

THE GENERATIONS' PREFERENCES FOR ONLINE TRAVEL BOOKING SYSTEMS AND TOOLS

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Abstract

Considering the changes brought by the development of mobile technologies and devices, both in the behavior and the preferences of individuals, as well as aspects related to the demographic evolution and the generational classification of the world population, a study was conducted to identify the generational preferences of tourists for the systems and tools used in the online travel booking; it was also considered that tourism is recognized as an adopting industry of all new mobile technologies and ITC solutions, but also being permanently adapted to the behavioral changes of tourists; this article contains, in the first part, a statistical picture on aspects related to the behavioral preferences of tourists according to their generation, and in the second part, the results of the study carried out; We believe the results obtained can provide important insights to the tourism industry, but also those in related industries and obviously for tourists.

Key words: *online booking systems; generations; travel booking*

JEL Classification: *L86; L83*

I. INTRODUCTION

The past few years have been marked by notable changes brought by the development of new technologies, both in the general behavioral pattern of people, in their ITC profile, and also in their preferences, reflected in everyday life, but also in their recreational activities, as those offered by tourism and travels.

It is very easy to see that these changes, have been done in ways, at levels and with totally different speeds, depending on the age of users; these trends have also been observed in the behavioral changes of users of new technologies and mobile devices, in their role as tourists.

Tourism can be considered as one of the most adaptable industries to the changes brought by new technologies and by solutions provided by the ITC industry; In this tertiary industry, on the one hand, there was demonstrated an important capacity to adapt the offers to profiles specific to the age groups and, on the other hand, the orientation of the demand towards certain categories of tourism services and products, specific to their age.

In recent years, it has become increasingly important to use another demographic classification as a criterion for segmentation of demand, namely the generational one, which restructures the age of people, according to common features, preferences and experiences.

In order to get a more complete picture of the field and subject studied, it is useful to identify a number of data and information characteristic for the global tourism industry; according to World Travel&Tourism Council (WTTC) - Travel&Tourism Economic Impact 2018 World, the contribution to the global economy development may be indicated by some specific aspects: travel&tourism GDP accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 1/10 jobs were supported by travel&tourism, which means 9.9% of global employment (WTTC, 2018).

It was also necessary and useful to consider statistical data related to the demographic profile, identified globally; at the level of February 2019, the population of the globe exceeded 7.71 billion people, this number having a daily increase (Worldpopulation, 2019); it is also useful to identify a top five of the countries with:

- the largest population: China, India, United States, Indonesia, Brazil;
- the highest population growth rates: Bahrain (4.52%), Niger, Oman, Equatorial Guinea, Angola;
- the lowest population growth rate: Latvia (-0.98%), Bulgaria (-0.68%), Croatia (-0.59%), Wallis and Futuna (-0.56%), Romania (-0.50%);

At continental/regional level, the lowest rates are identified for Eastern Europe (-0.19%) and Southern Europe (-0.09%), while the highest rates in the top five are: Middle Africa (3.06%), Eastern Africa (2.72%), Western Africa (2.67%), Sub Saharan Africa (2.66%), Africa (2.49%) (Worldpopulation, 2019); all these statistical data, deeply marks the demographic evolution of the world and provides extremely important information to all global business players.

From the perspective of the age categories, in 2018, the best represented, in the world, was 25-54 years (41.12%), and the gender distribution shows that the world population is slightly dominated by the male segment, while in the categories over the age of 55, dominates very little the female segment (Table 1) (Indexmundi, 2019).

Table 1. World population structure

Age structure:	Sex ratio:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25-54 years: 41.12% • 0-14 years: 25.44% • 15-24 years: 16.16% • 65 years and over: 8.68% • 55-64 years: 8.6% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • total population: 1.02 male(s)/female • at birth: 1.03 male(s)/female • 0-14 years: 1.07 male(s)/female • 15-24 years: 1.07 male(s)/female • 25-54 years: 1.02 male(s)/female • 55-64 years: 0.95 male(s)/female • 65 years and over: 0.81 male(s)/female

Source: (Indexmundi, 2019)

Also, worldwide, urban population represents 54.9% of the total population, and the rate of urbanization estimated for 2020 will increase by 1.84% (Indexmundi, 2019). Demographic projections show that the world population will reach 9.9 billion by 2050 (Prb, 2018), with an evolution in age categories indicating that by 2050, the richest represented age category will be 25-64 years (Table 2).

