

# What drives the willingness to travel? behavioral and psychological predictors among Generation Z

Research Article

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**Abstract:** The aim of the presented research was to quantitatively assess the extent to which behavioral factors (travel experience and autonomy in travel) and psychological factors (perceived travel stress and social discomfort) influence the desire to travel and explore new places among students belonging to Generation Z (Gen Z). The research was conducted in October 2024 on a sample of 404 respondents from the Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, with the target group being students at the bachelor's and master's levels of study. Data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire, the content of which focused on four key areas: travel experience, autonomy in travel, perception of travel-related stress, and social discomfort during interaction in a foreign environment. The data analysis was conducted using correlation and multiple linear regression analysis. The results showed that the most significant positive predictor of the desire to travel was the number of countries visited ( $B = 0.1927$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), while the perception of travel as a stressful factor had a statistically significant negative impact ( $B = -0.1563$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Other variables – willingness to travel alone and discomfort when ordering food – did not show statistical significance. Nonetheless, the model as a whole was statistically significant ( $F = 8.58$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings confirm the importance of behavioral and psychological factors in shaping travel motivation among young people. The research provides practical recommendations – such as strengthening students' travel competencies through international mobility and simultaneously reducing psychological barriers through the development of adaptation strategies. The results also provide a foundation for further research that could analyze a broader range of personality, value-based, and socio-environmental determinants of Gen Z's travel behavior.

**Keywords:** Generation Z • Travel motivation • Psychological barriers • Travel experience • Autonomous travel

## 1. Introduction

Travel as a form of leisure activity, self-development, or psycho-social regeneration is currently gaining new significance, especially in the context of post-pandemic changes, environmental challenges, and technological advancement. Generation Z (Gen Z), representing a cohort born during a time of extreme technological expansion, is increasingly becoming the focus of scientific interest as a group that fundamentally redefines consumer, digital, and travel patterns. This group is characterized by a high level of digital

literacy, strong value-driven beliefs, and at the same time specific mobility habits, which are also reflected in its distinct approach to travel compared to older generations (Busu & Busu, 2019; Olsson et al., 2020).

While some studies point to a preference for more ecological, safer, and more efficient transportation among younger generations, others warn against overgeneralizing these conclusions. Fisú et al. (2024) point out that most conclusions about Gen Z are based on research conducted in developed countries, which may lead to a distorted picture – in developing regions, the choice of means of transport is often determined by economic, cultural, or infrastructural factors that are fundamentally different.

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Therefore, it is important to perceive the travel behavior of Gen Z as highly heterogeneous and context-dependent.

Technological development, particularly in the field of autonomous vehicles (AV), brings new challenges as well as opportunities within travel behavior. Research by Maleki et al. (2021) pointed out that the introduction of AV technologies may stimulate longer and more frequent leisure trips, while in the area of business travel, it reduces costs and stress associated with work-related commuting. This suggests that new transport technologies can change not only the logistics of travel but also its emotional and motivational character.

User-generated digital content also plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of young travelers. Fronzetti Colladon et al. (2019) used semantic and network analysis of posts on online travel forums to predict tourist demand. It was shown that the linguistic complexity of posts and the level of discussion centralization can improve predictive performance compared to traditional models. These results indicate that Gen Z relies not only on personal experience when planning travel but also on recommendations and discussions in the online space.

While technological innovations have undoubtedly transformed mobility and travel planning, the present study does not focus on technological determinants. Instead, it concentrates on the behavioral and psychological mechanisms that shape Gen Z's willingness to travel. Behavioral factors refer to observable experiences and actions – such as prior travel experience and autonomy in trip planning – that can enhance confidence and motivation. Psychological factors, on the other hand, encompass emotional and cognitive states, including perceived travel stress or social discomfort when interacting in a foreign environment. By distinguishing between these two categories, the aim of this research is to provide a clearer understanding of how both experience-based and psychological mechanisms jointly influence young people's travel intentions.

