Mansoura University
Faculty of Tourism and Hotels

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE TRAVEL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN GENERATION X, Y AND Z AS MODERATING VARIABLES

By

Dr/ Rania Magdi Orabi

Department of Tourism Studies
High institute of tourism, Hotel
Management and Monuments
Restoration, Abou Qir-Alexandria

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Abstract

Travel decision-making is a very complex process. The reason why it is complex is that there are several considerations that travelers must make before travelling. Since travelers cannot see the tourism product before the purchase process, they are highly interested in their travel planning and decision-making. Therefore, they need trusted information sources like travel agencies, social media platforms, and social media influencers to provide them with information and help them to make the optimal decision. Travelers have many tendencies and preferences that differ in the travel decision-making process according to their ages. So, the current study aims to understand the major characteristics of generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z and to identify the main factors that influence the travel decision-making process. To achieve the main objective of this study, a quantitative approach was carried out in order to study generational differences in the travel decision-making process. This research has been based on a survey method through distributing a set of questionnaires

[1]Department of Tourism Studies High institute of tourism, Hotel Management and Monuments Restoration, Abou Qir-Alexandria

from 27 September 2021 until mid-December 2021. The proposed model was tested on a sample of 409 participants from different generations (189 from generation Z, 135 from generation Y, and 85 from generation X). As a method of data analysis, this study relied on descriptive statistics in the first axis of the questionnaire to recognize the characteristics and traits of each generation. To test the hypotheses in the current paper, we used partial least squares structural equation modelling to investigate the relationship between independent constructs (travel agencies, social media platforms, and social media influencers) and dependent construct (the travel decision-making process). To analyze the moderating effects, a multi-group analysis has been conducted to test the differences between the generational cohorts. The results have demonstrated that there were significant differences between generational cohorts, especially in the decision-making process. Generation X has leaned on travel agencies in the first rank as an information source, and social media platforms have been coming in the second rank, while the social media influencers factor was not significant. Generation Y has depended on social media platforms at the first rank and social media influencers at the second as trusted information sources, whilst the travel agencies construct was not significant. Whereas generation Z has leaned on Social media influencers as a reliable source. Finally, this study seeks to understand and compare between different tendencies and preferences of generations in order to provide them with suitable information sources to choose the optimal decision.

Keywords: Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, Travel Decision-Making, Social media influencers.

Introduction

Definitely, there is no product or service in tourism that meets the requirements of all tourists (Gardiner et al., 2014; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). Tourists are too numerous, dispersed, and diverse in their requirements and purchasing habits (Huang & Petrick, 2010; Hysa et al., 2021). Furthermore, the tourist service providers themselves vary greatly in their ability to serve various tourist segments of the market (Monaco, 2018; Dolot, 2018; Liu et al., 2020). So, it is significant to recognize the main variances in tourists' behavior across different generations (Baltescu, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020). Since demographic trends and developments, as well as shifts in attitudes and perceptions, have a significant impact on tourist behavior and tourism marketing methods, thus far, relatively few tourism studies have investigated and compared generational differences in travel decision making processes (Baum, 2011). The travel decision-making process is a hard procedure and complex because travellers must make several decisions before travelling (Stylos et al., 2021; Jiang & Hong, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021). So they need reliable information sources to assist them in making the optimal decision (Robinson, 2019; Juliana, 2021).

Undoubtedly that generational differences are very important issues for the business (Vargas-Sánchez, & Perano, 2017; Yang et al., 2020). To achieve unparalleled success and remain in the market (Li et al., 2013; Lyons et al., 2015). Firstly, the business must understand the needs

and wants of each market segment according to their age category (Juchnowicz, 2009; Borges et al., 2010). Secondly, finding different and innovative ways to reach each market segment separately at the lowest time and cost (Ishida et al., 2017; Törn-Laapio, & Ekonen, 2021). Finally, making an effort to meet those needs and desires (Borges et al., 2010). According to the age segment, travelers have varied expectations, needs, or preferences for their vacation destination in terms of duration, tourist attractions, and activities (Juchnowicz, 2009; Borges et al., 2010). It is significant to understand how various age groups spend their time, expectations, and requirements in order to build an effective marketing plan for each target segment (Li et al., 2013; Lyons et al., 2015; Vargas-Sánchez, & Perano, 2017).

Recently, with the increase of marketers' interest in dividing the market into different segments according to demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, income, etc.), there has been an increase in research that deals with generational analysis, especially in tourism publications (Bednarska, 2017; Dolot, 2018). Most studies on tourism demand trends conclude that generational analysis should be used to track trends and changes in travel behavior (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Benckendorff et al., 2010). Gardiner et al. (2014) have asserted that travel habits will change across generations over time. Thus, there is an urgent need for many researches and studies on each generation in order to properly react to their wants and desires.

Literature Reviews

Generational Differences

A sociological generation is a group of individuals born within a certain time frame who were formed by that time frame as a result of being affected by a group of external influences (technological advances, economic, social, and political situations) that occurred during the same period of time (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Benckendorff et al., 2010; Oh & Reeves, 2014). Mannheim (1952) states that the generation is "*the generation that participates in the same historical and social circumstances*" (p. 298). While Strauss and Howe (1991) have defined a social generation as "*the aggregate of all people born over a span of roughly twenty years, or about the length of one phase of life: childhood, young adulthood, midlife, and old age*" (p. 151). Generational differences or disparities are shown in differences in perspectives across generations on beliefs, customs, traditions, and culture (Tyler, 2007; Monaco, 2018; Hysa et al., 2021). It is also referred to as a "gap" that separates the ideas that are expressed by different generations (Peltomäki, 2015; Bednarska, 2017; Dolot, 2018). These differences are often reflected in behaviors, attitudes, and preferences that vary between younger and older generations (Monaco, 2018; Dolot, 2018; Liu et al., 2020).

These generational differences have formed across the decades due to the economic, social, and political differences experienced by each generation during a specific time period and in certain countries (Guerra et al., 2015; Youn, & Uzzell, 2016; Monaco, 2018). Therefore, the literature that has referred to generational differences does not have a fixed and uniform division of generations

as it varies according to the different conditions of those countries (Ishida et al., 2017; Törn-Laapio, & Ekonen, 2021). For example, the US market is characterized by multigenerational, starting from the silent generation (Traditionalists) to generation Z (Generation Alpha), according to "the Strauss–Howe generational theory" (Cole et al., 2002; Ishida et al., 2017). In contrast, European countries start from the generation maturists to generation Z (iGEN) (Liu et al., 2020).

