they are skeptical about first impressions and believe that these do not always reflect reality. The mean value ($\bar{x} = 3.28$) and the relatively high standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.01$) indicate that while skepticism is present, there are individual differences in its extent. Travel service providers need credible and transparent communication, which is further supported by the fact that, contrary to common beliefs, Generation Z holds mixed opinions about influencer recommendations. Although the mean value is low, the standard deviation is relatively high ($\sigma = 1.17$), meaning that the impact of influencers is not uniform - many do not consider them more credible than traditional advertisements, but this is not a general rule.

Generation Z's travel decisions (Figure 3/a; Figure 3/b; Figure 3/c.) are strongly influenced by prices and price comparisons, well-designed websites, and user reviews. Price sensitivity and price comparisons are critical in decision-making, while negative reviews have a significant impact on trust. Well-designed and professional websites increase booking willingness and confidence. The importance of individual statements changes in real decision-making situations. The starting point of the DTC is social media. Among respondents, only 23 people firmly disagreed with the power of social media, and they tend to make travel decisions based on offers or recommendations from external parties.
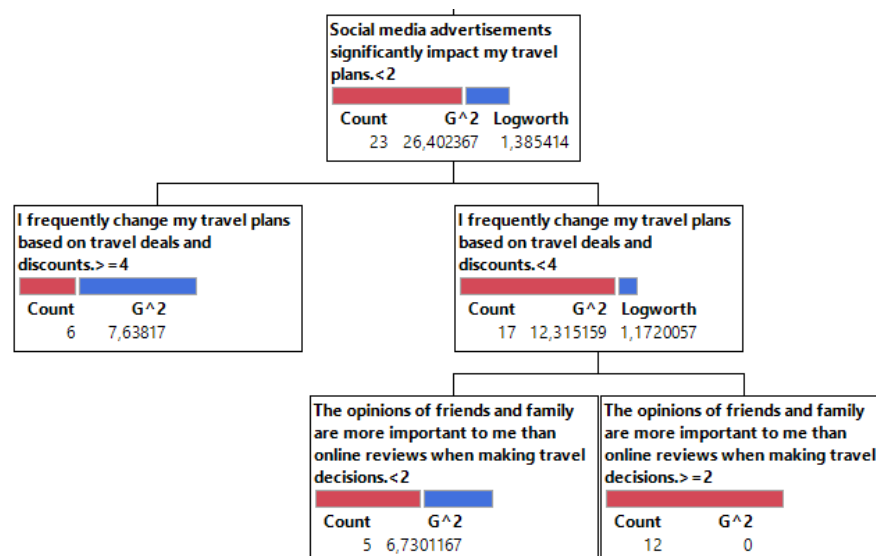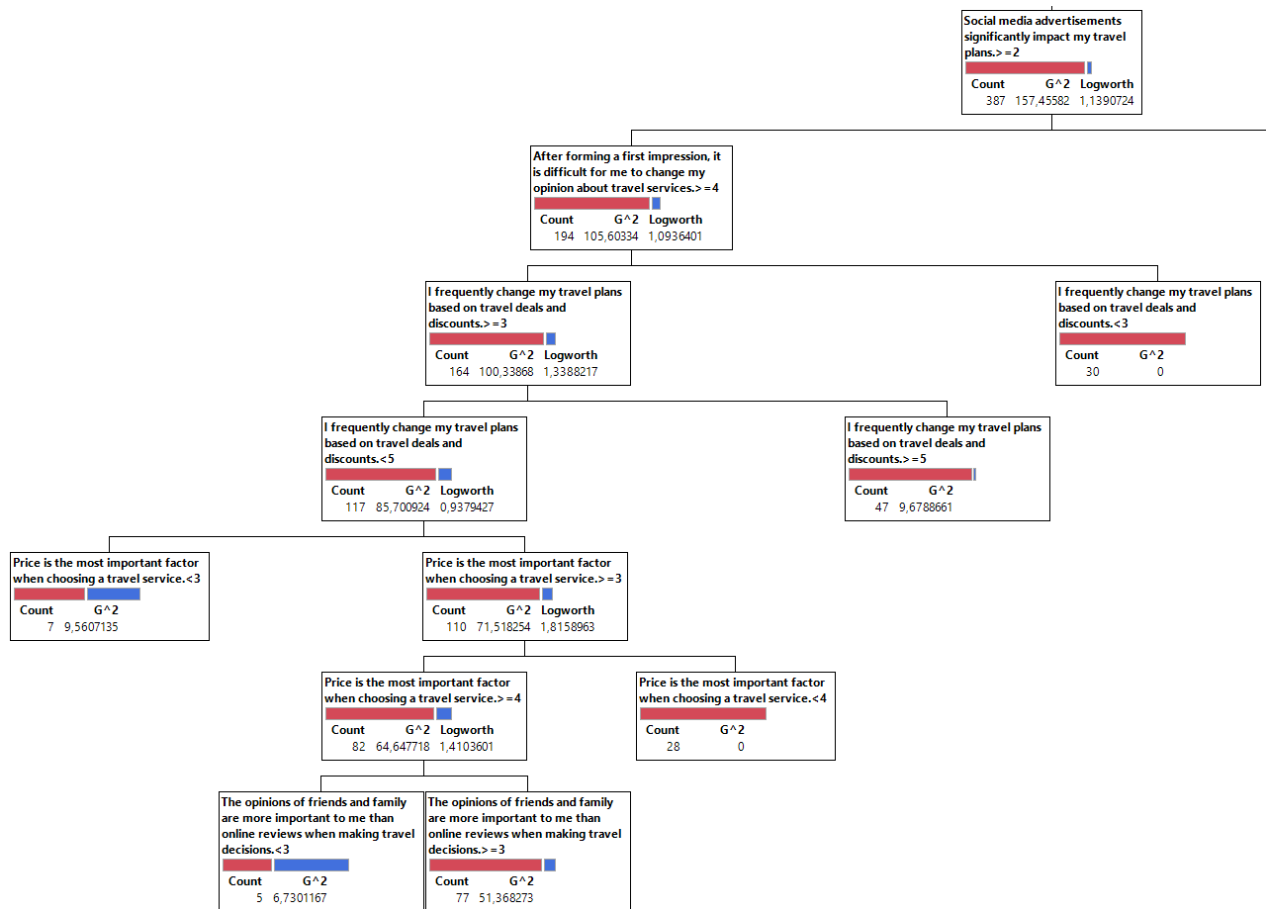