In terms of Gen Z's motivations, a key predictor of travel intention is a positive attitude, as well as subjective norms – that is, the social expectations in their surroundings. According to research by Pan and Satchabut (2022), these factors statistically significantly influence students' travel decisions, while perceived behavioral control plays a less important role. This means that although young people are aware of possible barriers, travel intentions are most often shaped by their beliefs and the social environment in which they operate. This aligns with the assumption that travel decisions are guided both by internal dispositions (attitudes and emotions) and by external social influences.

In summary, the travel behavior of Gen Z is shaped by the interaction of individual attitudes, social norms, and

psychological dispositions, within a broader cultural and economic context. Research in this area is therefore essential not only from an academic perspective but also for the development of effective marketing and transport planning strategies that will reflect the needs and expectations of the emerging generation of travelers. Although Gen Z is often described as open to travel, little is known about the specific psychological barriers that influence their travel motivation. Despite the growing body of research on Gen Z's digital and social behaviors, there remains a lack of focus on the behavioral and psychological foundations of their travel motivation – particularly how experience, autonomy, stress, and social comfort interact to shape willingness to travel.

This gap motivates the present study, which is guided by two central research questions: (1) To what extent do travel experience and autonomy in travel influence the desire to travel and explore new places among Gen Z? and (2) Do psychological barriers – such as perceived travel stress and discomfort when interacting in a foreign environment – significantly affect the travel motivation of Gen Z?

The aim of the presented research is to quantitatively assess the extent to which behavioral factors (travel experience and autonomy in travel) and psychological factors (perceived travel stress and social discomfort) influence the desire to travel and explore new places among students belonging to Gen Z.

## 2. Literature review

Based on the analysis of current literature, it can be stated that the travel behavior of Gen Z represents a complex phenomenon determined by multiple factors – demographic, psychological, value-based, and technological. Several studies agree that age, gender, and place of residence significantly influence the travel motivations of young people. For example, women are more likely to travel for personal development and to establish social contacts, while men are more likely to seek adventure and nature experiences. At the same time, rural residents show higher motivation for autonomy and self-realization than their urban peers, who prefer new experiences and social interactions (Clodnitchi and Busu, 2017; Marques et al., 2025). However, for the purpose of this research, the review focuses on four key variables that constitute the empirical model: (1) Travel experience, (2) willingness to travel alone, (3) perceived travel stress, and (4) social discomfort in a foreign environment.

The issue of Gen Z's value background in relation to environmental sustainability is another significant thematic area. Research confirms that biospheric and altruistic values, combined with a sense of responsibility, have a positive impact on pro-environmental travel behavior (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, as shown by the results of segmentation studies, not all members of Gen Z act in accordance with their ecological values – only certain segments of the population exhibit consistent ecological behavior (Ivasciuc *et al.*, 2025a,b). An important finding is also the fact that Gen Z demonstrates increased sensitivity to the quality of the environment and often adjusts its travel behavior depending on the specific conditions of the urban and social environment (Chen *et al.*, 2021).

Among the psychological determinants of travel are the level of personal resilience and perceived vulnerability. Research conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic showed that respondents with higher psychological resilience were more likely to change their attitudes toward travel in a positive direction, while vulnerability did not represent a statistically significant factor (Mălăescu, 2025). In connection with this topic, it appears that Gen Z's risk perception during the pandemic period was more focused on unhygienic and organizational risks rather than on actual health threats (Dragin *et al.*, 2022), while overall fear of travel decreased in the second year of the pandemic. At the same time, changes in preferences emerged – young respondents focused more on individual forms of travel and accommodation, thus trying to minimize contact with larger groups (Rončák *et al.*, 2021).

Autonomy and willingness to travel alone have also received considerable attention in recent studies. Wachyuni (2023) found that the main motives for solo travel include the desire to discover new places, self-realization, interaction with local residents, and the need to escape everyday stress. Significant factors also include the influence of social media and inspiration. In a similar vein, Luan & Le (2024) confirmed that personal and intrapersonal barriers have a fundamental impact on Gen Z's intention to travel alone – with the technological advancement of this group reducing their dependence on traditional forms of support.