Juchnowicz (2009) and Borges et al. (2010) have classified the generations into four categories: Veterans who were born from 1930 to 1945; Baby Boomers who were born from 1946 to 1969; Generation X who were born from 1970 to 1979; and Generation Y who were born after 1980. Lyons et al. (2015) have suggested one of the classifications that can be applied: The Silent Generation, who were born from 1922 to 1944; Baby Boomers, who were born from 1945 to 1964; Generation X, who were born from 1965 to 1980; Millennials, who were born from 1981 to 1994; and Generation Z, who were born after 1995. Despite the different date ranges in some research, most of them indicated six classifications that are still stable until the present time: the silent generation, who were born between 1925 and 1942, the baby boom generation, who were born between 1943 and 1960, Generation X, who were born between 1961 and 1981, Generation Y, who were born between 1982 and 1995, Generation Z, who were born between 1995 and 2010, and the Alpha generation, who were born in 2010 and later (Elliot & Choi, 2011; Li et al., 2013; Chen & Shoemaker, 2014; Papavasileiou & Lyons, 2015).

Characteristics of Gen X

Generation X (Gen X) refers to those who were born between 1961 and 1980 (Hysa et al., 2021), consisting of about 5.436.600 million members, or approximately 5.33 per cent of the Egyptian population (Population Pyramid, 2021). On the international level, this generation is also called the "lost generation" due to the social and economic difficulties they experienced (Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019; Hysa et al., 2021). Gen X is often referred to as the "fear generation" because of the constant worry of nuclear war and joblessness that they have experienced during this period (Huang & Petrick, 2010; Gardiner et al., 2014). The attitudes and opinions of this generation have been formed through a set of situations such as the Setback of "67", the War of Attrition, the October War, economic openness, and the spread of schistosomiases in Egypt (Richter & Steiner, 2008).

This generation is better than the baby boom generation due to the fact that Gen X has witnessed women's rights movements and equality (Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). This generation appreciates family and friends (Gardiner et al., 2014; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). Therefore, they prefer to plan their trips with family and children or friends (Guerra et al., 2015). Also, this generation prefers to strike a balance between career and personal life (Gardiner et al., 2014; Chen & Li, 2020; Hysa et al., 2021). Moreover, they prefer to get involved in the cultures, customs, and traditions of the local residents (Reisenwitz & Fowler,

2019). Most of them visit archaeological sites and museums, as well as cultural and artistic theatres (Huang & Petrick, 2010). One of the main features of this generation is patience (Huang & Petrick, 2010; Hysa et al., 2021). They prefer to travel domestically, do not prefer to travel permanently, do not prefer to use technology in travel procedures, and do not like to reveal flight information (Huang & Petrick, 2010; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). Facebook is the most popular social media platform used by this generation (Huang & Petrick, 2010).

> **H4a:** *Generation X moderates the relation between travel agencies and travel decision making process.*
> **H4b:** *Generation X moderates the relation between social media platforms and travel decision making process*
> **H4c:** *Generation X moderates the relation between social media influencers and travel decision making process*

Characteristics of Gen Y

Generation Y (Gen Y), also known as the Millennial generation, refers to those born after the Egypt–Israel peace treaty (1979) between 1981 and 1994 (Benckendorff, et al., 2010). On the international level, Gen Y represents the largest part of the population all over the world (Richardson & Thomas, 2012). this generation has experienced globalization, climate change issues, and been affected by the 9/11 attacks (Cairncross & Buultjens, 2007; Richardson & Thomas, 2012; Ketter, 2020). On the local level, this generation comprises over 33 million people, or roughly 32% of the total population of Egypt (Population Pyramid,

2021). This generation coincides with political stability in the Mubarak era (1981), the First Palestinian Intifada (1987) and the Gulf War (1990) (Richter & Steiner, 2008). Unquestionably, they are distinguished from any other generation by accepting change, having a higher degree of optimism, are more educated and have cultural diversity (Cairncross & Buultjens, 2007; Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010; Richardson & Thomas, 2012).

It is necessary to point out that this generation has grown up with technology (Richardson & Thomas, 2012; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). Gen Y is regarded as the first generation to be born into the digital world because they were born during the period of video games, compact CDs, and mobile phones (Vermeersch et al., 2016; Gardiner & Kwek, 2017). They use a lot of different social media apps on their phones for both personal and business reasons more often than Gen X (Benckendorff, et al., 2010; Richardson & Thomas, 2012; Ketter, 2020). Gen Y prefers to seek out new experiences when choosing a destination in order to meet their aspirations and needs (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017; Ketter, 2020). They typically obtain information about the tourist destination via social media platforms before, during, and after their travels (Richardson & Thomas, 2012; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). Traveling is more common among Gen Y than Baby Boomers or Gen X (Richardson & Thomas, 2012). Despite the fact that they prefer to spend more money, they nevertheless keep a close check on their trip budget (Cairncross & Buultjens, 2007; Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010). They also prefer to explore new destinations and are always looking for new and fascinating

information and experiences (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017; Ketter, 2020).

H5a: *Generation Y moderates the relation between travel agencies and travel decision making process.*

H5b: *Generation Y moderates the relation between social media platforms and travel decision making process*

H5c: *Generation Y moderates the relation between social media influencers and travel decision making process*

Characteristics of Gen Z

Generation Z (Gen Z), also known as "Post-Millennials" or "iGEN" (Skinner et al., 2018; Robinson & Schänzel, 2019), refers to people born between 1995 and 2010 who are the offspring of Gen X (Baltescu, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020). Some academics have determined that Gen Z are people who were born after 2000, while others have defined them as those born between 1995 and 2010 (Stylos et al., 2021; Jiang & Hong, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021). Whereas some researchers have identified Generation Z as people who were born between 1996 and 2010, others have determined the years between 1997 and 2014 (Yazici & Ayazlar, 2021; Olson, & Ro, 2021). For the purpose of this study, Gen Z was considered that the people who were born between 1995 and 2010. Actually, this generation represents more than one-third of Egypt's population (35%), which is equivalent to 36 million inhabitants (Population Pyramid, 2021). Globally, this generation has witnessed the most notable historical events, such as the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000), the 9/11 attacks, the invasion of Iraq (2003), the financial crisis (2007–2008), and the Arab Spring (2011)

(Baltescu, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020). Locally, this generation has experienced many dramatic events like terror attacks on tourism in Luxor known as the Luxor massacre (1997), the Sharm El Sheikh and Khan el-Khalili bombings (2005), the beginning of the emergence of the H5N1 virus in Egypt (2006), and the most important political event of the 21st century in Egypt, the Egyptian Revolution (2011) (Richter & Steiner, 2008; Hanna, 2014). Gen Z is the most open generation to the world through modern technological developments (Robinson, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020; Juliana, 2021).

