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Complaint behavior of Generation Z in tourism

Жалбено понашање генерације З у туризму

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Abstract:
Purpose: This research aim is to determine the correlation between the ways Generation Z is expressing dissatisfaction in the tourism and the absence of a sense of shame when complaining.
Methodology: The study was conducted in the Republic of Serbia on a sample of 231 Generation Z respondents. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software, and the Pearson correlation test was used to analyze the relationships between variables.
Findings: Results reveal a statistically significant and positive correlation for hypotheses H2, H3, and H4, but non-significant correlation was found for H1, which was therefore rejected. Hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 were accepted.
Originality/value: While consumer complaint behavior has been widely studied, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the complaint behavior of Generation Z tourists. This research contributes by focusing specifically on this generation and their behavioral patterns when dissatisfied.
Practical implications - The research findings are relevant for tourism service providers, as they provide important insights into the behavior of Generation Z consumers. Given these consumers' strong dependence on digital platforms, tourism service providers should pay special attention to communication through online communication channels and train employees to improve the service delivery process. Such measures can reduce the negative impact of complaints and foster long-term loyalty and satisfaction.
Limitations: The study's main limitation is the sample, which consists solely of Generation Z respondents. Additionally, the sample size of 231 respondents is relatively small; expanding it in future research would provide more robust insights into tourist complaint behavior.

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Keywords: tourism, complaint behavior, generation Z, locus of control
JEL classification: M31, Z33, L83

Сажетак:
Циљ: Циљ истраживања је утврђивање повезаности између начина на који Генерација З изражава незадовољство у туризму и одсуства осећаја стида приликом подношења жалби.
Методологија: Истраживање је спроведено у Републици Србији на узорку од 231 испитаника Генерације З. Подаци су анализирани коришћењем IBM SPSS Statistics софтвера, а за анализу корелације коришћен је Пирсонов тест корелације.
Резултати: Резултати показују статистички значајну и позитивну корелацију код хипотеза H2, H3 и H4, али је за H1 пронађена негативна корелација која није значајна, услед чега је H1 одбачена. Хипотезе H2, H3 и H4 су прихваћене.
Оригиналност/вредност - Иако је жалбено понашање потрошача анализирано од стране многих аутора, у литератури и даље недостаје део који се односи на жалбено понашање туриста Генерације З. Допринос овог истраживање је фокус на Генерацију З и њихове обрасце понашања када су незадовољни.
Практична примена - Резултати истраживања су релевантни за пружаоце туристичких услуга, с обзиром да пружају значајне увиде у понашање потрошача Генерације З. С обзиром на снажну зависност ових потрошача о дигиталним платформама, пружаоци туристичких услуга требало би да обрате посебну пажњу на комуникацију кроз онлине канале комуницирања и обуче запослене како би побољшале процес пружања услуга. Такве мере могу смањити негативан утицај жалби и подстаћи дугорочну лојалност и задовољство.
Ограничења истраживања: Главно ограничење истраживања је узорак, који се састоји искључиво од испитаника Генерације З. Поред тога, величина узорка од 231 испитаника је релативно мала; његово проширење у будућим истраживањима би пружило значајнији увид у понашање туриста у вези са жалбама.

Кључне речи: туризам, жалбено понашање, генерација З, локус контроле
ЈЕЉ класификација: M31, Z33, L83

Introduction

Considering the importance of Generation Z in today's business world, it is crucial to analyze their behavior in one of the most popular service sectors, i.e., tourism. It is necessary to analyze how this generation is expressing dissatisfaction through complaints. However, consumers often encounter situations in which their needs are not adequately met. Generation Z, as a digital generation, has a much greater power to influence others due to their online presence (Berry et al., 2014).

When the need is not satisfied, users express their negative attitudes in different ways: some of them opt for public actions as a way to warn or inform the rest of the public about a negative experience, some decide to share their experiences with people in their immediate environment and thus encourage the spread of negative WOM, while some decide to accept the circumstances that have befallen them and refrain from spreading any opinion (Ergün & Kitapci, 2018). Generation Z is considered to pioneer the virtual world, which knows no time or space limitations. Social networks have completely transformed

the way communication takes place, the way necessary information is obtained, and even the way experience is shared and with whom it is shared (Huang, Basu & Hsu, 2010).