In addition to behavioral determinants, psychological factors play an equally important role in shaping willingness to travel. Two of the most relevant constructs are perceived travel stress and social discomfort during interactions in a foreign environment.

Technology plays a crucial role in the travel behavior of Gen Z. Research by Paliwal *et al.* (2025) points out that the metaverse and other innovative tools (e.g., AI and chatbots) are increasingly entering the travel planning process, with Gen Z especially valuing the cognitive and

functional aspects of these tools. A high level of digital literacy and, at the same time, segmentability based on preferences and values are also confirmed by findings from Italy, where university students showed differing environmental attitudes based on social background and political orientation (Serio *et al.*, 2025).

Social media and digital identities also play a crucial role. Yağmur (2024) found that Gen Z perceives platforms as a space for self-realization, presentation, and social interaction. Gen Z thus profiles itself as a consumer with a strong interest in technological support and autonomy in travel behavior. Popşa (2024) in his study confirms that social media and travel influencers have an impact on destination choice, while young travelers are also motivated by experiences, unique encounters, and the ecological aspects of a holiday.

Generational differences in motivations and preferences have also been confirmed by other studies. Vašaničová and Melnyk (2025) analyzed intergenerational differences in the travel behavior of Slovak women and found that Gen Z prefers different seasons, motives, and styles of organizing trips compared to older cohorts. Similarly, Long and Hien (2024) used an extended model of planned behavior and identified key factors such as attitude, motivation, perceived control, and price as predictors of destination choice. An interesting finding was that subjective norms did not play a significant role, which indicates a stronger individualism within this group.

An interesting extension of standard motivation models is the spiritual dimension of travel. Stojsavljević *et al.* (2023) developed a model of spiritual motivation for Gen Z, in which they identified dimensions such as spiritual and canonical experiences, an ascetic way of life, interactions, values, and participation in religious events. This model offers a new perspective on travel behavior, which may be driven by deeper value-based and spiritual needs.

Finally, the study by Vasiciuc *et al.* (2025) presents an innovative approach by combining traditional questionnaire research with predictions from an artificial intelligence model. The results show differences in behavior predictions between human and AI outputs, with AI indicating a stronger trend toward ecological transportation and stays in private accommodations. This approach confirms the potential of AI as a complementary tool in travel research, which can enrich the interpretation of Gen Z's behavior.

The synthesis of findings from the analyzed studies clearly indicates that the travel behavior of Gen Z is shaped by psychological, behavioral, and technological determinants. Prior studies emphasize that accumulated travel experience reduces uncertainty and strengthens

openness to further travel (Rončák et al., 2021), while autonomy and solo travel are often associated with self-realization and independence (Luan & Le, 2024; Nedelcu & Busu, 2016; Wachyuni, 2023). At the same time, demographic factors such as age, gender, and residence further influence the degree of autonomy sought by young travelers (Marques et al., 2025). On this basis, the first research hypothesis is formulated:

- **H1:** *The number of countries visited and the willingness to travel alone have a statistically significant positive impact on the desire to travel and explore new places among Gen Z.*

Equally important are psychological barriers, which the literature identifies as constraints to travel motivation. Studies show that perceived stress and vulnerability influence travel-related attitudes (Mălăescu, 2025) and that risk perception shapes behavioral choices, particularly in times of crisis (Dragin et al., 2022). While some barriers, such as fear of health risks, diminish over time, social discomfort and stress during travel remain relevant (Rončák et al., 2021). Consequently, the second hypothesis is formulated:

- **H2:** *The perception of travel as a stressful factor and discomfort during social interactions have a statistically significant negative impact on the desire to travel and explore new places among Gen Z.*

A systematic investigation of these hypotheses provides the foundation for the empirical model and guides the methodological design of the present study.

