

GENERATIONAL COHORT ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN DOMESTIC TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Malaysian economy has suffered considerably. With the closure of international borders to travellers and the implementation of restricted travel movement, the tourism industry has been one economic sector heavily affected. To encourage a rebound in the tourism industry the Malaysian government has taken steps to focus on the domestic tourism market. Since the domestic tourism market involves quite a diverse range of segments, an understanding of the generational cohort in tourist behaviour is crucial to facilitate the effective prediction of tourism trends. This paper attempts to review and analyses the generational shifts in Malaysian travel characteristics between four cohorts, namely, baby boomers, generation X, millennials and generation Z that have been discussed in the literature. First, the travel characteristics of each cohort were identified, and comparisons were made between the cohorts. As a result of a literature review, findings indicate that each cohort has distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from their older counterparts and these characteristics lead to a diverse demand for tourism products and services. Therefore, it is important for tourism stakeholders to better understand the travel characteristics of their target customers based on generational cohort before preparing the right packages, products and services that match and fulfil their customers' needs and preferences.

Keywords: Generational cohort, travel characteristic, domestic tourist, Malaysia.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has been receiving high numbers of international tourists for the past few years with reports showing that tourist arrivals increased from 25.72 million in 2015 to 26.10 million in 2019, and tourist receipts rose from RM69.10 billion to RM86.10 billion (Ministry of Tourism Arts and Culture Malaysia, 2020). Despite the rise in arrival numbers of international tourists, the Tourism Satellite Account 2019 reported that the domestic tourism sector had also shown better performance accounting for 50.9% of tourism industry receipts, helping to propel total tourism receipts (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). However, the reporting of the number of international tourists has always overshadowed the record of domestic tourists, which indicates that the government is focusing more on international tourists. It has been mentioned in previous research (see Mazumder, Ahmed, & Al-Amin, 2009) that international tourism demand is an important source of income for Malaysia's economy. This shows that international tourism has become an important source of revenue for Malaysia's government while overlooking the effects of the domestic tourism market on the economy.

The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2) also known as COVID-19, has affected the global scene in various industries especially the tourism industry (Nicola et al., 2020). Travel restrictions that have been imposed by most countries during this pandemic have made the tourism industry the most affected economic sector worldwide. Malaysia declared the Movement Control Order (MCO) after the rise in COVID-19 cases in March 2020 (Tang, 2020) and the prohibition of movement and mass

assembly includes social and cultural activities which are related to the tourism industry. With this declaration by the government, Malaysia's border is closed, and restrictions have been placed on the entry of foreign tourists into Malaysia. Malaysians are also barred from leaving the country and those who return from overseas must go through a health check-up, as well as undergo a mandatory 14 days of self-quarantine. Because of these restrictions to both Malaysian and foreign tourists, data released by the Companies Commission of Malaysia reported that a total of 204 tourism and hotel operators have shut down their businesses since March 2020 due to limited customers and income (The Star, 2020). The latest announcement by the government regarding the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) gives various industries especially tourism, hospitality, and aviation the opportunity to rebound temporarily.

Although the restriction on foreign tourists is still ongoing, the government has allowed tourism providers to resume operation by providing their tourism products and services for domestic tourists. In addition, the government has introduced a domestic travel bubble Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in November 2020 (New Straits Times, 2020). This initiative is aimed at helping tourism providers keep their businesses alive and breathing, after all, they have been through with the Movement Control Order during the past few months. The initiative is not only for the tourism providers but includes various incentives and offers for Malaysian residents to enjoy their domestic holidays such as accommodation packages, airline offers, cashback offers, and e-vouchers. All these initiatives by the government are aimed at providing incentives for both tourists and tourism providers to help the industry to return to normal growth and help facilitate economic recovery.

Now is the right time for Malaysian tourism stakeholders to give their full attention to catering for domestic tourists. It is important to note that the domestic market involves quite a diversity of tourist segments and generational cohorts, with each cohort having unique travel characteristics. Tourism providers need to understand how the tourist chooses a destination and opts for accommodation type (e.g., price of the room, facilities provided, and size of the room) which leads to establishing their needs and preferences while travelling. Thus, understanding the generational cohort in tourist behaviour is crucial in facilitating the effective prediction of tourism trends. This paper intends to review the generational shifts of Malaysian travel characteristics between the four categories of the cohort as defined by Lau (2018), namely, baby boomers, generation X, millennials and generation Z. The paper also identifies the travel characteristics of each cohort and makes a comparison between them.

