

# **Generation Z as tourism consumers: the impact of childhood tourism consumption and the socialization environment - marketing activities of the tourism industry on this group**

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## **Abstract**

This research examines how childhood travel experiences and socialization environments influence adult tourism behaviour, focusing on Generation Z in Hungary. It investigates the interplay between early travel memories and current preferences, revealing the role of family, digital upbringing, and marketing strategies. Two main themes are explored: the influence of childhood travel on current consumer behaviour, and the socialization environment's impact on travel habits in adulthood. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and case studies, the study highlights the significance of early tourism experiences in shaping lifelong travel behaviours. Findings aim to inform tourism stakeholders, including destination marketers and hospitality providers, offering insights to enhance family-friendly offerings and strategic marketing efforts tailored to intergenerational needs. This research contributes to understanding tourism's dynamic intergenerational and socio-economic influences.

**Keywords:** generation Z, childhood tourism, travel behaviour, socialization environment, tourism marketing

**JEL Classification:** A13, Z32

## **Introduction and literature review**

The research area broadly explores the relationship between childhood travel and adult tourism consumption habits. The topic is multifaceted, focusing on how social environment and childhood tourism experiences influence adult tourism behaviour and consumption patterns. Additionally, it examines the attitudes of tourism market stakeholders towards children as a consumer demographic. Through various approaches, I aim to uncover the impact of childhood experiences on adult travel behaviour and shed light on the dynamics between childhood tourism, adult consumption patterns, and industry perceptions of children as consumers.

## **Travel attitudes, affection of the parents, tourism trends - in relation to the research field**

In the second half of the 20th century, tourism became a global economic and social phenomenon. For people in developed countries, travel has become almost a necessity and a dominant form of leisure. Tourism as a subject has been the subject of numerous academic treatises, mainly in economic terms. It was around the turn of the millennium that academic work produced a body of professional literature and research that examined and analysed the impact of travel on the quality of life of the domestic population and the direct impact of childhood travelling experiences and adulthood consumer behaviour.

Researchers recently looked at the relationship between social consumption patterns and tourism, focusing on the tourism consumption behaviour of families (Ásványi - Gyulavári - Jászberényi, 2018). Family holidays with larger groups are not common, only a small percentage of grandparents go with the family, and holidays with friends and acquaintances are more common when a larger group travels together. Families are most motivated by the time

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spent together on holiday, a motivation that is almost on a par with the value of the motivation to get away from it all.

Respondents rated relatively highly the destinations that they thought would welcome children, as well as the availability of entertainment facilities for children and the readiness of the destination's service providers to welcome children. There was variation in the importance of different demographic groups in terms of destination choice, for example, the age of the youngest child influenced the importance of different factors.

The complexity of family travel expectations is also influenced by the fact that all members of the family, including children, have an influence on holiday decisions, the research concludes. The need to spend time together dominates among family members' motivations for going on holiday, which is an opportunity for families to further strengthen their sense of belonging through shared experiences. At the same time, the reinforcement of the child's learning and development process during the holiday is important for a smaller proportion of families than spending time together. This can be partly explained by the fact that, from the parents' side, this means giving up their own leisure time and making more effort, and that neither the child nor the parents receive strong stimulation from the service provider side by providing opportunities in this direction (Ásványi - Gyulavári - Jászberényi, 2018).

Csapó et al. (2018) investigated the different tourism habits of generations in a national representative survey. There are very few representative, large-sample studies specifically shedding light on tourism consumer behaviour in Hungary, so the research results and their analysis have brought great results to the field. According to the study the tourism sector has developed at an extraordinary pace in recent years, both in Hungary and worldwide, and societies and generations are changing their habits and shaping their consumer behaviour to current trends at an accelerating pace. The results of the study show that in most cases, social and generational differences can be identified in the travel habits of the Hungarian population and the variables influencing their travel decisions (Gonda - Csapó, 2019).

## **Generation Z**

The concept of generation, as defined in Károly Mannheim's *Das Problem der Generationen* (The Problem of Generations), published in 1928, has served as a theoretical basis for research on generations and has been used as a starting point in many disciplines (Buda, 2019).