### 3. Methodology

The aim of the presented research is to quantitatively assess the extent to which behavioral factors (travel experience and autonomy in travel) and psychological factors (perceived travel stress and social discomfort) influence the desire to travel and explore new places among students belonging to Gen Z. To achieve this, an analytical model was developed in which the dependent variable was the desire to travel and explore new places ( $Y$ ). The set of independent variables included: the number of countries visited ( $X_1$ ), willingness to travel alone ( $X_2$ ), perception of travel as a stressful factor ( $X_3$ ), and discomfort when ordering food in a foreign environment ( $X_4$ ).

The empirical part of the study was carried out in October 2024 at the Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, specifically at the Faculty of Social and Economic Relations. The research population consisted of bachelor's

and master's students enrolled in the Human Resources and Personnel Management program, with purposive sampling applied within the faculty. A total of 404 valid responses were obtained.

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire distributed through the Survio platform. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire contained 16 closed items, evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The questions targeted four thematic areas: Travel experience, autonomy in travel, perception of travel-related stress, and social discomfort in everyday interactions while abroad. Demographic information, including age and gender, was also collected.

Data analysis relied on both correlation and multiple linear regression techniques. Correlation analysis provided insight into the strength and direction of associations between the variables, while multiple regression tested the predictive capacity of the independent variables on the dependent one. A significance threshold of  $\alpha = 0.05$  was applied in all tests. The assumptions of regression analysis were verified: Linearity was ensured through the construction of the questionnaire, normality of residuals was considered satisfied due to the large sample size ( $n = 404$ ), autocorrelation was excluded given the one-time data collection, and multicollinearity was tested and not detected.

The general regression model applied in this study can be expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

where

- $Y$  is the desire to travel and explore new places,
- $X_1$  is the number of countries visited,
- $X_2$  is the willingness to travel alone without company,
- $X_3$  is the perception of travel as a stressful factor,
- $X_4$  is the discomfort when ordering food in person or by phone,
- $\beta_1 - \beta_4$  is the effect size of each predictor,
- $\beta_0$  is the intercept, and
- $\varepsilon$  is the error term.

This methodological framework allowed the identification of behavioral and psychological predictors that shape travel motivation among members of Gen Z. By quantifying both experiential and attitudinal dimensions, the model provided a structured way to examine how past experiences, autonomy, and perceived barriers interact to influence the willingness of young people to explore new destinations.

## 4. Results

The purpose of this section is to present the results of the statistical analysis conducted with the aim of identifying factors influencing the desire to travel and explore new places among members of Gen Z. The results of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple linear regression, as well as the evaluation of the proposed hypotheses, are presented sequentially (Tables 1–3).

In the sample of 404 respondents, the highest average value was recorded for the dependent variable “Desire to travel and explore new places” ( $Y$ ), where the mean value reached 4.74. This result suggests that members of Gen Z show a high level of travel motivation and openness to discovering new locations. Most respondents indicated the highest possible value on the scale, which is also supported by the values of the mode and median, both of which reached the level of 5.

Willingness to travel alone without company ( $X_2$ ) with a mean value of 2.41, indicating a slightly lower than neutral willingness for solo travel. This is followed by “Number of countries visited” ( $X_1$ ) with a mean value of 2.39, which points to a relatively low but existing travel experience among respondents. The lowest average values were recorded for the variables “Perception of travel as a stressful factor” ( $X_3$ ) and “Discomfort when ordering food” ( $X_4$ ), which reached mean values of 1.40 and 2.01. These values suggest that most respondents do not perceive travel as stressful and do not feel significant discomfort during common interaction in a foreign environment.

The variance of responses was highest for variable  $X_2$  ( $SD = 1.72$ ), indicating significant variability in attitudes toward solo travel – some respondents strictly reject it, while others prefer it. In contrast, the most compact responses appeared for variable  $X_1$  ( $SD = 0.64$ ), which indicates greater homogeneity of travel experience within the sample.

|       | $X_1$      | $X_2$      | $X_3$      | $X_4$      | $Y$ |
|-------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----|
| $X_1$ | 1          |            |            |            |     |
| $X_2$ | 0.09553217 | 1          |            |            |     |
| $X_3$ | -0.251094  | -0.0931062 | 1          |            |     |
| $X_4$ | -0.1203447 | -0.1275918 | 0.24963811 | 1          |     |
| $Y$   | 0.20121702 | 0.10649166 | -0.2135938 | -0.0050348 | 1   |

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis.