Table 2. World population by age 1960-2050

Age category (years)	1960	2018	2050
0-14	37%	26%	21%
15-24	17%	15%	14%
25-64	41%	50%	49%
65+	5%	9%	16%

Source: (Prb, 2018)

The Pew Research Center, has defined a generational structure of the world population according to the year of birth, resulting in 5 generations:

- Gen **Z**, iGen, or Centennials, people born from 1997 to present, under the age of 22;
- Gen **Y**, Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, aged between 23 and 38 years;
- Gen **X**, born between 1965 and 1980, aged 39-54 years;
- **Baby Boomers** Gen, those born between 1946 and 1964, aged 55-73 years;
- **Silent Gen**, Traditionalists, those born before 1945 (Pewcenter, 2019).

Considering the two demographic structures by age, above, we can conclude that the best represented age group globally, 25-64 years, covers almost 3 generations, namely Gen Y, X and Baby Boomers.

From the perspective of generational features, "Gen Y is more interrogating and aware of her rights, they know to express their ideas and dissatisfactions openly, using social media as a means of expression and manifestation" (Mengu et al., 2015, p. 794).

TrekkSoft, one of the most well-known companies providing software solutions dedicated to the tourism industry, provided a set of "travel statistics to know about in 2018 and 2019,, (Trekksoft, 2019):

- "in terms of booking trends, 57% of tourists consider that tourism companies have to adopt adaptive behavior, depending on personal preferences or on the past behaviors of tourists;
- mobile bookings have increased;
- more than 80% of consumers prefer to identify their information using these devices, alone;
- in Europe, travel searches on mobile devices was 47%, followed by 40% in Asia, 38% in the Middle East and Africa and 34% in Latin America;
- Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), still have a visible advantage in booking preferences".

TripBarometer Travel Trends 2, provided by Tripadvisor, indicates the following image:

- "two-thirds of travelers use online channels to make accommodation bookings;
- one in five Baby Boomers use offline channels to make room reservations;
- channel used to book accommodation global is 65% online, 17% offline, 6% mobile;
- flight and accommodation prices are key drivers in traveler decisions;
- accommodation amenities, also, play a key role for Millennials and Generation X;
- Millennials want to be close to dining options;
- key attractions and transport options and are also more likely to pay attention to online media and site reviews than Generation X and Baby Boomers;
- half of Baby Boomers seek cultural vacations when traveling;
- for older groups, recommendations and a hotel special offer are almost equally important.
- cheap flights attract Millennials, whilst offers on accommodation are more likely to attract older generations;
- Millennials want new experiences" (TripBarometer, 2018).

AARP Researches in the "Travel: 2018 Travel trends" report, identified a set of generational differences in tourists' preferences, related to:

- "travel agendas - Millennials and Gen X prefer domestic and international travel more than Boomers;
- motivation for travel - Millennials prefer more adventure travel than Boomers, trying out something new;
- spend - Gen X anticipates travel expenses less than Boomers while Millennials plan their future spending;
- loyalty programs – Boomers are most present in loyalty programs" (AARP, 2018).

According to the study on the impact of heritage tourism on the Maasai community and the relationship between generations, it has been demonstrated that "the younger generation is likely to focus on short-term economic gain, while the older generation are affected by the loss of cultural values and the long-term impact on the social structure of society " (Kalavar et al., 2014, p. 56).

It has also been shown that the tourism sector, has become one of the largest beneficiaries of the aging process, as a result of changes in the lifestyle of the population, more geared to spending leisure time than previous generations; but the tourism companies have not sufficiently adapted their offerings to this behavioral change of older generations (Alen et al., 2016, p.304).