Members of the group were typically born between 1995 and 2010, but some studies include world born in a period of 20 years, so the cut-off is between 1991 and 2010. The most important difference between this group and previous generations is that they were born into the digital environment, into the world of digital technologies, they are the world's first global generation (*Homo globalis*), and so these influences are a dominant part of their lives. Other group names are known from their media use habits, such as Facebook generation, "digital-born" (Prensky, 2001), "dotcom" kids, net generation, iGeneration, hence the group members are also called C generation after the English word Connection, and D, which refers to the word digital (Pál - Törőcsik, 2013).

Generation Z is also characterised by the fact that their purchases are linked to values, which are best captured in consumer experiences. They are hard to reach, but if something 'clicks' with them, they will do anything to get it. They are highly influenced by status symbols, such as fashion brands in clothing, mobile phone brands, but also by tourism experiences, by the trend to have been to London, to the US, to go skiing, to have a holiday on the beach or to winter. They belong to scenes and cliques, which mainly unifies their appearance, but in their thinking, they prefer to show their uniqueness. They are egocentric in their attitudes, with the pursuit of experience, pleasure, and self-centredness at the top of the list of priorities (Törőcsik - Szűcs - Kehl, 2014).

## **Characteristics of the youth generations as consumers**

The consumption behaviour and motivation of members of Generation Z is strongly influenced by the financial background and values of their families. This group has an increasingly strong purchasing power, even though their purchasing decisions are typically not made alone, but mostly together with their parents. The parent is the one who mostly makes the purchases and either fulfils or rejects the child's wishes, yet there is evidence of the young generation's strong influence on the family's purchases and the family's consumption basket. We can distinguish different forms of influence of young people within the family (Törőcsik, 2011):

- approval - when the young person does not change the parent's choice but confirms it
- preference shifting - the parent's purchasing behaviour does not change immediately, but in the longer term it is influenced by the young person's continued influence
- habit change is the result of the young person's influence

Generation Z can be influential within the family not only in the purchase of goods they want to acquire and achieve for themselves, but also as opinion leaders in the consumption decisions of adults.

One type of family purchasing decisions is the so-called "joint decision", purchases related to product areas where the decision is made democratically by listening to everyone's opinion, such as purchases related to the choice of holidays, vacations, destinations, family activities. These are usually high spending programmes, it is important that everyone is satisfied, as they are a big drain on family budgets and represent an increased risk. This is why it is important to involve the children in the decision-making process and to make a compromise decision, so that no family member is grumpy or rejecting the trip. From a marketing point of view, when advertising such products and services, all members of the family, i.e. several generations, should be targeted together so that everyone receives a positive message that attracts attention (Törőcsik, 2011).

The motivation of people who want to travel and of those who play a role in travel decisions is a constantly changing phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors. In tourism-related consumer behaviour, motivations are the bridge between needs and travel decisions. Consumers usually do not decide to travel based on a single motivation, and they travel with secondary motivations in addition to their primary motivation (Kalmárné Rimóczi, 2018), such as the need to introduce the destination to their children, to create experiences, value, and memories for young people during the trip, or to reward them for their educational achievements, for example.

## **Research topics**

The paper is planned to be structured around two primary research themes, each forming a distinct section. The research field will examine:

The childhood travel experiences and perceptions of Generation Z in Hungary - in this context, the marketing activities of tourism market businesses on this group and their impact (Theme 1)

Research question 1: How do hotel's marketing activities influence the travel preferences and behaviours of families with children in Hungary?

Relationships between socialisation environment and travel experiences in adolescence and their impact on travel behaviour in adulthood (Theme 2)

Research question 2: How does the socialization environment during adolescence influence travel experiences and subsequently impact travel behaviour in adulthood?

In addressing the two research questions and their methodology (Figure 1), it is imperative to select appropriate methods and interviewees who align with ethical and reliability standards. For this purpose, I intend to focus on interviewing individuals from the current Generation Z, specifically targeting the age group of 18-28 years. I plan to engage with professional leaders in corporate operations. These individuals possess the expertise and experience necessary to offer reliable and credible perspectives on the business aspects and decision-making processes within the research domain. Their insights will enhance the depth and validity of the study findings, contributing significantly to its overall quality and relevance.