Source: own elaboration

In terms of the shape of the distribution of responses, variable  $Y$  was strongly left-skewed (skewness =  $-3.16$ ) and at the same time, extremely peaked (kurtosis = 9.42), indicating a high concentration of values in the upper part of the scale. Variable  $X_3$  also showed pronounced right skewness (skewness = 2.32), suggesting that only a small portion of respondents consider travel to be stressful. The other variables ( $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ ,  $X_4$ ) were within the acceptable range of skewness and kurtosis, which supports the assumption of an approximately normal distribution of responses for most items.

Based on the correlation analysis, it can be stated that various types of relationships – both positive and negative – appear among the observed variables, with the intensity of these relationships falling within the range of weak correlation. The strongest positive relationship was found between the variable “Number of countries visited” ( $X_1$ ) and “Desire to travel and explore new places” ( $Y$ ), where the value of Pearson’s correlation coefficient reached  $r = 0.201$ . This result suggests that respondents who have visited more countries also show a slightly higher desire to explore new places.

A weak but positive relationship was also recorded between “Willingness to travel alone” ( $X_2$ ) and the dependent variable  $Y$  ( $r = 0.106$ ), which may indicate that respondents with a higher degree of autonomy in travel show

|                         | $X_1$      | $X_2$      | $X_3$      | $X_4$      | $Y$         |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Mean value              | 2.38861386 | 2.41089109 | 1.4009901  | 2.01485149 | 4.742574257 |
| Standard error          | 0.03192969 | 0.08555729 | 0.04669767 | 0.07565611 | 0.03959321  |
| Median                  | 2          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 5           |
| Mode                    | 3          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 5           |
| Standard deviation (SD) | 0.64177875 | 1.71968033 | 0.93861151 | 1.52066892 | 0.795813679 |
| Kurtosis                | -0.6322255 | -1.3774011 | 4.74811304 | -0.3891981 | 9.421928222 |
| Skewness                | -0.5681656 | 0.60650722 | 2.32467469 | 1.0981237  | -3.15673273 |

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the observed variables.

Source: own elaboration

|                   |              | Regression statistics |            |                            |                            |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Multiple R        | 0.28139592   |                       |            |                            |                            |
| R square          | 0.07918366   |                       |            |                            |                            |
| Adjusted R square | 0.06995242   |                       |            |                            |                            |
| Standard error    | 0.76747455   |                       |            |                            |                            |
| Observations      | 404          |                       |            |                            |                            |
| ANOVA             |              |                       |            |                            |                            |
|                   | df           | SS                    | MS         | F                          | Significance F             |
| Regression        | 4            | 20.20986623           | 5.05246656 | 8.57779143                 | 1.19606 × 10 <sup>-6</sup> |
| Residual          | 399          | 235.0178565           | 0.58901718 |                            |                            |
| Total             | 403          | 255.2277228           |            |                            |                            |
|                   | Coefficients | Standard error        | t Stat     | P-value                    |                            |
| Intercept         | 4.33395202   | 0.189506916           | 22.8696245 | 1.4187 × 10 <sup>-74</sup> |                            |
| X <sub>1</sub>    | 0.19272047   | 0.061804402           | 3.11823215 | 0.00195131                 |                            |
| X <sub>2</sub>    | 0.03861992   | 0.022513425           | 1.71541747 | 0.08704506                 |                            |
| X <sub>3</sub>    | -0.1563108   | 0.043267707           | -3.6126442 | 0.00034179                 |                            |
| X <sub>4</sub>    | 0.03681112   | 0.026154071           | 1.40747203 | 0.16006601                 |                            |

Table 3. Regression analysis.