Generally, this generation lacks financial resources due to the fact that they have not yet been employed; they still rely on their parents (Stylos et al., 2021; Jiang & Hong, 2021). Therefore, most of them stay at home in their virtual world through smart phones and tablets, isolated from their actual world (Yazici & Ayazlar, 2021; Olson, & Ro, 2021). They prefer to communicate with others via social media platforms compared to the prior generations (Baum, 2011). Gen Z can quickly get information through the internet and social media. This generation is more mobile and connected (Robinson, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020). This generation is smart and selective (Baum, 2011). They usually shop alone and want better goods and services (Baltescu, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020). Indeed, this generation is more autonomous in their digital information search and decision-making processes (Robinson, 2019; Juliana, 2021). Bradley (2016) also claimed that they are more affected by social media influencers compared to prior generations.

> **H6a:** *Generation Z moderates the relation between travel agencies and travel decision making process.*

H6b: *Generation Z moderates the relation between social media platforms and travel decision making process*
H6c: *Generation Z moderates the relation between social media influencers and travel decision making process*

Travel Information Sources

During the second stage of the travel decision-making process, travellers search for reliable sources of information (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; No & Kim, 2015). The availability of information influences the travel decision-making process, particularly when selecting a destination (Luo et al., 2005; de la Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2019). Unquestionably, technological advancements have influenced how travellers obtain travel-related information (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; No & Kim, 2015). The internet has become the major source of information during trip planning (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; No & Kim, 2015; de la Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2019). Recently, travellers have preferred to increasingly search on the internet and social media for tourism destinations to visit, rather than relying on traditional information sources such as travel agencies, tour operators, and word of mouth (Frías et al., 2012; No & Kim, 2015). It is not surprising that generational differences have another opinion (de la Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2019). There are generations that have still preferred to obtain travel information from their traditional sources (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). On the other hand, Digital generations prefer social media and influencers as reliable and influential sources in travel

decision-making (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; No & Kim, 2015).

Social Media Platforms
The term "social media platforms" has spread greatly among individuals and business organizations over the past few years and has begun to be widely used in various fields, the most important of which is the tourism field (Hvass & Munar, 2012; Hays et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). A set of definitions and terms have appeared that describe this concept. Some researchers have described social media networks as virtual communities, while others describe them as channels of communication (Ráthonyi, 2013; Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015). Social media networks are platforms that were created for the purpose of gathering users and friends, sharing activities and searching for friendships and interests such as following gastronomy, travel, lifestyle, celebrities, and fashion (Hvass & Munar, 2012; Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015; Xiang et al., 2017). In terms of the most popular social media platforms in the world in 2021, Facebook had 2.797 billion, YouTube 2.291 billion, Instagram 1.287 billion, and Twitter 396 million users (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). According to Pestel and Alic (2017), visual advertising of tourism destinations performs best, which is why Instagram and YouTube have become popular platforms for tourism promotion, since videos and photographs of a trip can clarify more details for tourism experience. Social media platforms enable travellers to share their thoughts, experiences, and sentiments in an innovative way (Ráthonyi, 2013; Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015; Jansson, 2018). Tourists may search,

receive, and read numerous pieces of information about tourism destinations via comments, which are submitted by other tourists on different social media networks (Hvass & Munar, 2012; Hays et al., 2013; Jansson, 2018). These evaluations on social media are termed "user-generated content" (UGC). Xiang and Gretzel (2009) have stated that UGC is an important resource that may assist, improve tourists' plans, and affect travel decision-making.

Social Media Influencers

The ease of browsing social media platforms in order to obtain news and information has led to the emergence of a new category of user generated content known as "Social Media Influencers" (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Gretzel, 2018). In spite of this new term's being difficult to define, many websites have determined a definition to explain it (Guerreiro et al., 2019; Jaya et al., 2020). An influencer is defined as "*a person who has several million followers, with a minimum of 10,000 followers, on social media platforms*" (Francalanci & Hussain, 2015). According to Pixlee, a social media influencer is "*a person on social media platforms who has developed a reputation in a certain field*". Most of users consider electronic word-of-mouth as a credible source of information, particularly for things that can be searched for, booked, and bought online like tourism products (Gretzel, 2018; Viñán-Ludeña et al., 2020). Social media influencers can convince others users by virtue of their credibility and reach (Francalanci & Hussain, 2015; Viñán-Ludeña et al., 2020). Social media Influencers are divided into several types; celebrities, public figures, opinion leaders, specialists, bloggers, activists (Gretzel, 2018; Pop et al., 2022). According to Casaló et al. (2018), Instagram is the most popular social

media platform among influencers. Instagram has a greater interaction rate than other social media networks, making it even more profitable (Casaló et al., 2018). There are many reasons and motives that make the followers of social media influencers continue to increase (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Gretzel, 2018; Pop et al., 2022). It may be because of the influencer's attractiveness, trustworthiness, or expertise in a certain field (Guerreiro et al., 2019; Jaya et al., 2020).

According to the number of followers on different social media platforms, Globally, Brian Kelly has ranked the first position as top travel influencers in 2021, then Kate McCulley as a solo female traveler and Kiersten Rich as a top travel influencer according to Forbes (Zhang & Huang, 2022). Locally, Ali Ghozlan has ranked first rank as an Egyptian travel influencer and has 4 million followers, followed by Passant Nur El-Din, who is working as a tour guide and travel influencer at the same time and has 3.7 million followers, Haggagovic also has 3.2 million followers, and finally, Asmaa Raouf has 1.4 million followers (the culture trip, 2021). Ultimately, social media influencers are utilized as an effective marketing tool for promoting and building a tourism destination's image (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Pop et al., 2022). Positive online reviews, remarks, or ratings from social media influencers can enhance prospective users' perceptions of tourism services (Guerreiro et al., 2019; Jaya et al., 2020; Viñán-Ludeña et al., 2020). Therefore, online feedback posted by other users concerning tourism services improves the destination image and influences customer purchase intention (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Pop et al., 2022).

Thus, to enhance the understanding of the influence of travel information sources (travel agencies, social media

platforms, and social media influencers) for different generations during the travel decision-making process, the current study suggests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Travel agencies have a positive influence on travel decision making process.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Social media platforms have a positive influence on travel decision making process.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Social media influencers have a positive influence on travel decision making process.*
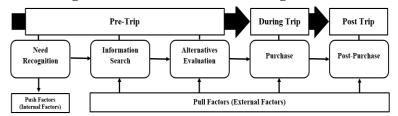
Travel decision making process

Since the beginning of the 1960s, the decision-making process has garnered a lot of interest from researchers and marketers in various global official discussions in order to determine a specific and explicit definition (Maser & Weiermair, 1998; Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Karl et al., 2020). Since then, many models and theories of decision-making have been established by consumer behavior researchers and have been adopted by tourism researchers, who have modified, tested, and implemented them in the tourism industry (Ricci & Wietsma, 2006; Dwityas & Briandana, 2017; Karl, 2018). Therefore, many travel decision-making process definitions have appeared that have been suggested by a variety of tourism researchers (Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1995; Maser & Weiermair, 1998; Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). Despite the many definitions and theories of the decision-making process, practically all prior research focused on the conventional tourist's behavior concept and grouped all tourists into one segment

with the same goals and motivations (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Karl et al., 2020).