The studies have also shown, that older consumers have very different behavior both in the use of information technology in tourism and in the preparation phase of the journey; therefore, the management of tourism companies must consider these issues related to senior tourists (Pesonen et al., 2015, p.248).

Published studies on the characteristics of generations of tourists, Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y, have identified several issues; for Generation Y, "the affective commitment to developing and maintaining long-term relationships in tourism, is very important"; the segment of seniors being a growing category is becoming a very profitable category of tourists who are geared towards prior travel purchases and online booking (Ruiz-Gómez et al., 2018, p.64).

From another perspective, it has been shown that wellness tourism in Austria, Central Europe, which increasingly exploits the tradition of thermal and spa services and who have been the preference of the older generation, has in recent years focused on attracting young people, in this area services (Csirmaza and Peto, 2015, p. 759).

The landscape of the recent tourist market has been enriched with companies that have focused their "25-65+" age range by developing specific strategies; thus, the "multigenerational family," 3G "packages (children, parents, grandparents) were introduced" (Nikitina and Vorontsova, 2015, p. 848).

The increase in the number of elderly people who want to experience active travel, have imposed in the tourism industry in many countries, adopting solutions to ensure a tourism infrastructure and tourism products well suited to this age segment (Hung and Lu, 2016, p. 134).

Another trend to adapt the tourism industry is related to the greater preference of women to travel compared to men; and, also considering that women have a higher life expectancy than men, they can become an important segment to consider in the development strategies of tourism companies (Losada et al., 2016, p.93).

Also, it was indicated that "tourism managers should distinguish between different groups of grandparents in their promotional strategies for senior market tourism" (Shavanddasht, 2018, p.154).

An aspect related to the preferences and behavior of the Gen Y, as tourists, has also been identified: "the Millennials are looking for authentic and memorable experiences, they have to sink in the lifestyle of local residents and have valuable experiences similar to those of the inhabitants; this has led to a change in which tourists are concentrating, thus invading spaces traditionally reserved to residents and thus generating "tourismphobia"" (Veiga et al., 2017, p.612).

Starting from all these aspects, a study has been carried out on generational preferences for online travel booking methods and tools; it was aimed at identifying the methods and tools used by Romanians to book online their travels, according to the generation they belong to.

We believe that the results obtained will provide a useful set of information for offline travel agencies, online travel agencies (OTAs), accommodation units, developers of software solutions for tourism, but also for tourists.

II. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted between March 15 and August 1, 2018, using the mobile survey, by administering a questionnaire distributed on mobile social networks; the questionnaire contained 13 questions; the targeted population were the Romanian social media users, as tourists; the final sample was composed of 1003 respondents, with 971 valid questionnaires, retained for data analysis; the aim was to identify aspects related to:

- *The traveler profile of the respondents*, from the perspective of their preferred form of travel (in organized group, for business, with family, with friends), of their preferred destination

(international/national travel) and of the chosen type of trip (self-development trip, cruise trip, adventure trip, business trip, event travel, volunteer travel, group tour, city break, weekend break/countryside break, package holiday/all inclusive holiday; were also identified: the tourist information sources used for travel preparation (OTAs websites, friends/family, travel agencies offices, social media) and the tourism products/ services most often booked online (accommodation, flights/transport, tourism packages/package holiday, events);

- *Preferences for using online travel booking systems and tools, depending on the generation to which the respondents belong;* the following issues were followed: use/non-use of these systems, the type of device used for online booking (laptop/desktop, mobile devices), the solution/tool used in online booking (direct booking online, mobile apps for booking, offline booking, OTAs websites, booking websites), the online system/platform used for booking (Booking.com, Airbnb, Direct booking, Skyscanner, Trivago.com, Google Flights, Hotels.com, Expedia.com, Kayak, Hipmunk, Kiwi.com, Momondo, Other);
- *Socio-demographic profile of respondents* (gender, generation, education level).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of collected data allowed to identify a significant set of information about the respondents, namely:

- *The socio-demographic profile,* brings to the fore the best represented generation Gen X (37.12%), followed by the Gen Y and Baby Boomers; a majority male segment (51.07%), graduates of university studies (38.02%) has also been formed; (Table 3).