Source: own elaboration

slightly higher travel motivation. Although this relationship is statistically borderline, its direction is consistent with expectations.

In terms of negative relationships, the most pronounced occurred between "Perception of travel as a stressful factor" (X<sub>3</sub>) and the desire to travel ( $r = -0.214$ ), which suggests that respondents who perceive travel as stressful have a lower tendency to travel and explore new places. Similarly, a very weak negative relationship was identified between "Discomfort when ordering food" (X<sub>4</sub>) and variable Y ( $r = -0.005$ ), with this value indicating a practically zero linear relationship between the variables.

In terms of relationships between the independent variables, the most pronounced negative relationship appeared between X<sub>1</sub> (number of countries) and X<sub>3</sub> (perception of stress), with a value of  $r = -0.251$ , which suggests that respondents with more travel experience are less likely to perceive travel as stressful. A weak positive relationship was also recorded between X<sub>3</sub> and X<sub>4</sub> ( $r = 0.250$ ), which may indicate that people who feel stress when traveling also more often experience discomfort when interacting in a foreign environment.

Overall, it turned out that several relationships between the variables make logical psychological as well as behavioral sense, with significant correlations between the independent and dependent variable providing a solid basis for subsequent testing using regression analysis.

Based on the outputs from the multiple linear regression, it can be stated that two of the independent variables – "Number of countries visited" (X<sub>1</sub>) and "Perception of travel as a stressful factor" (X<sub>3</sub>) – have a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable "Desire to travel and explore new places" (Y). The remaining two variables – "Willingness to travel alone without company" (X<sub>2</sub>) and "Discomfort when ordering food" (X<sub>4</sub>) – did not show a statistically significant effect at the 0.05 significance level. The coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.079$  indicates that the model explains approximately 7.9% of the variability in the dependent variable, which, in the context of the social sciences, represents an adequate though lower explanatory power.

The ANOVA test confirmed that the model as a whole is statistically significant ( $F = 8.58$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that, taken together, the included independent variables significantly contribute to explaining the variability in the desire to travel.

In terms of individual effects, the most pronounced positive impact was "Number of countries visited" (X<sub>1</sub>) ( $B = 0.1927$ ;  $p \approx 0.0019$ ), which means that the more countries a respondent has visited, the greater their reported desire to travel and explore new places. Conversely, "Perception of travel as a stressful factor" (X<sub>3</sub>) had a negative and statistically significant impact ( $B = -0.1563$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which suggests that among respondents who consider travel stressful, the desire to travel is significantly lower.

The variables “Willingness to travel alone” ( $X_2$ ) and “Discomfort when ordering food” ( $X_4$ ) did show weak positive coefficients ( $B = 0.0386$ ;  $B = 0.0368$ ), but their impact was not statistically significant ( $p \approx 0.087$  and  $0.160$ ), and therefore their effect should be interpreted with caution.

The resulting regression equation has the following form:

$$Y = 4.3340 + 0.1927 X_1 + 0.0386 X_2 - 0.1563 X_3 + 0.0368 X_4.$$

This model shows that travel experience ( $X_1$ ) supports respondents’ desire to travel, while psychological barriers in the form of travel-related stress ( $X_3$ ) dampen it. The other factors (autonomy and social discomfort) proved to be secondary influences that do not play a decisive role in this model.

Based on the statistical analyses, it was possible to verify all the proposed hypotheses in the context of the presented model.

## 5. Evaluation of hypotheses

|    | Hypothesis formulation                                                                                                                                                               | Result |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| H1 | The number of countries visited and the willingness to travel alone have a statistically significant impact on the desire to travel and explore new places among Gen Z.              | C      |
| H2 | The perception of travel as a stressful factor and discomfort when ordering food have a statistically significant impact on the desire to travel and explore new places among Gen Z. | R      |

Legend: C – confirmed (the hypothesis was statistically supported)  
R – rejected (the hypothesis was not statistically supported).