The decision-making process relates to a customer decision-making method that refers to a mental orientation explaining how a customer makes a decision. Andrews (1992) and Kotler (2010) have divided the decision-making process into five phases: (1) problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) purchase, and (5) post-purchase, as shown in Figure (1). Whereas, Flekel (2013) has claimed that the travel decision-making process goes through four stages: information search, comparing between alternatives, choosing the destination, and evaluating the trip. Wang et al. (2002) have suggested another point of view that the travel decision-making process could be shown using just three phases only: (1) need recognition, (2) information search, and (3) evaluating alternatives. Blythe (2013) has stated that the decision-making process must be divided into seven phases: (1) need recognition, (2) search for information, (3) pre–purchase assessment of alternatives, (4) purchase, (5) consumption, and (6) post–consumption evaluation.

Figure. 1 Travel Decision Making Process

- **Need Recognition:** The customer recognizes an issue when he/she notices a need and a desire to decline his/her current conditions and has a desire to achieve

new and better experiences (Andrews, 1992; Kotler, 2010; Flekel, 2013). Solomon (2013) indicated that customers have two issues that need to be addressed: the first is when the customers recognize that their old products are not working well, thus they need to purchase another new product. The second is when the customers need to purchase something new to make a change in their current situation. This phase includes the goals and motives that drive tourists to travel outside their usual environment (Wang et al., 2002; Kotler, 2010).

- **Information Search:** When the customer recognizes an issue, he/she will collect some significant suggestions by visiting the service provider, browsing social media, or by phoning family and friends (Kotler, 2010; Flekel, 2013). This information plays an important role in reducing the degree of perceived risk and the formation of a destination image for the tourist (Wang et al., 2002). There are various types of information sources (Kotler, 2010; Blythe, 2013; Flekel, 2013). For instance, personal sources include word of mouth through family and relatives, and friends (Kotler, 2010). Commercial sources that involve advertisements, salespersons, and commercial websites. Finally, the complete product experience (Kotler, 2010; Flekel, 2013). All of these sources help the customer gather information related to products and services. Information searching is one of the most important

stages of travel planning (Blythe, 2013). Tourists find that the availability of adequate information about the destination makes the travel decision easier for them (Kotler, 2010; Flekel, 2013).

- **Alternatives Evaluation:** After customers are finished gathering information related to products and services (Wang et al., 2002; Kotler, 2010). They must reach the alternative evaluation stage by assessing available products and services according to a set of criteria that customers find very significant to themselves, such as the price, quality, safety, and expiration date of the product (Blythe, 2013; Flekel, 2013). With the increasing competition between tourist destinations and the multiplicity of tourism and travel-related services, the comparison process has become one of the necessities to choose the appropriate destination (Kotler, 2010).

- **Purchase:** this phase includes a customer's consumption of appropriate products or services after assessing them through a set of criteria that differ according to customer priority (Andrews, 1992; Kotler, 2010). In this phase, travellers are having tourism experiences, which include the consumption of tourism-related items such as lodging, transportation, attractions, and food (Kotler, 2010; Blythe, 2013; Flekel, 2013).

- **Post-Purchase:** After having consumed the product, the customers will assess their satisfaction with the product

(Kotler, 2010; Blythe, 2013). If they are satisfied with the product, it will lead them to repurchase the product and recommend it to others (Blythe, 2013; Flekel, 2013). If not, it will lead to stop repurchasing the product in the future and warning other customers from purchasing it (Woodside & Drew, 2008; Kotler, 2010). In this phase, travellers evaluate their tourism experiences and measure their satisfaction with them (Kotler, 2010; Blythe, 2013). The evaluation process shapes tourist behavior in the future, which is reflected in revisiting the destination and recommending it to other visitors or not (Blythe, 2013; Flekel, 2013).

Woodside and Drew (2008) have stated that there are internal and external factors that influence the travel decision-making process.

- **Push Factors (Internal):** The internal effects are known as "push factors" that push travelers to travel out of their usual environment in order to meet their needs and desires, which are determined by Crompton (1979) into seven major factors: escapism, enjoyment, entertainment, gaining position, and strengthening familial ties.

- **Pull Factors (External):** the external effects are known as "pull factors." The external factors are considered as pull factors, which motivate customers' desires for travel, especially factors that are related to information sources like travel agencies, social media, word of mouth, and social media influencers.
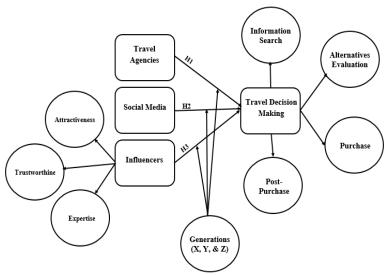
Figure .2 Conceptual Model

Methodology
Survey and sample
This study has used a quantitative approach through distributing a set of questionnaires in hardcopy and softcopy form via Google Drive between mid-December 2021 and mid-February 2022 as a procedure for getting primary data in order to achieve the goals of the current study:

- Recognizing the main characteristics of each generation.
- analyzing the motives and needs of each generation.

- displaying the most credible source of travel information.
- Which information sources have the most influence on the decision-making process?
- Conducting a comparative study between generations in the decision-making process

A survey was aimed at the three generations (X, Y, and Z). The study has been based on a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The sample size has reached 409 respondents, consisting of 189 from generation Z, 135 respondents from generation Y, and 85 respondents from generation X.

Data analysis
In the first section of the questionnaire, questions about age, gender, education, marital status, occupation, and monthly income have been asked. Additionally, some questions about technology use, like average time you spend on social media, which social network you use the most, which thematic do you frequently follow on social media, and how do you access social media platforms? This part of the questionnaire relied on descriptive analysis by using the SPSS 22 package program to obtain frequencies and percentages for demographic data, as shown in Table 1. While the remaining sections of this questionnaire were measured by a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Therefore, these sections were based on partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) version 3.3 to analyze the current data, examine study hypotheses, and assess the casual relationship between travel agencies, social media platforms, and

influencers as travel information sources towards each stage of the travel decision making process according to each generation (X, Y, and Z). As clarified in previous Figure (2), the current proposed model consists of four main constructs that reflect travel information sources (travel agencies, social media platforms, and influencers) as independent variables and one construct as a dependent variable (the travel decision-making process). Additionally, two of these constructs have sub-constructs. The Influencers construct consists of three variables (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise), while the Travel Decision Making Process construct includes four variables (Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Purchase Decision, and Post-purchase evaluation).