Table 3. Socio-demographic structure

Generations	Gen Z/iGen/Centennials	15.92%
	Gen Y/Millennials	21.21%
	Gen X	37.12%
	BB (Baby Boomers) Gen	20.86%
	Silent Gen	4.89%
Gender	Female	48.93%
	Male	51.07%
Education	Basic	1.159%
	High school	26.67%
	College	27.12%
	University	38.02%
	Post university	7.03%

- *Travel profile and preferences,* identified a nearly majority segment of those declared travelers (98.06%) and who prefer international travel (69.95%); they usually travel with their family (33.47%) (Figure 1) and choose Package holiday (37.67%) (Figure 2);

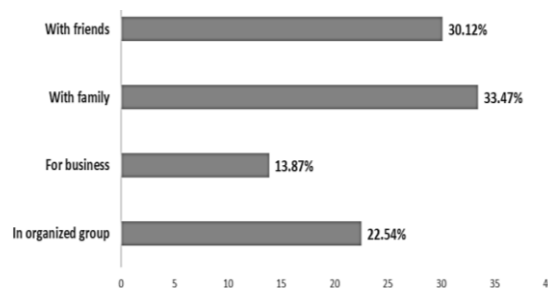


Figure 1 - Preferred way to travel

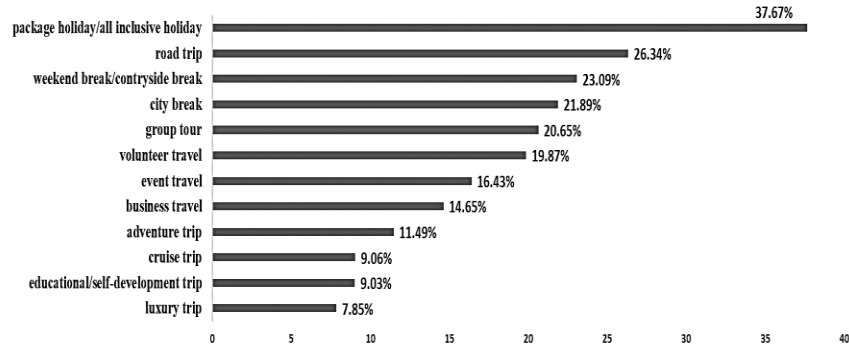


Figure 2 - Preferred travel type

- the sources of information used preferably in the choice of a trip are: social media (29.67%) and travel agencies offices (29.04%) (Figure 3), and the most often booked services/products are accommodation (40.85%) and flights / (31.32%) (Figure 4).