2.0 LITERTURE REVIEW

2.1 Generational Theory

Yulia Florya (2014), stated that this theory was used to understand and characterize people according to their generational group based on their year of birth. According to Strauss & Howe (1997), the generational theory is distinctive in terms of the beliefs, interests, and traits of each generation. Thus, the generational theory has been used to understand, identify, categorize, and differentiate people according to their interests and beliefs. It shows the characteristics and behaviour of people born in the same year, which it then combines in one generation. The generational theory has been used in various research where it has divided groups according to their age since different generations characteristic depends on the year they were born and the environment in which they grew up (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In tourism, this theory has been used to understand the generational cohort characteristics, trends, demographics and the factors that influence them to travel

(Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). Thus, it is important to understand each generation's characteristics since the future growth of the tourism industry depends on each generation to define tourism market segmentation.

Based on previous research by Benckendorff et al., (2009), there are only four generations in existence, namely, the Baby Boomer generation (1943-1960), Generation X (1961-1981), Generation Y (1982-2002), and Generation Z (2003-present). In Malaysia, the study of generational cohorts had been lacking until a pioneering study was carried out in 2012 by Ting & de Run (Ting, Lim, de Run, Koh, & Sahdan, 2018). This study was limited to one state in Malaysia and five main generational cohorts were identified, namely, Battling-lifers, Idealistic-strugglers, Social-strivers, Prospective-pursuers and Neoteric-inheritors (Ting et al., 2018; Ting, Run, & Fam, 2012). In contrast to this study, Tung & Comeau (2014) identified four types of the cohort in Malaysia namely, The seekers, The builders, The developers and Generation Z. In comparison to the United States generational cohorts, the turn of events and time of each generation's existence, make Malaysian generational cohorts different from their United States counterparts. This paper attempts to review the generational shift of Malaysia with the four generational cohorts as referred to in the United States. To gain a better understanding of each of these generational cohorts, Figure 1 summarizes a compilation of the characteristics which refer to each of the United States generations.