Table 1. Demographic Information of Sample

Items	N	%	Items	N	%
Q1) Age			**Q6) Monthly income**		
18- 21	189	46%	Less than 1000 L.E	155	38%
22- 40	135	33%	1000–1999 L.E	8	2%
			2000–2999 L.E	9	2%
41+	85	21%	3000–3999 L.E	32	8%
			More than 4000 L.E	205	50%
Q2) Gender			**Q7) Average time you spend on social media**		
Male	154	38%	Less than 1 hour	28	7%
			Between 1 and 3 hours	78	19%
Female	255	62%	Between 3 and 5 hours	99	24%
			More than 5 hours	204	50%

Q3) Education			Q8) Which social network you use the most		
No Schooling Completed	44	11%	Facebook	159	39%
Trade/ Technical/ Vocational Training	39	9%	Instagram	155	38%
Bachelor's Degree	293	72%	Twitter	85	21%
Postgraduate	33	8%	Other	10	2%
Q4) Marital status			**Q9) Which field do you frequently follow on social media**		
Single	198	48%	Travel & Destinations;	105	26%
Married	112	27%	Fashion & Beauty	80	20%
Married with children	90	22%	Sports & Healthy Lifestyle	61	15%
Other	9	2%	Culture & Art; Celebrities	72	17%
			Culinary; News; Other	91	22%
Q5) Occupation			**Q10) How do you browse social media platforms?**		
Does not working	185	45%	Access via Mobile	375	92%
Part-time	17	4%	Access via home PC	23	6%
Full-time	207	51%	Access via office PC.	11	2%
Total	**409**	**100%**	**Total**	**409**	**100%**

The majority of the sample are from generation Z, which consists of 189 respondents who are aged 18–21 years old,
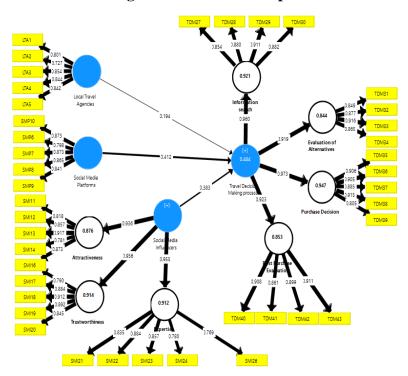
followed by generation Y, which includes 135 respondents who are aged 22–40 years old. Then, generation X involved 89 respondents who were over 41 years old. Regarding the gender of the sample, more than two-thirds of respondents (62%) were female, in which 38% were male. According to education level, 72% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, 11% have not finished their course of study, 9% have graduated from a trade/technical/vocal training institute, and 8% have only completed postgraduate. Moreover, more than half of the respondents (51%) were employed full time, while 45% hadn't worked yet, followed by part-timers, who represented 4% of all respondents. In terms of monthly income, half of the respondents have earned more than 4000 L.E in a month, whereas one-third have a monthly income below 1000, and 2% of respondents have received between 1000–1999 L.E and 2000–2999 L.E. Around 50% of the participants spend more than 5 hours a day browsing on different social media platforms, followed by 24% who spend between 3 and 5 hours, while 19% of them spend between 1 and 3 hours, and 7% spend less than 1 hour a day. Furthermore, more than one-third of respondents prefer to use Facebook and Instagram, about 39% and 38%, respectively, more than other platforms, followed by 21% of them prefer to use Twitter, and only 2% of respondents prefer to browse other platforms. According to the most frequently followed fields by respondents, respondents have stated that travel, culinary, and fashion were the most frequently followed fields on social media platforms, with about 26%, 22%, and 20%, respectively, while culture and art was 17%, and sports & healthy lifestyle was 15%. Finally, the majority of the study

sample prefers to browse social media platforms via mobile (92%), 6% of them via home PC, and 2% via office PC.
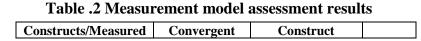
Measurement Model Validation

To check the validity of the proposed model's constructs, all constructs relied on a set of measurements that were adapted from previous literature. As mentioned above, the current questionnaire consisted of four main constructs and seven sub constructs; travel agencies construct was assessed by five items, that have been modified from Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001), Frias et al. (2008), and Katircioglu et al. (2011). The social media construct was estimated by five items that were cited by Xiang and Gretzel (2010), Fotis et al. (2012), Munar and Jacobsen (2013), Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017), and Bethany and Raj (2020). The social media influencers construct was evaluated using sixteen-items that were divided into three sub-constructs (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise) modified by Gandhi and Muruganantham (2015), Cooley and Parks-Yancy (2019), Zak and Hasprova (2020), and Pop et al. (2022). Also, the travel decision making process construct was assessed using seventeen items that were divided into four sub-constructs (Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Purchase Decision, and Post-purchase evaluation) that were taken from Andrews (1992), Kotle (2010), Flekel (2013), Solomon (2013), and Blythe (2013).

First, to evaluate the convergent validity, it was necessary to verify some of the requirements for the structural proposed model, as shown in Figure 3 and Table 2. According to Barclay et al. (1995), the factor loading values for each item should be greater than 0.70. This means that any items with a value of less than 0.70 have been deleted,

like "SMI25" as clarified in Figure 3. The Cronbach's alpha (α) values should be higher than 0.70 according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), the composite reliability (CR) for all latent variables should be greater than 0.60 according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), and the average variance extracted (AVE) should be higher than 0.50 according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) or greater than 0.70 according to Hair et al. (2014).

Figure 3. PLS-SEM Output

Table .2 Measurement model assessment results

Constructs/Measured	Convergent	Construct	

Items		validity		reliability			Source
		Factors loading	**Results**	**AVE**[a]	**α**[a]	**CR**[a]	
Travel Agencies				0.664	0.874	0.908	
LTA1	Before travelling, I prefer to take travel agency suggestions for choosing tourism destinations.	**0.801**	Accept				(Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Frias et al., 2008; Katircioglu et al., 2011).
LTA2	When I arrange a trip, I prefer to ask travel agencies.	**0.727**	Accept				
LTA3	I became excited about visiting a certain destination after the suggestions of travel agencies.	**0.854**	Accept				
LTA4	I usually choose my trips from brochures and leaflets provided by travel agencies.	**0.844**	Accept				
LTA5	I rely on suggestions from friends and relatives about dependable	**0.842**	Accept				

	travel agencies.						
Social Media Platforms				0.723	0.906	0.929	(Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Fotis et al., 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017; Berhanu & Raj, 2020)
SMP6	Before traveling, I prefer to browse social media, searching for the optimal destination.	0.798	Accept				
SMP7	I prefer to search on social media platforms when I'm planning a trip.	0.873	Accept				
SMP8	Social media provides information about new tourism destinations.	0.865	Accept				
SMP9	Information found on social media regarding tourism seems reliable to me.	0.841	Accept				
SMP10	I use social media platforms after my trip to share my travel experiences.	0.873	Accept				
Social Media Influencers				0.630	0.960	0.964	s- Ya nc
Attractiveness				0.724	0.904	0.929	