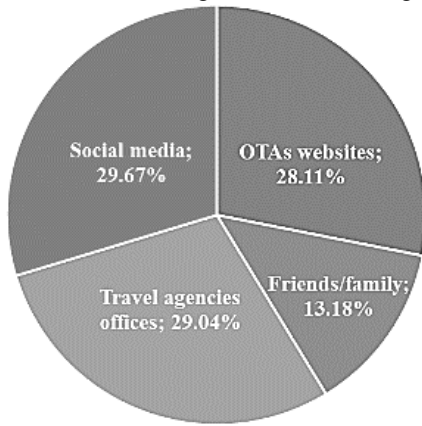


Figure 3 - Preferred source of information

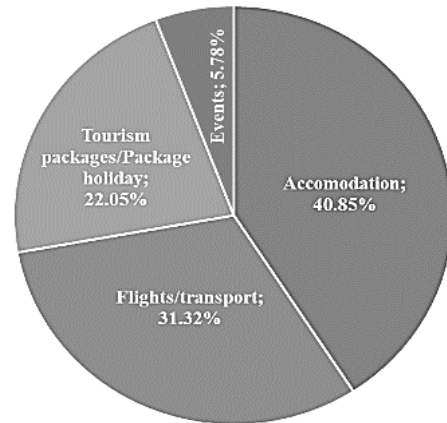


Figure 4 - Products/services most often reserved

- Generational preferences for using online booking systems and tools, have led to the identification of the following series of aspects:
 - the quality of users of online booking systems:
 - outlined an important segment of respondents using online reservations, while only 4.07% of the population surveyed said they were non-users of these systems;
 - the device type used for online booking, forms a majority segment of mobile devices users (57.82%);
 - the type of system or tool accessed for online booking (Figure 5):
 - identified as primarily preferred Booking websites (36.29%), followed by Mobile apps for booking (28.91%)
 - it should also be emphasized the existence of a narrow segment of users (7.06%), which uses only Offline Booking;

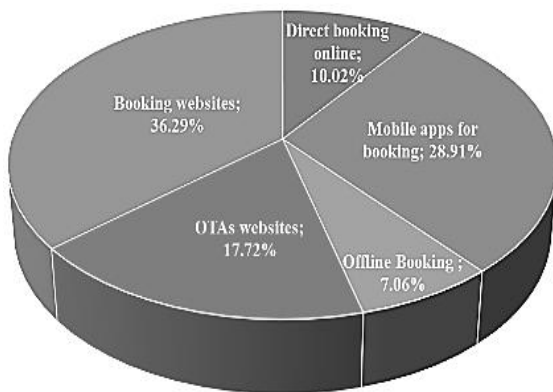


Figure 5 - Preferences in travel booking

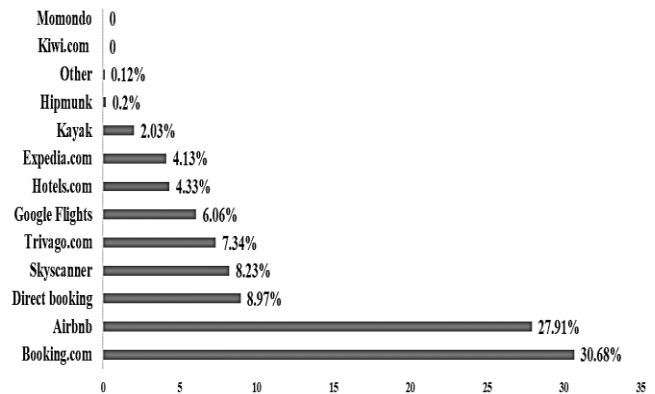


Figure 6 - The most used websites for booking

- preferred online platform/website for booking (Figure 6):
 - Booking.com (30.68%), Airbnb (27.91%), and Direct booking (8.97%), were identified as the respondents' favorites; as well as resources such as Kiwi.com and Momondo, are completely unknown / not used by Romanian tourists;

The results obtained, according to the generation of respondents and based on their preferences as tourists and as users of online booking systems and tools, were synthesized in Table 4.

Table 4. Generational preferences for online booking systems and tools

Generation	Preferred travel type	Source of information	Most often booked service/product	Device used in online booking	Preferred booking way	Most used booking websites
X (37.12%)	Holiday packages (76.12%) Business travel (50.11%) City break (40.76%) Road trip (39.12%) Luxury trip (19.75%)	OTAs websites (75.12%) Social Networks (48.92%)	Accommodation (81.12%) Flights (75.02%) Tourism packages (68.73%)	Laptop (71.03%) Mobile devices (47.11%)	Booking websites (82.23%) OTAs webs (72.12%)	Booking, AiBnb, Skyscanner
B (oomers) (20.86%)	Holiday packages (72.02%) Group tour (68.15%) Road trip (51.07%) Business travel (32.81%) Luxury travel (25.12%) Cruise tip (22.04%)	OTAs webs (63.12%) Travel agency office (48.11%) Friends/family (19.13%)	Tourism packages (69.72%) Accommodation (58.19%) Flights/transport (56.04%)	Laptop (68.16%) Mobile devices (28.87%) Do not book online (13.14%)	Booking websites (33.41%) Direct booking (30.15%) OTAs (20.04%) Offline (9.76%)	AiBnb, Booking, Trivago
Y (21.21%)	Adventure trip (58.92%) City break (50.16%) Group tour (45.78%) Event travel (44.12%) Educational travel (22.43%)	SN (65.78%) Friends/family (43.89%) OTAs (22.56%)	Flights/transport (80.12%) Accommodation (69.12%)	Mobile devices (77.56%) Laptop (53.12%)	Booking websites (78.35%) Mobile apps (74.11%)	Googleflights, AiBnb, Skyscanner
Z (15.92%)	Adventure trip (62.19%) Event travel (48.24%) City break, road trip	Social Networks (89.82%) Friends/family (19.13%)	Flights/transport (67.11%) Events, accommodation	Mobile devices (89.62%) Laptop (53.11%)	Booking websites (70.04%) Mobile apps (59.12%) OTAs	AiBnb, Booking, Googleflights, Skyscanner