#### *Connection between the Theme1 and Theme2*

The two themes are interconnected through the influence of childhood travel experiences on adult travel behaviours and the role of marketing in shaping these experiences. Theme 1 focuses on Generation Z' experiences in Hungary, examining how their childhood travel experiences and perceptions influence current travel preferences and behaviours. How these early experiences can potentially shape future travel preferences and behaviours by creating lasting positive memories and associations. Theme 2 explores how the socialization environment and travel experiences during adolescence impact adult travel habits. Both themes highlight the importance of early travel experiences and socialization in shaping long-term travel behaviour.

**Table 1.** *Summary of the main points of research plan (Author's own compilation)*

| Research questions                                                                                                                                 | Research expectations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Research activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Methodology                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| RQ1: How do hotel's marketing activities influence the travel preferences and behaviours of families with children in Hungary?                     | <p>Effective hotel marketing activities significantly shape the travel preferences and behaviours of families with children in Hungary by highlighting family-friendly amenities and services.</p> <p>Specific marketing strategies that resonate most with this demographic influencing customer's hotel choices, loyalty and travel planning decisions</p> | <p><b>Case Studies:</b> Develop case studies of specific hotels that are recognized for their successful marketing campaigns targeting families. Examine the strategies used and the resulting impact on bookings and customer satisfaction.</p> <p><b>Interviews with Management:</b> Conduct interviews with hotel marketing managers to understand the objectives, strategies, and perceived effectiveness of their marketing efforts directed towards families with children.</p> <p><b>Content Analysis:</b> Analyse the marketing content of hotels (e.g., advertisements, social media posts, websites) to identify the key themes and messages aimed at attracting families with children.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Case study                            |
| RQ2: How does the socialization environment during adolescence influence travel experiences and subsequently impact travel behaviour in adulthood? | <p>Travel-oriented socialization environment during adolescence significantly enhances positive travel experiences.</p> <p>Early experiences and influences shape adult travel behaviours, preferences, and the likelihood of engaging in diverse and frequent travel activities</p>                                                                         | <p><b>Online Survey:</b> Design and distribute online survey mixed quantitative and qualitative data on their travel behaviours, preferences, and perceptions of their childhood socialization environment. Utilize closed-ended questions to gather structured data that can be analysed statistically to identify correlations between experiences and adult travel behaviour.</p> <p><b>Qualitative In-Depth Interviews:</b> Conduct in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of adults to explore their memories and perceptions. Analyse the qualitative data to uncover patterns, themes, and insights into the long-term impact of adolescent socialization on travel behaviour.</p> <p><b>Comparative Analysis:</b> Perform a comparative analysis utilizing both in-depth interviews and online surveys. Conduct in-depth interviews with individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds or cultural settings to explore the diversity of childhood socialization experiences.</p> | Online surveys<br>In-depth interviews |

## Research models - the potential of qualitative research in tourism

In tourism research, both quantitative and qualitative methods are equally valuable and appropriate. These methods can be used concurrently or even in combination - the nature of the research problem or question always determines the most suitable approach. However, economics, including tourism studies, only recently began accepting the application of qualitative methods alongside quantitative ones, which have long been used internationally.

In the past two decades, there has been significant momentum in the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in tourism research. The main reasons for this include the development of destinations and the spread of globalization, leading to increased attention to collecting tourism quantitative data and establishing databases. Concurrently, service providers, destination managers, and local decision-makers increasingly rely on measurable data in their decision-making processes. As a result, statistical data and econometric analyses have become more valued. Additionally, qualitative research has been increasingly prevalent in tourism and other social sciences since the 1980s (Nagy, 2017). In marketing research, which often extends its reach into the field of tourism, qualitative methods were not widely accepted as standalone methodologies for a long time. They were primarily limited to techniques such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, considered as preparatory steps to quantitative research (Mitev 2015a) (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** *7 Steps in a qualitative research design (Author's own compilation based on Mitev 2015a)*

According to the quantitative methodology, research results can be quantified into measurable, so-called "hard" data, where causal relationships can be formulated through statistical associations. From these, general regularities can be inferred. The qualitative, or interpretive methodology, starts from the premise that social phenomena – where the subject of the research is human beings – cannot be examined using natural scientific methods. Therefore, research results appear in so-called "soft" data, in non-quantifiable forms (e.g., observations, words, stories). Thus, the aim of qualitative research is not to uncover general regularities. The qualitative researcher generates the data themselves. While quantitative research is rigid,