SMI11	Influencers are the best storytellers through using text, film, music, photography, or a mix of them.	**0.818**	Accept				
SMI12	Influencers have the ability and skill to interact successfully across several platforms.	**0.857**	Accept				
SMI13	Influencers have the ability to reach large groups of targeted segments.	**0.917**	Accept				
SMI14	Influencers have a social presence that extends beyond their online presence.	**0.781**	Accept				
SMI15	I am drawn to influencers as a travel information source more than any other traditional source.	**0.873**	Accept				
Trustworthiness				**0.749**	**0.916**	**0.937**	ncy

SMI16	Influencers are maintaining transparency and authenticity in their field.	**0.790**	Accept				
SMI17	Influencers are devoted to their work and their beliefs.	**0.884**	Accept				
SMI18	Influencers have an uncanny power of persuasion.	**0.912**	Accept				
SMI19	Influencers have the ability to determine when, how, and where to utilize their voice for maximum impact.	**0.892**	Accept				
SMI20	I trust influencers more than any other traditional sources of travel information.	**0.845**	Accept				
Expertise				0.682	0.883	0.915	Yancy, 2019.
SMI21	Influencers have good	**0.835**	Accept				

	knowledge of their field.						
SMI22	Influencers have the power to affect the behavior and mindsets of followers.	**0.884**	Accept				
SMI23	Influencers have innovative methods to show their actual tourism experiences.	**0.857**	Accept				
SMI24	Influencers have more information about tourism destinations than any other traditional sources.	**0.780**	Accept				
SMI25	I prefer following influencers' experiences more than family and friends' experiences.	**0.606**	Delete				
SMI26	I am likely to follow digital influencers who provide	**0.769**	Accept				

	accurate and updated information and high-quality content.					
Travel Decision Making process			**0.699**	**0.973**	**0.975**	(Andrews,1992; Kotler, 2010; Flekel, 2013; Solomon, 2013; Blythe, 2013).
Information search			**0.778**	**0.904**	**0.933**	
TDM27	I prefer to look for new information about travel destinations.	0.854	Accept			
TDM28	When I must make travel decisions, I search for many sources.	0.880	Accept			
TDM29	I have been watching many videos that belong to my favorite destinations.	0.911	Accept			
TDM30	I tend to consider tourism experiences that belong to other tourists when I make a travel decision.	0.882	Accept			
Evaluation of Alternatives			**0.770**	**0.900**	**0.930**	Flekel, 2013; Solomon,
TDM31	I prefer to have many alternatives before	0.849	Accept			

	choosing a destination.						
TDM32	I prefer to evaluate a lot of information to learn more about my favorite destination.	**0.877**	Accept				
TDM33	I prefer to compare different offers to filter between them when choosing a destination.	**0.916**	Accept				
TDM34	I prefer to get suggestions from reliable sources to ensure that I have made the right choice.	**0.865**	Accept				
	Purchase Decision			0.782	0.930	0.947	(Andrews,1992; Kotler, 2010; Flekel, 2013; Solomon, 2013; Blythe, 2013).
TDM35	I tend to read the best tourism experiences when making my travel decisions.	**0.906**	Accept				
TDM36	I am likely to visit the places that have been reviewed by others.	**0.905**	Accept				
TDM37	I prefer to	**0.885**	Accept				

	adjust my trip plans based on other people's opinions or ideas.					
TDM38	I tend to capture the same photo repeatedly. I've seen people do it.	**0.915**	Accept			
TDM39	My final travel decision is based on only the most trustworthy sources.	**0.805**	Accept			
	Post-Purchase Evaluation			0.801	0.917	0.941	
TDM40	I post my travel experiences on social networking to share my impressions with others.	**0.908**	Accept			
TDM41	I compare my experience with that of other travelers.	**0.861**	Accept			
TDM42	After my incredible journey, I will take all suggestions	**0.899**	Accept			

(Andrews,1992; Kotler, 2010; Flekel, 2013; Solomon, 2013; Blythe, 2013).

	and opinions only from reliable sources.									
TDM43	I will recommend the same method to my friends and family when they are planning a vacation.	**0.911**	Accept							

Notes: (a) Average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's (α), and composite reliability (CR).

Second, to assess the discriminant validity, it was necessary to check two main criteria for the structural proposed model, as demonstrated in Table 3. According to Henseler et al. (2009), Hair et al. (2011), and Henseler et al. (2015), the square root of the average variance extracted for all constructs of the current proposed model should be greater than the inter-variables correlation.

Table .3 Discriminant Validity Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Attractiveness (1)	**0.851**										
Alternatives Evaluation (2)	0.287	**0.877**									
Expertise (3)	0.847	0.271	**0.826**								
Influencers (4)	0.30	0.8	0.31	**0.88**							

		2	38	7	**2**							
Information search (5)		-0.130	0.495	-0.054	0.461	**0.815**						
Travel Agencies (6)		0.380	0.742	0.375	0.887	0.412	**0.895**					
Post-Purchase (7)		0.342	0.896	0.341	0.905	0.486	0.861	**0.884**				
Purchase decision (8)		0.936	0.316	0.955	0.359	-0.047	0.422	0.385	**0.793**			
Social Media Platforms (9)		0.007	0.550	0.030	0.511	0.766	0.571	0.552	0.047	**0.851**		
Travel Decision (10)		0.348	0.919	0.347	0.960	0.491	0.923	0.973	0.394	0.578	**0.836**	
Trustworthiness (11)		0.838	0.291	0.879	0.348	-0.004	0.409	0.361	0.956	0.0665	0.374	**0.866**

Note: Bold values are the square root of AVE, and off-diagonal reflects the correlation between variables.

Another strong criterion to assess the discriminant validity of the structural proposed model is the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). According to Henseler et al. (2015), the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio should be less than 0.90. As shown in The following table (4).

Table .4 Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Attractiveness (1)											

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Alternatives Evaluation (2)	0.323									
Expertise (3)	0.847	0.305								
Information search (4)	0.335	0.827	0.355							
Travel Agencies (5)	0.197	0.549	0.100	0.507						
Post Purchase (6)	0.422	0.815	0.418	0.872	0.450					
Purchase Decision (7)	0.376	0.878	0.377	0.887	0.530	0.834				
Influencers (8)	1.002	0.347	1.038	0.390	0.139	0.454	0.414			
Social Media (9)	0.159	0.590	0.143	0.545	0.869	0.605	0.582	0.152		
Travel Decision (10)	0.374	0.882	0.374	1.022	0.523	0.877	1.024	0.413	0.595	
Trustworthiness (11)	0.721	0.320	0.778	0.381	0.065	0.447	0.391	1.018	0.121	0.395

Results

Testing of hypotheses

It is necessary to point out that the validity of the structural proposed model is also evaluated by testing the power of the path coefficients between latent constructs and the percentage of variance as mentioned previously (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler et al., 2015). This is due to the fact that partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) does not result in an overall goodness-of-fit index compared to structural equation modelling (SEM) by Amos (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2011). To test statistical significance of the proposed model, we bootstrapped 5000 sub-samples. The empirical findings, as shown in Table 5 and Figure 4, demonstrate that none of our hypotheses had to be rejected (H1, H2, and H3). The outcomes have shown that travel agencies (H1: ß = 0.194, t = 4.169, p <0.01), social media platforms (H2: ß = 0.412, t = 8.941, p <0.01), and influencers (H3: ß = 0.383, t = 9.169, p <0.01) as travel information sources have positively influenced the travel decision making process for all generations (X, Y, and Z).