The subject of research is the behavior of Generation Z in tourism, with a focus on complaints. The research aims to determine the connection between the ways Generation Z is expressing dissatisfaction in tourism and the absence of a sense of shame when submitting complaints. While consumer complaint behavior has been widely analyzed by many authors, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the complaint behavior of Generation Z tourists. This research contributes by focusing specifically on this generation and their behavioral patterns when dissatisfied. The research problem relates to the manner in which the complaining behavior of Generation Z is manifested.

The first part of this paper contains a theoretical basis with a review of the literature that connects tourism as a leading service activity today with Generation Z, and special attention is focused on complaint behavior caused by dissatisfaction. The second part of this paper contains the author's research in which the Pearson correlation test was used in order to determine the existence of a statistically significant and positive correlation between the absence of embarrassment when complaining and different ways of expressing dissatisfaction.

1. Literature review

In recent years, tourism has become an increasingly popular service industry and has also contributed to the growth of popularity in related service segments such as hospitality and accommodation facilities. Technology development and its application to planning and organizing trips are the main reasons for the growing popularity of the tourism industry (Jorge-Acain, 2022). The emergence of social media has changed the way tourists access the necessary information. Given that the number of users of tourism services who have time to physically visit a travel agency and thus choose the desired arrangement is decreasing, social networks should be seen as a practical solution.

In their daily life, tourists are burdened with activities that occupy their time, and social networks solve this problem of time limitation by providing the possibility of quick connection with the right information (Dina & Sabou, 2012). Using social platforms, users can easily find the desired information and make decisions about choosing a destination (Alsoud et al., 2023). Social media can be defined as a strategic tool that has a significant role in tourism and hospitality management (Osei, Mensah & Amenumey, 2018). The two main reasons why potential tourists use social networks are: 1) the need to establish social connections; and 2) the need to share and explore interesting information (Narangajavana et al., 2017). The benefits that tourists get from using social media refer to (Alghizzawi, Salloum & Habes, 2018): 1) the presence of the necessary information on the websites of travel companies; 2) benefits that reward satisfied users after the service; 3) a sense of security when purchasing or booking different trips; and 4) the ability to share information about trips or any changes that may occur.

In addition to the advantages that social media has provided to tourists, the most

important contribution is evident in the changed way companies that provide services communicate. Today, communication most often takes place in the online world and is direct (Dina & Sabou, 2012). Due to frequent engagement on tourist sites, tourists have become a key element in the development of the industry (Alghizzawi, Salloum & Habes, 2018). In the process of planning a trip, tourists use social media when they go through each of the three stages (Osei, Mensah & Amenumey, 2018):

- Before the trip (pre-trip) - influence on the most important decisions (help with choosing a destination and accommodation);
- During the trip - discovering information about activities and attractions;
- After the trip (post-trip) - sharing videos, pictures, and leaving reviews.

The experiences that users can share on social media in mutual interaction, whether positive or negative, can influence their further behavior (Marić, Leković & Džever, 2024). Dissatisfaction is most often expressed through negative e-WOM; in this way, tourists can point out potential dangers, inadequate service they experienced, or overall dissatisfaction with the arrangements they had.

In tourism, which is considered an unpredictable environment, tourists are interested in finding out whether a certain service will or will not satisfy their needs. Social media has changed the way people communicate, the way they obtain information, and the way they make decisions about choosing a destination (Huang, Basu & Hsu, 2010). Social media allows users to share experiences, based on which later decisions about destination choice are made. If the experience was positive, there is a high probability that consumers will repeat it (Șchiopu et al., 2023). Although tourists most often use social media for communication, information search, entertainment, relaxation, and expressing opinions, we can classify them into several categories (Akın & Şener, 2024): collaborative projects, blogs and content communities and social networking sites, virtual games, and virtual worlds.

Generation Z is considered responsible for the development of tourism in the digital and online environment. It is believed that this generation will completely transform tourism and hospitality (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). In addition to the Internet, a major contribution to the development of hospitality and tourism can be attributed to the growing use of smart devices by young users (Gavrilović & Maksimović, 2018). Due to their dependence on technology, Generation Z is also called "i-Gen", "Gen Tech", and "Gen Wii" (Karim, 2019). The main characteristic of Generation Z members is reflected in the fact that this young generation grew up with the Internet and does not know life without it (Williams & Page, 2011). They are also considered the pioneers of social media. Generation Z has a constant need to connect and stay up-to-date, and social media enables them to establish new contacts and develop relationships. They connect on several platforms, look for quick answers and attention, and they can lose interest with a single click (Șchiopu et al., 2023). As consumers, Generation Z can be divided into 4 categories (Yussof et al., 2018): 1) those who are interested in new technologies; 2) those who insist on ease of use; 3) those who want to feel safe; and 4) those who want to temporarily escape

from reality. Young members of Generation Z use social media to get positive comments and experiences about destinations, accommodation, travel agencies, and even restaurants. For these reasons, the content on social networks is diverse and rich (Dewi et al., 2021).