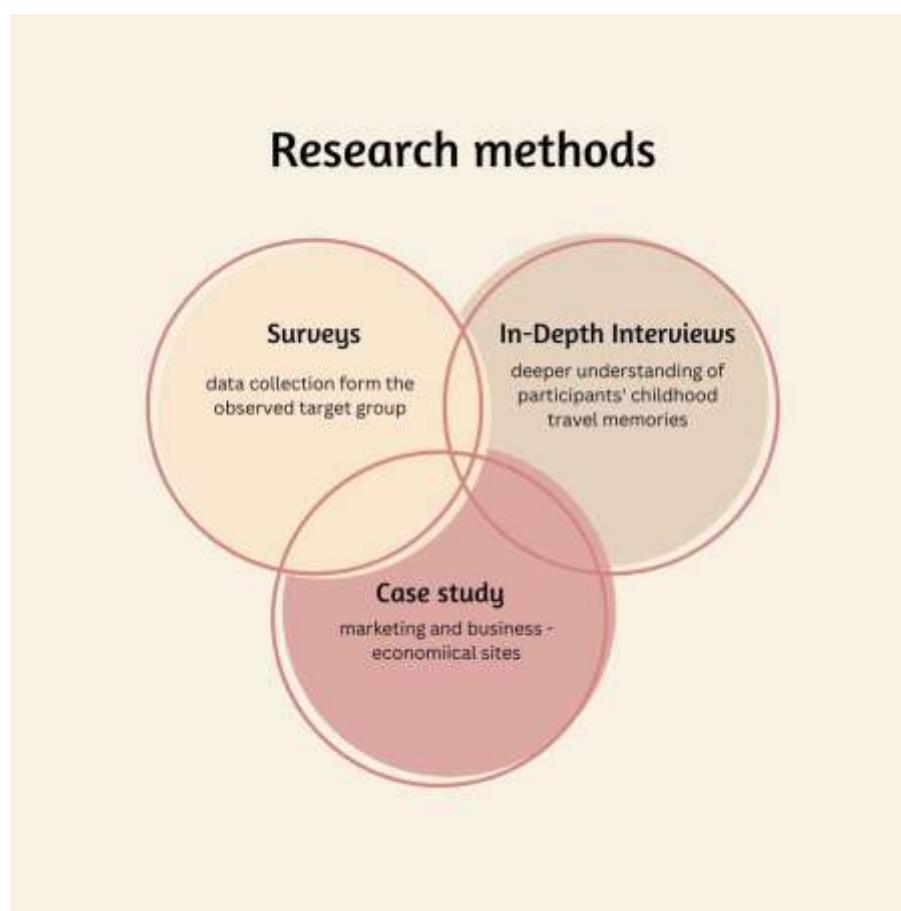
structured, and static, examining under artificial conditions with a large sample size, qualitative research is flexible, unstructured, and investigates phenomena in their natural environment (Sztárayné 2011).