Table 5. Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Standardized coefficients (beta)	T-Value (bootstrapping)	**Decision**
H1: Travel Agencies → Travel Decision Making	0.194	4.169***	Supported
H2: Social Media Platforms → Travel Decision Making	0.412	8.941***	Supported
H3: Influencers → Travel Decision Making	0.383	9.169***	Supported
R^2 (Travel Decision Making process) =			

0.484 Q^2 (Travel Decision Making process) = 0.335			

Level of significance: *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10.

As we expected, the empirical results show that social media platforms as a source of travel information are more important in supporting travellers in their travel decision-making process than travel agencies and influencers. Consequently, we find it interesting to test the influence of generational differences on the travel decision-making process. So, we will examine the effects of age (X, Y, and Z) as a moderate variable on the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables.

Figure 4. Structural Model's Path Coefficient of All Generations

Moderating effects
To test the moderating effects of age, we carried out multi-group analyses to examine the difference between generations, using a t-test. Generation X (n = 85, 20.7%)

includes people over the age of 42 who were born between 1961 and 1980; Generation Y (n = 135, 33%) includes people between the ages of 28 and 42 who were born between 1981 and 1994; and Generation Z (n = 189, 46.2%) includes people between the ages of 18 and 27 who were born between 1995 and 2010.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 show the effect of each generation as a moderate variable on the relationship between exogenous variables that are represented by information sources (travel agencies, social media, influencers) and endogenous variables, which are represented in the travel decision-making process.

Table 6. Moderate Effects (Generation X)

Hypothesis	Standardized coefficients (beta)	T-Value (bootstrapping)
H4a: Travel Agencies → Travel Decision Making process	0.274	2.233**
H4b: Social Media Platforms → Travel Decision Making process	0.681	5.490***
H4c: Influencers → Travel Decision Making process	0.093	1.818[NS]

Level of significance: *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10.

As mentioned above, the outcomes have shown that generation X trusts travel agencies as a reliable information source (H4a: ß = 0.274, t = 2.233, p < 0.05). This was confirmed by the theoretical side previously. Therefore, H4a was accepted. Unexpectedly, we find that generation X has more confidence in social media platforms than in travel agencies (H4b: ß = 0.681, t = 5.490, p < 0.01). Hence, H4b was supported. Not surprisingly, generation X does not trust influencers (H4c: ß = 0.093, t = 1.818, p >.05). So, H4c was rejected.

Table 7. Moderate Effects (Generation Y)

Hypothesis	Standardized coefficients (beta)	T-Value (bootstrapping)
H5a: Travel Agencies → Travel Decision Making process	0.100	1.671[NS]
H5b: Social Media Platforms → Travel Decision Making process	0.613	10.385***
H5c: Influencers → Travel Decision Making process	0.312	4.019***

Level of significance: *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10.

On the other hand, the results of generation Y were as expected from the theoretical side previously. Generation Y does not trust travel agencies as a source of travel information (H5a: ß = 0.100, t = 1.671, p >.05). Therefore, H5a was not accepted. While, as expected, generation Y trusts in social media platforms more than in influencers (H5b: ß = 0.613, t = 10.385, p < 0.01). Thus, H5b was supported. Also, H5c was accepted, in which generation Y has trust in influencers too (H5c: ß = 0.312, t = 4.019, p < 0.01).

Table 8. Moderate Effects (Generation Z)

Hypothesis	Standardized coefficients (beta)	T-Value (bootstrapping)
H6a: Travel Agencies → Travel Decision Making process	-0.222	1.528[NS]
H6b: Social Media Platforms → Travel Decision Making process	0.267	1.477[NS]
H6c: Influencers → Travel Decision Making process	0.487	6.432***

Level of significance: *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10.

According to the mention above about characteristics of generation Z, the findings have come as expected,

Generation Z prefers social media influencers as an information source more than others for several reasons. Influencers have an uncanny power of persuasion, a social presence that extends beyond their online presence, and the ability to determine when, how, and where to utilize their voice for maximum impact. This enabled them to reach Generation Z easily. H6c was supported due to that the results were H6c: ß = 0.487, t = 6.432, p < 0.01. whereas, H6a and H6b were rejected because the outcomes were (H6a: ß = -0.222, t = 1.528, p >.05) and (H6a: ß = 0.267, t = 1.477, p >.05) respectively.

Table 9 shows the results of multi-group analysis of generational differences (X, Y, and Z). The difference between the two generations (X and Y) was not significant in the case of travel agencies (H7a: ß = 0.174, t = 0.562, p >.05). Therefore, H7a was rejected. In the case of social media platforms (H7b: ß =0.068, t = 4.895, p < 0.05) and influencers (H7c: ß =0.219, t = 2.201, p< 0.05), the difference had a positive influence. Therefore, H7b and H7c were accepted.

Table 9. Results of Multi-Group Analysis of Generational Differences

Hypothesis	Beta t-value	Beta t-value	Difference Beta t-value
Multi-Group Analysis (Two Generations)	**Generation X**	**Generation Y**	
H7a: LTA → TDM	0.274(2.233**)	0.100 (1.671)	0.174 (0.562)
H7b:SMP → TDM	0.681(5.490***)	0.613 (10.385***)	0.068 (4.895**)
H7c:SMI →	0.093(1.818)	0.312	0.219

TDM		(4.019***)	(2.201**)
Multi-Group Analysis (Two Generations)	**Generation X**	**Generation Z**	
H8a: LTA → TDM	0.274(2.771**)	-0.222 (1.528)	0.052 (1.528)
H8b:SMP → TDM	0.681(4.490***)	0.267 (1.477)	0.414 (3.013*)
H8c:SMI → TDM	0.093(1.618)	0.487 (6.432***)	0.394 (4.814**)
Multi-Group Analysis (Two Generations)	**Generation X**	**Generation Z**	
H9a: LTA → TDM	0.100(1.668)	-0.222 (1.497)	0.122 (0.171)
H9b:SMP → TDM	0.613(10.351***)	0.267 (1.470)	0.346 (8.881**)
H9c:SMI → TDM	0.312(3.954***)	0.487 (6.254***)	0.175 (2.30*)

Level of significance: *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.10.