Due to its ease of use and non-existent costs, the Internet has become a popular means of accessing important information (Lipowski, 2017). The development of social media significantly facilitated the process of selecting and purchasing tourist services. Potential tourists can search and purchase tourism services wherever they are, at any time, even on their way to work (Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2014). The most important elements that describe the behavior of Generation Z in tourism include (Baltescu, 2019) the tendency to make decisions at the last moment, intensive search for opportunities, using word-of-mouth (WOM) as a source, and increasing use of low-cost services.

In addition to sharing information, Generation Z tourists have the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences. In the digital world, word-of-mouth communication is present every day, especially after the trip when tourists share their satisfaction in the case of a positive experience or their dissatisfaction in the case of a negative outcome (Chen & Chen, 2010). Sharing their negative experience with others can provide relief (Kusumawati, Suhandi & Purwanegara, 2024).

In the buying process, it is necessary to highlight how different consumers behave in different ways. During this process, they go through the three stages mentioned earlier. The phase in which they express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction after using the product or service is called post-purchase. An unmet need that leads to dissatisfaction with the product or service is the company's main problem after the consumer's interaction. In these situations, the consumer most often chooses one of two options, namely stopping the purchase or spreading negative WOM (Panda, 2014). Considering that Generation Z is addicted to the Internet, they have no problem expressing any form of dissatisfaction on social media (Kusumawati, Suhandi & Purwanegara, 2024).

Every buying process starts with a need that needs to be satisfied. Most often, consumer dissatisfaction is manifested when goal-directed behavior is interrupted before the need is satisfied (Panda, 2014). Consumers who are dissatisfied often want to share it with other users from their environment, but also with the company itself. The opinion of one dissatisfied user has the potential to influence many others today, which was unimaginable in the past (Berry et al., 2014). In the traditional offline environment, complaints were expressed mainly through WOM communication, while with the development of the digital world, they were redirected to digital platforms in the form of discussion forums, service reviews, and blogs, because that way their negative experiences are more effective and visible (Kitapci et al., 2019). Although complaint behavior can often be interpreted as an unpleasant experience, both for the company and the consumer, it represents a significant corrective measure towards future satisfaction (Berry et al., 2014). Analyzing the reactive behavior of consumers after a negative experience with a service or product is presented through the field of research called consumer complaint behavior (CCB-Consumer complaint behavior) (Kitapci et al., 2019). Every customer reacts differently when they are dissatisfied. While some of them will have no problem making

their complaint directly, others will turn to the Internet to do so, either through negative reviews or simply by spreading negative WOM (Berry et al., 2014). Complaining behavior of tourists can be divided into three categories (Ergün & Kitapci, 2018): 1) public actions; 2) private actions; and 3) no actions.

When consumers want to publicly share their dissatisfaction with other users and potential tourists, they will opt for public action. Complaining directly to a company whose service has dissatisfied tourists, demanding a refund, or initiating legal action against the company is called public action. The activities that tourists would carry out as part of private actions are related to the spread of negative WOM, sharing a negative experience with close people in their environment, and even boycotting a company and choosing a new one (Irawan & Saptarini, 2023). Behavior characterized as no action implies that the user has experienced dissatisfaction but does not want to exhibit any complaint behavior and, in some cases, chooses to remain loyal to the company (Berry et al., 2014).