Figure 3/a . The real decision situation: decision tree (DTC) for Generation Z fillers, way 1 (Source: own analysis output)

However, the main branch clearly shows that the influence of social media is dominant (G2 = 157.45) (n = 387), after which the role of impressions becomes more significant, splitting the sample into two groups. The sub-branch clearly indicates that the factor of first impressions creates a loop - their role is uncertain but still an existing phenomenon, which can only be overridden by others' opinions. After that, impressions regain their primary role. This means that a significant portion of Generation Z makes emotional, impulse-based decisions, and social media is capable of triggering this demand.

Continuing along the main branch, another loop can be observed: the decision influenced by discounts and offers repeatedly resurfaces. Uncertainty is a fundamental characteristic of Generation Z, which is visibly confirmed at this stage as well - the unclear meanings and the influence of external factors reinforce this uncertainty even in travel-related decisions. The issue of price only appears at the fifth level of the DTC, despite the fact that, when evaluated independently, this factor was considered primary. Those who are satisfied with the price at this stage still require further confirmation, as the same factor reappears at the sixth level of the DTC, meaning they reassess the issue of price once again. Following this, 82

individuals still require final validation through online reviews before making a decision. Thus, it is evident that first impressions have a significant impact on their opinions, and they frequently modify their plans based on offers and discounts, where price remains a crucial factor. Those who are influenced by social media advertisements tend to adjust their plans frequently in response to offers, and the opinions of friends and family are also important considerations for them.

Figure 3/b. The real decision situation: decision tree (DTC) for Generation Z fillers, way 2 (Source: own analysis output)
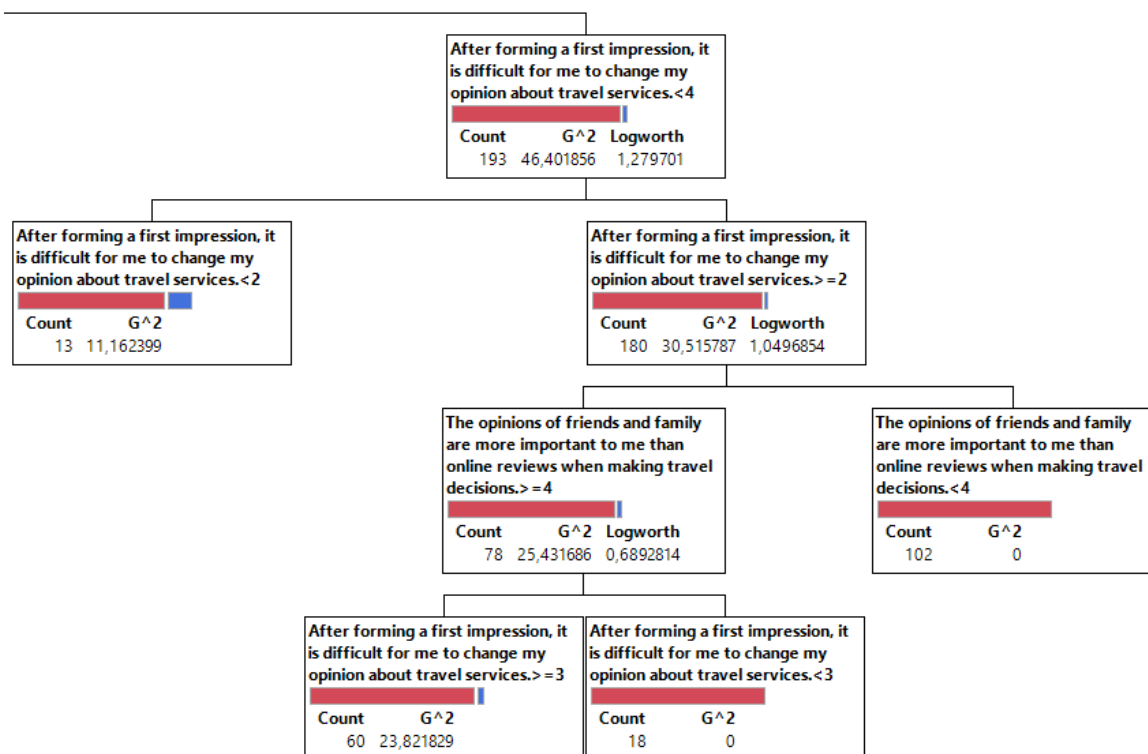
Figure 3/c. The real decision situation: decision tree (DTC) for Generation Z fillers, way 3; source: own analysis output