Within the model aimed at identifying predictors of Gen Z’s desire to travel and explore new places, mixed results were obtained. Hypothesis H1, which assumed a significant impact of the number of countries visited ( $X_1$ ) and willingness to travel alone ( $X_2$ ), was partially confirmed – variable  $X_1$  was a statistically significant positive predictor ( $B = 0.1927$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), while  $X_2$  did not demonstrate statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ). Given that the hypothesis referred to the effect of both variables as a whole, and at least one of them significantly contributed to explaining the variability in the dependent variable, the hypothesis as a whole was classified as confirmed (C).

Conversely, hypothesis H2, which assumed a significant impact of the perception of travel-related stress ( $X_3$ ) and discomfort when ordering food ( $X_4$ ), was classified as rejected (R). Although  $X_3$  demonstrated a statistically significant negative effect on the desire to travel ( $B = -0.1563$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), the second variable  $X_4$  did not complement this effect – its impact was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Even though  $X_3$  is a strong predictor in the model, the hypothesis was formulated as a set of two factors, and therefore it was evaluated as not fully supported.

These findings suggest that travel experience (represented by  $X_1$ ) significantly strengthens the travel motivation of the young population. Conversely, psychological barriers such as the perception of travel-related stress weaken it, while social interaction barriers (such as discomfort when ordering food) did not prove decisive in this model. The results thus point to the differing weight of behavioral vs psychological factors and create room for further examination of motivational mechanisms in the context of autonomous travel among young people.

## 6. Discussion

The research results bring several important findings that help clarify the factors influencing the desire to travel and explore new places among members of Gen Z. The analytical model, consisting of four independent variables, confirmed that the desire to travel is most strongly influenced by travel experience and the perception of travel-related stress. These results correspond with findings from the literature, which point to the importance of both behavioral and psychological factors in shaping the travel motivation of young people (Dragin et al., 2022; Marques et al., 2025; Mălăescu, 2025).

By answering the first research question, it was confirmed that the number of countries visited has a statistically significant positive effect on the desire to travel ( $B = 0.1927$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), which suggests that accumulated travel experience increases openness to further exploration. This relationship is also supported by the results of the correlation analysis, where the strongest positive relationship between variables  $X_1$  and  $Y$  was recorded ( $r = 0.201$ ). In line with this result, the literature repeatedly emphasizes the experiential framework, which shapes attitudes, reduces barriers, and increases self-confidence in travel (Rončák et al., 2021; Wachyuni, 2023). Conversely, the variable representing the willingness to travel alone ( $X_2$ ) did indicate a positive trend ( $B = 0.0386$ ), but its effect was not statistically significant ( $p \approx 0.087$ ), which may indicate that while autonomy in travel may be perceived as important, in

practice, it may not yet manifest as a decisive motivational factor. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that solo travel is still associated with certain barriers that are not captured in the applied model (Luan, 2024).

The second research question focused on the impact of psychological barriers on travel motivation. The results showed that the variable “Perception of travel as a stressful factor” ( $X_3$ ) had a statistically significant negative effect ( $B = -0.1563$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that a higher level of stress during travel is associated with a lower desire to explore new places. The correlation analysis supports this relationship with a moderately strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.214$ ). These findings are consistent with previous studies, which have shown that psychological resilience significantly influences attitudes toward travel (Mălăescu, 2025). Conversely, the variable “Discomfort when ordering food” ( $X_4$ ) did not prove to be statistically significant ( $p \approx 0.160$ ), suggesting that social discomfort in simple interactions in a foreign environment is unlikely to represent a substantial barrier in the travel behavior of Gen Z. This result can also be interpreted in light of the high digital literacy of young people, who can use technology to simplify many aspects of travel (Paliwal et al., 2025; Yağmur, 2024).