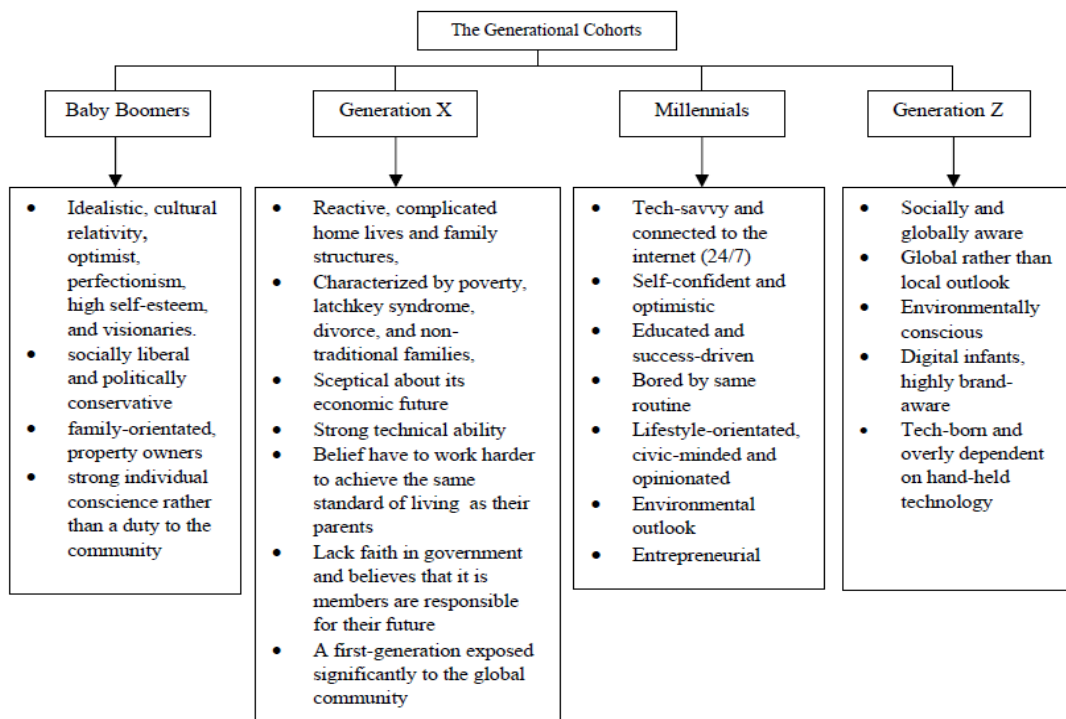


Figure 1: Summary of Generational Cohorts based on United States generations

Sources: Compiled from Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Pendergast (2013); Chapman (2016); Chumakov (2008); Corbisiero & Ruspini (2018); Frey (2018); Kebritchi & Sharifi (2016); Pendergast (2010); Shevchenko (2013); Turner (2015); Yulia Florya (2014)

2.1.1 Baby Boomer

The Baby Boomers generation has been referred to as “prophets”, they were born in the years 1943 to 1964 and they are the pioneering generation that exists in the world today

(Chumakov, 2008; Yulia Florya, 2014). Baby Boomers are associated with the end of World War II and the subsequent population explosion that followed (Chumakov, 2008), as a result of this, they generally possess a more limited knowledge of technology in comparison to subsequent generations. Shevchenko (2013), identified Baby Boomers as a generation with, honesty, interest instability and economic welfare, friendship, teamwork, and optimism. This generation is known for their optimism, and they are eager to achieve their goals and win, success is the main driving force for them (Yulia Florya, 2014). Baby Boomers always strive to overcome any difficulty they encounter, they take it as a personal challenge. According to Benckendorff et al., (2009), Baby Boomers have been categorized as an idealist type of generation that is known as "leaders that transfer their values".

2.1.2 Generation X

Born in the years 1965 to 1982 (Yulia Florya, 2014), Generation X is the next generation after the Baby Boomers. This generation has been referred to as "children with the keys on the neck" since they grew up in families with workaholic parents (Benckendorff et al., 2009; Chumakov, 2008; Yulia Florya, 2014). Based on the background of the years they were born, this generation faced a lot of problems, such as economic recession (Noble & Schewe, 2003), "cold war" and the war in Afghanistan (Yulia Florya, 2014), as well as divorced households, and workaholic parents (Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2005). These kinds of situations made Generation X independent and gave them a great sense in terms of dealing with people since they value human relationships. As a result, Generation X are good leaders with a great ability to build business relationships (Yulia Florya, 2014).

2.1.3 Millennials Generation

The Millennials generation, born during the years 1983 to 2000, is now entering into the phase of active life (Chumakov, 2008). Current research by Frey (2018) identified this generation as young people age 22 to 38 years old who are born in the years 1981-1997. Although referred to as Millennials, marketers also recognized this generation as "Net-Generation" and "Y Generation" (Chapman, 2016), and "network" (Yulia Florya, 2014). Unlike the previous generation, Millennials were born in the first generation of the era of the "Information Age" (Yulia Florya, 2014). Because of this, Millennials are known as a tech-savvy generation, they have grown up during the era of advanced technology (Benckendorff et al., 2009; Frey, 2018). This proves that technology is an important key in this generational approach to the tourism industry (Morrison, 2013). According to previous research, Millennials have high values in terms of responsibility, dignity, freedom, confidence, and they are relaxed, conservative, and educated (Benckendorff et al., 2013; Pendergast, 2010; Shevchenko, 2013; Yulia Florya, 2014).