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to investigate how digitalisation influences the travel decision-making processes of Generations X, Y, and Z, and to identify the generational differences that emerge in tourism consumer behaviour. Through a quantitative approach supported by literature review and decision tree modelling, we examined not only how these cohorts access and process digital information but also the weight they assign to various factors when making travel-related choices.

Our findings confirm that digitalisation is a key determinant in travel decision-making for all generations, but its effects manifest differently depending on the age group. These results are consistent with recent research Zsarnóczky (2024) observed that Generation Y's reliance on online reviews and peer feedback aligns with our conclusion that online reviews, particularly negative ones, weigh heavily on their travel decisions. His work further reinforces the significance of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) as a key driver for Gen Y consumers. For Generation X, digital platforms are functional tools that must convey reliability and trust, primarily through clear structure, security, and professionalism in design. Generation Y, shaped by the rise of digital technologies during their formative years, relies extensively on online reviews and peer feedback—especially negative reviews—before committing to a travel purchase. Generation Z, being digital natives, exhibits a stronger emotional and visual attachment to content encountered on mobile platforms and social media, often prioritising the aesthetic appeal and ease of access over traditional markers of credibility.

While price sensitivity was found to be a universal factor, the generational motivations that accompany it differ significantly. Generation X focuses on affordability and cautious comparison, Generation Y seeks value and is more willing to invest in quality if convinced, and Generation Z demonstrates both high price awareness and responsiveness to digital influence such as social proof or viral content.

Beyond the specific findings of this study, several broader and generalisable insights emerge. First, the research validates the relevance of using a generational framework to understand evolving patterns in digital consumer behaviour. In an era where digital technologies continue to transform the tourism industry, recognising how different age cohorts engage with online tools—such as websites, reviews, or social media—is vital for developing tailored marketing strategies. This is consistent with the findings of Buhalis et al. (2024), who emphasise that the role of digitalisation in tourism varies significantly across generations.

Furthermore, Hiezl and Gyurácz-Németh (2025) highlight that generational segments differ markedly in their preferences for digital versus personal interactions. These insights underscore the necessity for tourism marketers to adopt generationally nuanced approaches, especially in the context of ongoing digital transformation.Second, our results support the theoretical distinction between traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) as separate influence mechanisms. While personal recommendations retain their power among older generations, e-WOM has become a decisive factor for younger users. This highlights the importance of managing digital reputation, online review platforms, and user-generated content in tourism communication.

Third, the emotional and psychological dimensions of digital interaction are becoming increasingly important. For Generation Z especially, decision-making is not purely rational or economic—it is shaped by the immediacy, interactivity, and emotional resonance of digital content. This underlines the need for experience-driven and emotionally engaging content strategies in digital tourism marketing.

Fourth, the study draws attention to the design-related factors that affect digital trust and consumer conversion: website usability, mobile optimisation, brand aesthetics, and coherent visual identity all emerged as meaningful elements in building user confidence and influencing booking intent. These insights are applicable not only in tourism but across sectors where digital presence substitutes or precedes physical interaction.

Finally, the research confirms that digital maturity—defined not only by technical skills but by critical information-processing habits—varies between generations and should be considered in tourism education, destination management, and policy planning. Service providers, platforms, and policymakers must avoid one-size-fits-all approaches and instead embrace personalised digitalisation—one that is inclusive of generational diversity and adaptable to rapid technological change.

In conclusion, while digitalisation acts as a unifying backdrop across all generations, it is the interplay between technology, trust, values, and generational identity that ultimately shapes travel decision-making in the digital era. These findings are not only relevant for tourism marketing professionals but also provide a foundation for future academic studies exploring the human side of digital transformation in tourism and beyond.

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

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