In the context of previous research, these findings complement existing knowledge by quantitatively confirming the importance of behavioral experience and psychological attitudes in shaping travel motivation. While Gen Z tends toward autonomy and technological support, the emotional mindset toward the very process of travel – specifically perceived stress – plays a more significant role than is often assumed. At the same time, it has been shown that although digital skills may alleviate social concerns, their impact on the overall desire to travel may not be strong enough to act as a motivator.

In conclusion, several recommendations can be formulated. In the field of education and development, it would be appropriate to create opportunities for gaining travel experience already during studies, for example, through exchange programs, internships, or short-term projects abroad. Such initiatives can strengthen students’ self-confidence and reduce perceived travel-related stress. At the same time, it is important to address psychological barriers through mental health support and the development of adaptation strategies. Travel agencies and destinations should offer solutions that reduce uncertainty – for example, detailed guides, localized applications, or options for online communication in the native language. Last but not least, future research could expand the analysis with qualitative components that would allow for a better understanding of the individual experience of stress, autonomy, and travel preferences among young people in a changing world.

## 7. Limitations

This study provides valuable insights into the behavioral and psychological predictors of travel willingness among Gen Z students. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The most significant constraint is the limited scope of the sample, which included participants from a single faculty at one university in Slovakia. This restriction was primarily due to logistical and organizational constraints, including access limitations and feasibility of broader participant recruitment. As a result, the generalizability of the findings to the broader Gen Z population is restricted. While the results offer important preliminary indications, they should be interpreted with caution and within the context of the specific academic and cultural environment of the surveyed institution.

To address these limitations, future research is encouraged to include a more diverse and representative sample, ideally at the national or international level, to validate the present findings across different educational and socio-cultural settings.

## 8. Conclusion

The results of the presented research clearly confirm that the travel behavior of Gen Z is shaped by a combination of behavioral experience and psychological attitudes. Of all the analyzed factors, the number of countries visited proved to be the strongest predictor of the desire to travel. This variable significantly influenced the level of travel motivation and confirmed that personal experience and past travel increase the willingness to further explore new places. Conversely, perceiving travel as a stressful factor weakened this desire – emphasizing the importance of individuals’ emotional and mental mindset when making travel decisions.

Variables such as autonomy in travel and social discomfort in a foreign environment did show a logical direction of influence, but their effect was not statistically significant. These findings suggest that while solo travel and digital skills may be relevant for trip planning, their mere existence does not yet guarantee an increase in travel motivation. We can therefore assume that, for young people, it is specifically lived experiences and the emotional evaluation of travel as an activity that play the most important role.

The analytical model itself demonstrated a modest yet statistically significant ability to predict the desire to travel and explore new places, which is usually acceptable in the context of socio-psychological research. At the same time, however, it suggests that there are other important factors

that may influence the travel behavior of Gen Z. Such factors may include, for example, value orientation, level of self-confidence, socio-economic status, technological equipment, or environmental beliefs – and it is precisely these that could be the subject of future research efforts.

Based on the findings of this research, several specific measures can be recommended. First and foremost, universities, educational institutions, and youth organizations should support the acquisition of travel experience already during studies – for example, through mobility programs, exchange programs, or internships. These initiatives can not only broaden horizons but also reduce psychological barriers that prevent young people from traveling actively. At the same time, it is desirable to work purposefully on reducing travel-related stress – for example, through the development of adaptation strategies, stress management training, or strengthening competencies in unfamiliar environments.

For the field of marketing and planning in tourism, these findings imply the need to create offers that take into account the experiential capital of young people as well as their sensitivity to psychological barriers. Personalized offers, an emphasis on safety, clear, and transparent information, digital accessibility of services, and support for autonomous decision-making can significantly contribute to increasing the willingness to travel in this age group.

At the same time, future research should go beyond quantitative analysis and integrate qualitative approaches that would allow for a better understanding of the inner motivations, fears, and values of young people when making travel decisions. Only in this way will it be possible to grasp the complexity of Gen Z's travel behavior at a time when mobility, safety, and mental well-being are becoming key challenges of the present.

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## Author contributions

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## Conflict of interest statement

Authors state no conflict of interest.

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