2.1.4 Generation Z

As the offspring of Generation X, Generation Z has been raised during changes occasioned by the smartphone, internet, laptops, digital media, and free available network access (Tulgan, 2013). Generation Z, who has also been referred to as iGenerating, Post-Millennials, NextGen and Gen Wii (Raphelson, 2014; Turner, 2015) were born between the early 1990s and the year 2000 (Addor, 2011; Iorgulescu, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Tulgan, 2013). Previous researchers have also described generation Z as "postmillennial", "pivotal", "digital natives" or "centennials" (Research, 2011; Southgate, 2017). These generations are the descendants of the Baby Boomer generation and Millennials and are also known as a generation "being virtually connected" due to being tech-savvy (Kebritchi & Sharifi, 2016; Turner, 2015). They are considered a highly educated generation possessing creativity and innovation as well as the ability to multi-task in an increasingly changing environment (Corbisiero & Ruspini, 2018).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

To achieve the aim of providing a comprehensive review of findings and discussion on the Malaysian generational cohorts of domestic tourism, the keywords of *Generational cohort*, *travel characteristic*, and *Malaysian domestic tourist* were used to search for Malaysian generational cohorts articles published in academic journals. Not only that, but references in each published article were also traced. Each identified article was carefully read by both researchers to determine its inclusion for the analysis. Based on the analysis, both researchers made the decision on which article gave direct relevance to the topic of the study and needed to include in this study. Similar with other academic paper that review studies in different research topic, this study mainly focused on analyzed full-length articles that published in tourism and hospitality academic journals. Meanwhile, other sources such as book reviews, conference articles, internet columns, online news, and reports, were included if any of its showed the contribution to knowledge development regarding to the topic of this study.

At the end of the article reading and database searching, a total of 45 published studies were included in the analysis and been determined as relevant for this study. To ensure the accuracy of the article consequent to the theme of the study, both of the researchers independently reviewed all these articles again and categorized into four main generational cohorts namely, baby boomers, generation x, millennials, and generation z. In this study, the content analysis then has been used to examine the articles. Before the analysis, the travel characteristics for each Malaysian generational cohort were identified and were categorized under the four main cohorts. Then, input by both researchers were compared and cross checked to ensure the consistency on the topic of study. As showed in Table 1 under the discussion section, comparison between the generational cohorts were made and explained. In the subsequent section, the findings and discussion in the works of the analysis about Malaysian generational cohorts will be presented. Additionally, this study contributes and provides managerial implications for future research.

4.0 DISCUSSION

While the previous section focused on a description of the generational theory and the general characteristics of the generational cohort, this section has the important task of discussing the Malaysian generation cohorts in a domestic tourism context. As mentioned earlier, the Malaysian generational cohorts differ from other generational cohort studies which usually refer to the United States. It is important to note that the pioneering study of Malaysian generations was carried out by Ting et al. (2012) and this study was limited to one state in Malaysia (Ting et al., 2018). Findings from the study confirmed that Sarawak cohorts differed from the United States cohorts due to different major social events experienced and recalled by every age group (Ting et al., 2012). As a result, five cohorts have been listed in Sarawak, namely, Battling-lifers, Idealistic-strugglers, Social-strivers, Prospective-pursuers and Neoteric-inheritors. Despite the list of cohorts by Ting et al. (2018), further research about the Malaysian generational cohorts by Tung & Comeau (2014) has identified four cohorts that are different from the previous research, namely The Seekers, The Builders, The Developers and Generation Z. Although the western generations and Malaysia generations showed different major events and different birth years for each of the cohorts, those cohorts listed by Tung & Comeau (2014) seem to have similarities, in terms of living experiences, with the western generational cohorts. The literature reveals that each generational cohort has different behaviour and preferences that give each of the generations unique travel characteristics, which affects the decision-making process for tourism products and services. This section will be focused on the analysis of each

generational cohort in Malaysia based on this four cohorts list, concerning domestic tourism especially in terms of travel characteristics.

As the pioneering generational cohort in Malaysia, the Seekers generation was born in a period of hardship, conflict, and struggle in seeking independence (Tung & Comeau, 2014). People in this cohort are known as those who experienced British colonialism and witnessed Japanese occupation which pushed them on a desperate search for survival and independence, which has led to them being referred to as the Seekers generation. The situation that the Seekers generation went through does show similarities in living experience with the Baby Boomers generation who was born as a group that witnessed war and were desperate for survival (Tung & Comeau, 2014). This generation was born before the great technological advances of the late twentieth century, hence this generation is known as one that has limited knowledge in technology (Benckendorff et al., 2013). As reported by Amadeus Asia Pacific (2017), the Malaysian "Baby Boomers" recorded a stronger preference for using intermediaries than other generations in Malaysia. Because of this, when it comes to researching for trips or making a booking, the Malaysian Baby Boomers prefer to use intermediaries such as travel agencies to help them plan and book for their trips. In addition, results derived from the survey also showed that this generation tends to be influenced by word of mouth when planning for their trip (Amadeus Asia Pacific, 2017). The Boomers prefer to ask and get recommendations about tourism destinations from their family and friends. It can be concluded that the Seekers generation or Baby Boomers generation in Malaysia is a tech-limited generation that prefers to use the traditional ways of planning and organizing a trip rather than using technology.