According to the same findings, the difference between the two generations (X and Z) has no positive influence on the relationship between travel agencies and travel decision making (H8a: ß = 0.052, t = 1.528, p >.05). Thus, H8a was rejected. On the contrary, in the case of social media and influencers, the difference between the two generations (X and Z) is significant (H8b: ß = 0.414, t = 3.013, p < 0.10) and (H8c: ß = 0.394, t = 4.814, p < 0.10). Hence, H8b and H8c were supported.

According to prior literature, Gen Y and Z are more affected by social media and influencers (Yazici & Ayazlar, 2021; Olson, & Ro, 2021). They are the most open generation to the world through modern technological developments (Robinson, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020; Juliana, 2021). Therefore, the results came as expected. The

difference between the two generations (Y and Z) is not significant in travel agencies (H9a: ß = 0.122, t = 0.171, p >.05). Hence, we rejected H9a. The difference between the two generations (Y and Z) is significant on social media platforms (H9b: ß = 0.346, t = 8.881, p < 0.05) and influencers (H9c: ß = 0.175, t = 2.30, p < 0.10). So, H9b and H9c were supported.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study actively seeks to shed light on the differences between generations (X, Y, and Z), recognizing the main characteristics of each generation and analyzing their motives and needs. Moreover, the study displays several travel information sources like travel agencies, social media platforms, and influencers and the phases of the travel decision-making process. Finally, we carried out a comparative study between generations to determine which information source has the most influence on the travel decision-making process for each generation. Due to most literature on tourism demand trends confirmed that generational analysis must be used to track trends and changes in travel behavior (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Benckendorff et al., 2010). Gardiner et al. (2014) have asserted that travel habits will change across generations over time. Therefore, this study has focused on the effects of the generational differences (X, Y, and z) as moderator variables on the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables.

The results of the current study have clarified that generation X still trusts travel agencies as a reliable information source (H4a: ß = 0.274, t = 2.233, p < 0.05). Also, we find that generation X has confidence in social media platforms (H4b: ß = 0.681, t = 5.490, p < 0.01). According to their characteristics mentioned previously, generation X does not trust influencers (H4c: ß = 0.093, t = 1.818, p >.05). On the other hand, Generation Y does not trust travel agencies as a source of travel information (H5a: ß = 0.100, t = 1.671, p >.05). While, Generation Y trusts in social media platforms (H5b: ß = 0.613, t = 10.385, p <

0.01). Also, generation Y has become more trusting in influencers as a reliable source of travel information (H5c: ß = 0.312, t = 4.019, p < 0.01). According to the characteristics of generation Z revealed previously, this generation prefers social media influencers as an information source more than others. Therefore, H6c was supported due to that the results were H6c: ß = 0.487, t = 6.432, p < 0.01. whereas, H6a and H6b were rejected because the outcomes were (H6a: ß = -0.222, t = 1.528, p >.05) and (H6a: ß = 0.267, t = 1.477, p >.05) respectively.

Implications for theory and practice

This study paves the way for new opportunities for researchers, businesses, and marketers in order to give interest to generational differences as an important issue (Vargas-Sánchez & Perano, 2017; Yang et al., 2020). To achieve unparalleled success and remain in the tourism market (Li et al., 2013; Lyons et al., 2015). First, the tourist providers must understand the needs and wants of each tourism market segment according to their age category (Juchnowicz, 2009; Borges et al., 2010). Secondly, by finding different and innovative ways to reach each segment separately at the lowest time and cost (Ishida et al., 2017; Törn-Laapio, & Ekonen, 2021). Finally, making an effort to meet tourists' needs and desires (Borges et al., 2010).

The empirical results of the current study have clarified that generation X still trusts travel agencies as a reliable information source. This was confirmed by the theoretical side previously. But unexpectedly, we find that generation X has more confidence in social media platforms than in travel agencies. This is contrary to what was discussed on

the theoretical side. Not surprisingly, we found that generation X, according to their characteristics mentioned above, does not trust influencers.

As we expected according to the theoretical side, Generation Y does not trust travel agencies as a source of travel information. While, Generation Y trusts in social media platforms. It is necessary to point out that this generation has grown up with technology (Richardson & Thomas, 2012; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). Gen Y is regarded as the first generation to be born into the digital world because they were born during the period of video games, compact CDs, and mobile phones (Vermeersch et al., 2016; Gardiner & Kwek, 2017). They use a lot of different social media apps on their phones for both personal and business reasons more often than Gen X (Benckendorff et al., 2010; Richardson & Thomas, 2012; Ketter, 2020). Recently, generation Y has become trusting in influencers too as a reliable source of travel information.

According to the characteristics of generation Z mentioned above, this generation often prefers to communicate with others via social media platforms compared to the prior generations (Baum, 2011). Gen Z can quickly get information through the internet and social media. This generation is more mobile and connected (Robinson, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020). This generation is smart and selective (Baum, 2011). They usually shop alone and want better goods and services (Baltescu, 2019; Vieira et al., 2020). Indeed, this generation is more autonomous in their digital information search and decision-making processes (Robinson, 2019; Juliana, 2021). Bradley (2016) also claimed that they are more affected by social media influencers compared to prior generations. Therefore, the

findings have come as expected, Generation Z prefers social media influencers as an information source more than others for several reasons. Influencers have an uncanny power of persuasion, a social presence that extends beyond their online presence, and the ability to determine when, how, and where to utilize their voice for maximum impact. This enabled them to reach Generation Z easily. According to the study mentioned previously, there are a set of recommendations that must be taken into consideration:

- Egyptian travel agencies and tour operators must adjust their marketing strategy to face the expected fierce competition after the emergence of the Metaverse phenomenon to ensure their survival in the tourism market.

- Travel agencies need to improve their performance by creating innovative apps that add real and new value to users that enable them to compare, search for a wide range of information and easily book travel experiences.

- The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Egyptian Tourism Authority should adopt the co-creation of the tourism experience as a new trend to attract different segments of the tourism market.

- Tourist service providers need to choose carefully which vloggers, streamers, and celebrities to use to promote their brands on social media.

Limitations and future lines of research

The first limitation of this research is that only a small number of other studies have looked at the impact that influencers have on the travel decision-making process. Consequently, as a result of this weakness, there was a shortage of measuring items relating to exogenous constructs. The second limitation is that the study has ignored word of mouth as an information source, which has an important influence on the travel decision making process because it has been studied a lot in the prior literature. Finally, in future lines of research, we hope to study the effect of the Metaverse phenomenon as a new technology trend on the travel decision-making process and the possibility to conduct a comparison between international and local tourists in the process of making a travel decision.

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