Generation	Preferred travel type	Source of information	Most often booked service/product	Device used in online booking	Preferred booking way	Most used booking websites
S (ilent) (4.89%)	Family trip (69,03%) Friends, organized groups	Friends/family (80.29 %) Travel agency office (68.33%) OTAs websites	Accommodation (62.11%) Flights/transport	Do not book online (57.17%) Laptop (20.14%)	Offline (64.47%) Booking webs	Booking, AiBnb, Trivago

IV. CONCLUSION

According to the results presented, it is easy to identify a set of respondents' preferences that allow the correlation and identification of common points between generations in terms of using systems and tools specific to online booking for travelers.

Thus, with the exception of Silent Gen, the rest of the generational segments were declared as international travelers; this may be an important indicator for tourism companies to diversify their international travel offerings and to generate special offers for the Silent generation to convert them to international travelers.

Also, as a common preference in most used booking websites, for all generations appears identified Airbnb, followed by Booking.com; Booking.com, does not actually appear in the preferences of the Gen Y; this may be a sign of warning for Booking.com that it has failed to provide updated and tailored services to this generation, which is highly adventure oriented, communicates online on social media and prefers to reserve transport and accommodation services.

On the other hand, preferences for:

- the online booking of flights/transport services marks the formation of a new inter-generational group, Gen Y&Z; in this group, all airlines would be advised to dedicate specific offers to them, especially given that they become the very important generational category in global demographic evolution;
- the online booking of accommodation services forms another group, namely Gen X&S, for which accommodation services providers and hospitality companies should design dedicated offers.

Considering a set of combined preferences such as travel type, sources of information and device used in online booking, another new inter-generational groups can be identified, namely:

- Gen X&B, who prefer holiday packages, OTAs webs like source of information and the laptop as the most used device, in online booking;
- Gen Y&Z, that prefers adventure trips, social networks as source of information and the mobile devices as the most used device;

Silent Gen, who do not use online booking and prefer a family trip, can be preserved, from this perspective, as an independent segment.

The results of the study, have brought to the forefront a set of important issues related to:

- the profile of the Romanian tourists according to the generation to which they belong;
- a set of generational preferences in using online booking systems;
- identifying inter-generational groups, with common preference for travel choices and for using online booking systems.

It can be concluded that, on the one hand, the results obtained match the statistical profiles identified from the secondary sources of information used and, on the other hand, the specifics of the Romanian tourist segment may be generated by both the socio-economic realities of Romania, as well as the specificity of Romanian traditions and culture.

We consider that the results obtained, can provide useful information for a wide range of actors from the tourism industry, the ITC industry and the online marketing, starting with travel companies, offline travel agencies, OTAs, hospitality companies, developers of software solutions dedicated to tourism, etc. and last but not least for tourists, as final beneficiaries of tourism products and services.

V. LIMITATIONS

The study may have some limitations, related to the insufficient representation of the population included in the study and the use of only the most representative social network in Romania, Facebook; but the set of results obtained and delivered can be considered as an important informational base, both in performing more complex or comparative studies on regional or even global population.

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