According to Tung & Comeau (2014), the second generation in Malaysia, born between 1961 to 1981 is known as the Builders generation. The reason for the name Builders generation is because people of this generation witnessed the beginning of development in Malaysia which propelled the country towards a new era in economic self-control, education development, industrialization, and urbanization. Therefore, the Builders generation in Malaysia can be seen as Generation X. Although they have some knowledge of technology, they still stick to the traditional ways of daily life (Benckendorff et al., 2009). Evidence of this can be found in the latest literature by Ridzuan (2020) which mentions the individualistic values of Generation X tourists who still stick to the traditional ways of deciding on their tourism destination, products and services. This is also in keeping with a survey by Amadeus Asia Pacific (2017) which reports that Generation X also prefer to source information for their trips from family, friends, and colleagues. When planning a trip, this generation also still relies on traditional methods like travel agencies. Based on the explanation above, the Builders generation has a similarity in terms of living experience with Generation X since both generations provide the pathway for development towards the new era of modernization. People in this generation have a little more knowledge of technology.

The third generation on the cohort list is the Millennials generation, they are known to be the most open-minded generation and are always looking for the novelty of having fun while travelling (Benckendorff et al., 2009; Yulia Florya, 2014). In concurrence with that statement, Faat, Nasir, & Nor (2017) consider Malaysian Millennials as a young generation with a high level of education and experience in various cultures. As a result, Millennials possess a positive attitude towards travelling (Faat et al., 2017) and they have a keen interest in exploring new destinations, despite having the low disposable income (Chiu, Ramli, Yusof, & Ting, 2015; Cheah, Lim, & Kayat, 2015). This generation is also known as the Developers generation in Malaysia, due to their having grown up in the ever-advancing age of technology and being a part of helping Malaysia advance into a developed nation by 2020 (Tung & Comeau, 2014). In comparison to the previous generation, Malaysian

Millennials are much more likely to use mobile devices when it comes to searching for their trips (Amadeus Asia Pacific, 2017). Not only that, but the survey results also showed that Malaysian Millennials tend to be more influenced by content they see on travel blogs or forums compared to the previous generation. Based on this information, it is quite clear that the Millennials generation in Malaysia easily adapts to and uses technology in their daily life, especially while planning for their trips or while travelling. Additionally, although previous research by Gilbert & Terrata (2001) mentioned that Millennials prefer to travel abroad due to its being seen as a luxurious activity, the latest research states that Millennials prefer less budget travel and expect to gain more experience (Faat et al., 2017).

Generation Z is the latest addition to the generational cohorts list. Consequently, there is still a lack of study which describes and explains this generation, especially in the Malaysian generation context. According to Tung & Comeau (2014), Generation Z is born and grow up in a highly globalized world and are known as the most educated generation compared to the others. In the context of tourism, travel for generation Z is socialization, empowerment, and time for conviviality (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Therefore, Tung & Comeau (2014) mentioned that this generation likes to travel throughout the world as a result of higher income and higher consumption which makes travel more affordable. Although there are limited studies about this latest generation, it is possible to see from what is available that they are an over-tech generation. This is because they are born and grow up in an age of advancing technology, which makes them depend on that technology in their daily life.