### Research design and research methods for the themes

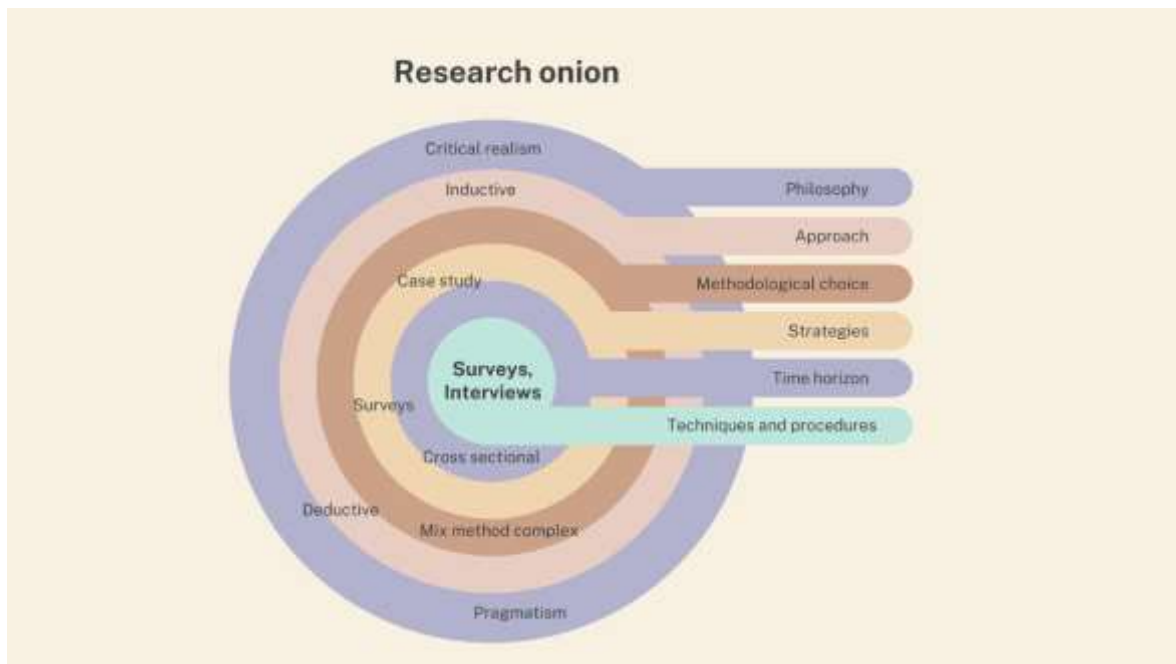
The research design will adopt a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate the themes of childhood travel experiences, their impact on adult travel behaviours, and the marketing strategies of tourism operators targeting Generation Z. Quantitative data will be collected through online surveys distributed to a sample of Generation Z individuals aged 18-28. These surveys will assess participants' travel habits, preferences, and perceptions of their childhood travel experiences. Secondly, I would like to collect qualitative data through in-depth interviews with a subset of survey respondents. These interviews will provide a deeper understanding of participants' childhood travel memories, their influence on current travel behaviours, and their perceptions of tourism marketing aimed at their demographics.

The research design will incorporate a case study analysis focusing on one tourism industry professional. Interviews with professionals, marketing experts and decisions makers in a well-known Hungarian family-friendly hotel. I want to explore their marketing strategies and approaches targeting families with children. These interviews will delve into the effectiveness of various marketing channels, messaging, and experiences offered to attract and engage with the target group.

By triangulating (Figure 3) quantitative survey data, qualitative interview insights, and case study findings, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding (Figure 4) of the interplay between childhood experiences, socialization, adult travel behaviours, and marketing strategies targeting families and children in the tourism industry.



**Figure 3.** *Planned research methods mix (Author's own compilation)*



**Figure 4.** *Research onion (Author's own compilation based on the figure of Saunders et al., 2016)*

### Expected results and their use, Conclusion

During my research I hope I can outline in the 2 examined themes and get valuable insights into two critical aspects of tourism: the influence of childhood experiences on adult travel behaviour and the impact of the socialization environment during childhood on travel experiences and behaviours in adulthood.

In the exploration of childhood travel experiences and perceptions of Generation Z in Hungary, my research aims to uncover how early travel experiences shape travel preferences and behaviours in adulthood. I try to get answers and results include discovering specific types of childhood travel experiences (e.g., family vacations, school trips) that have a lasting impact on current travel decisions. These findings can be utilized by tourism industry stakeholders, including destination marketers and hospitality providers, to tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to resonate with the preferences and interests of family travellers.

The study of the relationships between the socialization environment and travel experiences is expected to reveal on the long-term influence of socialization on travel behaviours. Anticipated results may reveal correlations between supportive socialization environments, exposure to diverse travel experiences, and a propensity for adventurous or culturally immersive travel in adulthood. Such insights can inform educational institutions, youth organizations, and policymakers in designing programs and initiatives aimed at fostering a travel-oriented socialization environment.

The expected results from both research themes can have practical implications for various stakeholders in the tourism industry. Destination marketers can leverage the findings to craft targeted marketing campaigns that resonate with the travel preferences and aspirations of different demographic groups. Hospitality providers can use the insights to design family-friendly accommodations that cater to the needs and preferences of travellers with children. Additionally, policymakers can utilize the research findings to inform the development of initiatives aimed at promoting travel literacy and fostering a culture of exploration among youth.

In conclusion, the anticipated results from the research themes hold the potential to inform strategic decision-making and enhance the effectiveness of marketing efforts, product



development, and policy initiatives in the tourism sector, ultimately contributing to a more vibrant and sustainable tourism industry.

Exploring the impact of socialization during adolescence on travel behaviours in adulthood highlights the importance of early social influences. The research in further should delve into the interplay between socialization factors and external influences, such as socio-economic status and cultural background.

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