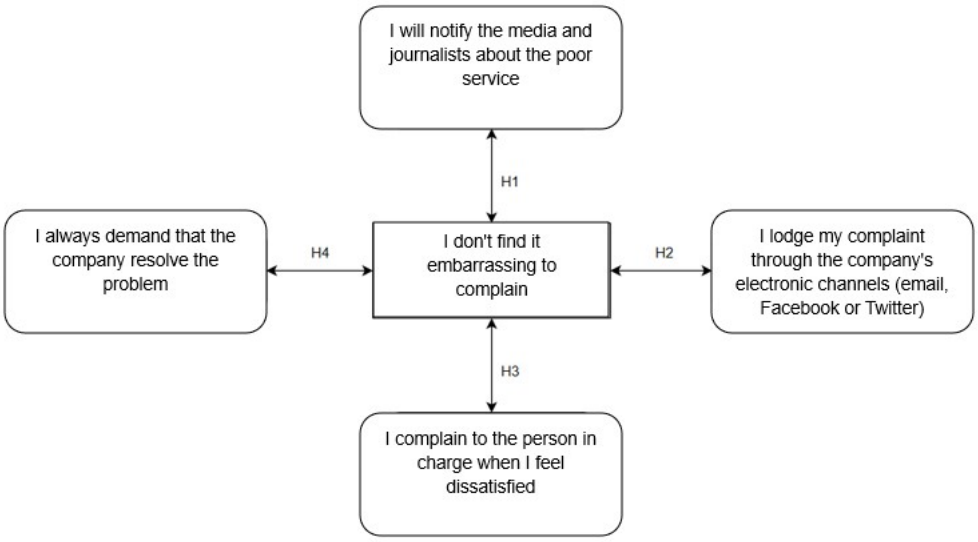
Social media has facilitated the process of complaining and expressing dissatisfaction. Various factors can influence whether a user will engage in complaining behavior. Some of the factors relate to the attitudes, psychology of the individual, but also the locus of control. Most factors are completely out of the company's control. Locus of control is a measure of the degree to which people believe that outcomes depend solely on them and not on external influences from the environment. A distinction needs to be made between the internal and the external locus of control. An internal locus of control is when a person believes they can control the outcome of an event. On the other hand, the external locus of control is when an individual believes that the outcome depends on external influences rather than themselves (Berry et al., 2014).

It is necessary to adapt to the needs of tourists and pay attention to them. The behavior of other users can be influenced by information posted on social media. A positive experience after a trip contributes to the spread of positive images of destinations and an overall higher level of satisfaction in the tourism sector.

2. Methodology

To determine the connection between the ways Generation Z is expressing dissatisfaction in tourism and the absence of a sense of shame when submitting complaints, research was conducted on a convenient sample made up of Generation Z (born from 1995 to 2005). The sample consists of 231 respondents, and the research was conducted from May to July 2025 on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The sample consisted of 63.2% women and 36.8% men, all born between 1995 and 2005. The majority of respondents have a high school education (34.6%), and were mostly satisfied with the services provided during trips (43.7%). Data were collected using an online questionnaire specifically designed for this research and distributed through social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook). The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions divided into categories. For this research, questions were analyzed within the categories of attention and complaint behavior.

Figure 1: Research framework



Source: The authors' research

For this research, a convenient sample was utilized, focusing on Generation Z. IBM SPSS Statistics software was used to analyze and process the collected data. The Pearson correlation test was conducted to assess the correlation between the observed variables.

3. Results and discussion

The following hypotheses were set based on the literature overview and research objectives:

H_1: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and express dissatisfaction through the media and journalists.

Table 1: Research results (H_1)

Correlations			
		I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	I will notify the media and journalists about the poor service.
I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.106
	N	231	231
I will notify the media and journalists about the poor service.	Pearson Correlation	-0.107	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.106	
	N	231	231
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

Source: The authors' research

Based on the data obtained from Table 1, it is possible to see that there is no statistically significant or positive correlation between the observed variables, given that the $p > 0.001$, and the coefficient *r* is negative and equals -0.107, which indicates that an increase in one variable affects a decrease in another variable. Therefore, hypothesis H_1 has been rejected.

H_2: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and express dissatisfaction through the company's electronic channels (email, Facebook, or Twitter).

Table 2: Research results (H_2)

Correlations			
		I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	I lodge my complaint through the company's electronic channels (email, Facebook, or Twitter).
I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	Pearson Correlation	1	0.199**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.002
	N	231	231
I lodge my complaint through the company's electronic channels (email, Facebook, or Twitter).	Pearson Correlation	0.199**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	
	N	231	231
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

Source: The authors' research

Given that $p = 0.002$, which is lower than the significance limit, i.e., $p < 0.01$, it can be observed that there is a statistically significant correlation between the observed variables. The correlation coefficient is $r = 0.199$ and indicates that there is a weak positive correlation. In other words, if tourists think that it is not embarrassing to complain, there is a high probability that they will submit their complaint to the company through electronic channels. Therefore, hypothesis H_2 has been accepted.