Generally, each generational cohort has intensions to travel. However, technology is the main factor that differentiates each of the generations. For example, the Boomers generation that was born during and after the end of World War II, have very limited knowledge about communication technologies and only a limited number of people in this generation have that knowledge. Because of this, people from that generation prefer to stick with the old traditional method of travelling on a group trip with everything conducted and provided by a travel agent. In comparison to their parents, Generation X does have some knowledge of the technology, and they know how to get information, about tourism products and services by using that technology. However, they still prefer the traditional method of getting information while making choices and deciding on their tourism products and services. Usually, people in this generation still depend on the travel agent to create their travel itinerary. Millennials, however, who are born at the start of the era of technology have no difficulty in using that technology, it is easy for them to adapt to it. As for Generation Z, born after the Millennials, they are over-tech tourists born during the booming age of technology, this generation not only easily adapt to technology, but technology has become a part of their life. Thus, this generation cannot live without technology and prefer tourism destinations that provide internet services. To get a better understanding, Table 1 shows a summary of each Malaysian generational cohort travel characteristic.

Baby Boomers (The Seekers)	Generation X (The Builders)	Millennials (The Developers)	Generation Z
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer the traditional method of deciding for travelling • Find local language offerings and services while travelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tech-limited generation, they can use the technologies but only know how to use basic things. • Still stick to traditional method on getting information and deciding for tourism products and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tech-savvy generation with a high level of education • Seek novelty • High interest in exploring new places and culture • Having a low disposable income makes them budget-oriented tourist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-tech generation • Travel to the world • Higher-income and higher consumption • Most educated generation

Table 1: Summary of Malaysian generational cohort travel characteristics

Sources: Compiled from Amadeus Asia Pacific (2017); Chiu et al. (2015); Faat et al. (2017); Ridzuan (2020); Ting et al., (2015); Tung & Comeau (2014)

5.0 CONCLUSION

As the pandemic quickly spread across the world, many countries including Malaysia closed their borders to international tourists. Due to this situation, the Companies Commission of Malaysia, reports that various companies involved in the tourism industry such as hotel operators have shut down their businesses. As a result of this shut down of tourism companies, there has been a dramatic increase in the rate of unemployment. To counteract this situation, the Malaysian government has taken the step of introducing the Domestic Travel Bubble Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) as an initiative for growth in the tourism industry. This initiative should provide a positive impact on the tourism industry with Malaysian tourists being able to travel inside the country once again. The domestic tourism market in Malaysia involves a diverse range of tourism segments. Therefore, it is important to understand each cohort in terms of tourist behaviour to facilitate the effective prediction of tourism trends. The purpose of this paper is to identify the generational shift of Malaysian travel characteristics according to four cohorts known as the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z, then review and analyse each cohort's travel characteristics and makes a comparison between them.

Findings reveal that the Malaysian generational cohorts have close similarities with the western generational cohorts in terms of the living experiences of each generation and each cohort has distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from each other. From these characteristics, it is possible to ascertain various demands for tourism products and services. Tourism providers should give full attention to each cohort's needs and wants for their holiday experience purchases. Since each generational cohort has its own clearly defined preferences and characteristics regarding tourism products and services, it will influence their decision-making process while choosing the products and services. For example, Millennials prefer to use technologies such as travel websites to get information about tourism destinations in comparison to the Boomers generation and Generation X which prefer the traditional methods such as a brochure. Due to this reason, the tourism providers need to consider and understand each cohort's travel characteristics when providing tourism products and services that are friendly to any generation and all ages.

Findings from this paper not only have practical implications for the tourism stakeholders, but they also help to increase the body of knowledge for future research. Research gaps have been found that show existing studies specifically focused on certain cohorts, such as, Colli, Sharp, and Giesbrecht (2003) study on senior travellers' patterns, Etmiani-Ghasrodashti, Paydar, and Hamidi (2018) focused on young adult travellers, and Zulfakar and Rahim (2019) conducted comparison research about Malaysian and Thailand millennial's travel patterns. Thus, findings from this paper will help future researchers to explore more about each generational cohort in Malaysia. For example, the cohorts travel characteristics are the main key for each generation during the decision-making process for their destination of choice. Different generations have different travel characteristics that influence their decision-making process and any further research about the decision-making process is an opportunity to explore more about each generational cohort. The travel characteristics in this paper could be the variable factors with which to explore and gain more information on how each generation conducts the decision-making process to travel. This paper not only helps the future researcher by providing a reference, but the details on each generational cohort's travel characteristics could also help tourism providers acquire more information and understanding about each generation, and as a result, help them cater to the right segment of the domestic tourism market by relating their travel characteristics with their market segmentation.

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