H_3: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and express dissatisfaction to the person in charge.

Table 3: Research results (H_3)

Correlations			
		I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	I complain to the person in charge when I feel dissatisfied.
I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	Pearson Correlation	1	0.296**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	231	231
I complain to the person in charge when I feel dissatisfied.	Pearson Correlation	0.296**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	231	231
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

Source: The authors' research

Looking at the results obtained in Table 3, it is possible to see that there is a statistically significant correlation, given that $p < 0.01$. These results indicate that there is a minimal possibility that the correlation between the tested variables is a coincidence. Also, observing the results of the correlation test, where $r = 0.296$, it is observed that there is a positive correlation of small strength. Therefore, hypothesis H_3 has been accepted.

H_4: There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and the demand that the company solve the problem.

Table 4: Research results (H_4)

Correlations			
		I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	I always demand that the company resolve the problem.
I don't find it embarrassing to complain.	Pearson Correlation	1	0.296**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	231	231
I always demand that the company resolve the problem.	Pearson Correlation	0.296**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	231	231
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

Source: The authors' research

Testing the correlation between the variables, the results obtained from Table 4 indicate the presence of a statistically significant and weak positive correlation, given that $p < 0.01$ and $r = 0.296$. The obtained results indicate that changes in one variable have a positive effect on the change in another variable. Therefore, hypothesis H_4 has been accepted.

Similar research was conducted by the authors Mat et al. (2020) with a focus on the millennial generation. These authors proved that there is a correlation between complaining behavior and the users' attitudes towards expressing their negative experiences. Also, a

similar topic was observed by Berry et al. (2014), analyzing how users will express dissatisfaction. The authors have concluded that the way of expressing dissatisfaction (actively, passively, or without activity) largely depends on the internal and external locus of control. If the user exhibits an internal locus of control, according to these authors, it will imply an active manifestation of dissatisfaction through certain channels, while on the other hand, if the user exhibits an external locus of control, their manifestation of dissatisfaction will be passive or even without action.

Conclusion

Analyzing the obtained research results, it is observed that there is a statistically significant correlation with H_2, H_3, and H_4. Given that $p < 0.01$, it is possible to conclude that the possibility that the correlation between the observed variables is a coincidence is extremely small. In case of H_1, $p = 0.106$, whereby it is concluded that there is no statistically significant correlation between the observed variables. A positive sign is present in the variables in H_2, H_3, and H_4, indicating that an increase in one variable affects the increase in another variable, while in H_1, this is not the case due to the negative sign in the coefficient *r*. Based on the obtained results, the authors concluded that hypothesis H_1 (There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and express dissatisfaction through the media and journalists) has been rejected. Hypothesis H_2 (There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and expressing dissatisfaction through the company's electronic channels (email, Facebook or Twitter)), H_3 (There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and expressing dissatisfaction to the person in charge) and H_4 (There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the attitude that it is not embarrassing to complain and the demand that the company solve the problem) have been accepted.

Digitalization is considered the most significant element of tourism development. The development of technology and digitalization has led to significant changes in the behavior of young tourists of Generation Z, as well as the way in which they express their dissatisfaction. Social media has enabled mass sharing of negative experiences between users and thus become one of the most important sources of information when planning any type of trip. Dissatisfaction with the service has so far been shared through word-of-mouth communication, exclusively between the dissatisfied user and individuals from the user's closest environment. However, the growing popularity of the online world and platforms made it possible for that dissatisfaction to become public and available to every individual looking for additional information about a destination, accommodation, travel agency, and even a restaurant. Public actions have greatly helped and contributed to users in order to prevent them from repeating mistakes or wrong choices.

The limitation of this paper is related to the sample, which consists exclusively of Generation Z. In future research, the same variables can be tested on a sample of tourists belonging to one of the remaining generations. Also, as another limitation, the range of the

sample can be mentioned; the sample of 231 respondents should be enlarged to obtain more relevant information on consumers' complaint-filing behavior. In the future, the goal is to increase the sample size and provide a more detailed explanation of the factors that determine the complaint behavior of Generation Z tourists. In addition to the limitations, this research represents a significant contribution to further research dealing with the complaining behavior of tourists, Generation Z. The complaining behavior of users in tourism is one of the most significant problems for the tourism sector. Companies need to focus on understanding users and responding to their needs. This is the only way to avoid spreading negative experiences through the mass media.

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