



Generation Z's Value Perception and Advocacy of Accommodation Promotions Offered by Online Travel Agencies

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Abstract

The current study aims to assess the effectiveness of six accommodation promotions offered by online travel agencies (OTAs) for Generation Z customers (born from 1997 to 2012) and to examine the relationship between Generation Z's perceived value of these promotions and their likelihood to advocate them. The study employed experimental research, using survey questionnaires, to gather data from 420 Generation Z respondents in Thailand. The findings reveal that the six promotions are equally effective, without any distinctive perceived value ratings or noticeable likelihood of recommending the promotion. Moreover, both price and emotional values have positive influences on Generation Z's tendency to advocate the promotions. Therefore, OTAs are recommended to craft promotions that better resonate with Generation Z customers and leverage their potential to serve as promotion advocates by focusing on providing them with both price and emotional values.

Keywords: 1) Generation Z 2) Online Travel Agency 3) Perceived Value 4) Promotion 5) Word of Mouth

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Introduction

Effective promotions are crucial for online travel agencies (OTAs) that partner with hotels to help sell the accommodations. Customer tastes have become complex, which has necessitated managers to deploy multiple promotions (Kaneko and Yada, 2017, p. 19). In Thailand, OTAs have become a progressively integral booking channel. By June 2023, 44% of Thai respondents had used OTAs (Statista, 2023). A study conducted by European Travel Commission (ETC), in December 2019, revealed that Generation Z's favored channels for booking accommodations, when travelling, were OTAs (43%), followed by direct channels (26%), metasearch engines (21%) and offline channels (9%) (European Travel Commission, 2020).

Among different age cohorts, Generation Z customers certainly warrant attention and research among academics and practitioners. Generation Z are the largest generation in the world (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2021, p. 26). They were born from 1997 to 2012 (Beresford Research, 2023). Since they were born, when the internet had already become conventional, they are regarded as the very first digital natives (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2021, p. 25). In terms of behaviors, they express the need for convenience, innovation, security, and escapism (Wood, 2013). Generation Z travelers are considered as the next wave of travelers (Mandelbaum, 2016), and they have gained influence in making decisions regarding family travel (Ting, 2016). According to a 2024 Statista survey, while the average global traveler took 2.4 domestic trips and 1.9 international trips in 2023, Generation Z were

keener to travel abroad that year, averaging 2.1 international trips respectively (Statista, 2024).

Despite the importance of Generation Z as a viable target market, there is a scarcity of research exploring how Generation Z customers evaluate promotions offered by OTAs. To the best of researchers' knowledge, no studies have investigated whether the marketing promotions of OTAs influence Generation Z's perceived value and word-of-mouth intention in the context of Thailand. Therefore, this study aims to empirically contribute to this insight. Additionally, the study seeks to understand whether Generation Z customers' perceived value towards promotions can lead to buzz marketing.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Development

1. Promotions

Promotions are important, especially for services, due to the perishability of the offers. It has been established that marketing promotions impact customer behavior. To exemplify, customers considered delaying their purchase of an offer at full price in order to purchase it later during a clearance sale (Cachon and Swinney, 2011, p. 781). Nevertheless, not all promotions are perceived to provide similar levels of values to customers. Numerous researchers have found that the framing or presentation of messages about products impacts customers' purchase intention or behavior (Gendall, et al., 2006, p. 458).

2. Customer Reviews and Ratings

With the growth of online communities, many customers share their experiences



about products and services online, allowing other customers' to learn more about products and services, before making their own purchasing decisions. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been described as the exchange of consumers' experiences about products and services in internet-mediated communities (Dellarocas, Zhang and Awad, 2007, p. 24). In the tourism industry, particularly the hotel sector, eWOM has a strong impact (Sann and Lai, 2019, p. 2). Consumers are increasingly relying on online reviews, ratings, and recommendations from online intermediaries when deciding on hotel bookings (Cezar and Ögüt, 2016, p. 300). Research reveals that better customer ratings lead to both increased sales and higher room prices for the hotel (Ögüt and Taş, 2012, p. 210).

3. Free Booking Cancellation

Using their smartphones, customers can book or cancel their travel plans easily anywhere and anytime (Lee, Yang and Chung, 2021, p. 2). When booking hotels, customers have the choice of making non-refundable bookings at a lower price, or bookings with free cancellation option at a higher price. Offering the option to cancel a hotel booking at a low cost benefits guests, but it is less favorable for hotels. A substantial portion of hotel bookings are not fulfilled due to cancellations or no-shows (Falk and Vieru, p. 3100). Research reveals that there are many factors related to the likelihood of cancelling hotel bookings, including booking lead time, country of residence, season, composition and size of the travel group, and channel used for booking (Falk and Vieru, p. 3109).

4. Free Gifts

Free gifts are one of the promotion efforts that hotels employ to persuade customers to make purchases. Consumers who feel a stronger social connection after receiving a gift from a company are more inclined to engage in behaviors that ultimately benefit the company (Tang, et al., 2020, p. 2494). Research has demonstrated that free gifts can positively affect purchase intention (Zhang and Wang, 2024, p. 3254). However, not all kinds of gifts are assessed positively. A low-fit gift may undermine consumers' assessment of the promoted product (Park and Yi, 2019, p. 1436).

5. Price Fence

A price fence is a method of charging different customers varying prices for the same products and services using the same metrics (Nagle and Müller, 2018, p. 102). To be perceived as fair, a rate fence must be clear, logical, and difficult to evade (Guillet, Guo and Law, 2015, p. 836). Poorly designed rate fences may cause dissatisfaction and confusion for consumers (Guillet and Xu, 2013, p. 336).

When there is a difference in the timing that customers in different market segments purchase, it is possible to segment customers using time fence. For instance, some hotels use time fence and offer special rates, if guests use the service during low seasons, or if customers book within the specified time. In addition, when there is a difference in the customer characteristics, it is possible to segment customers using the buyer identification fence. For example, it is evident that children receive special treatments in terms of discounted price or free entry only provided that their height is

below the specified height.

6. Environmental Pillar of Sustainability

Hotels that implement sustainable practices and focus on using environmentally-friendly products and services are referred to as green hotels (Khalil, et al., 2024, p. 657). In general, customers who express environmental concern tend to support green hotels, if their support does not lead to the sacrifice of their comfort. A positive relationship was found between consumers' environmental beliefs and their attitudes and behaviors towards green hotels, while a negative relationship was observed between beliefs about luxury and attitudes and behaviors towards green hotels, indicating that if consumers perceive green hotels as less luxurious, they are less likely to have a positive attitude towards green hotels, choose them, or pay a premium (Line and Hanks, 2016, p. 919).

7. Customers' Perceived Value

Perceived value is the overall assessment made by consumers regarding the utility of a product, based on their perceptions of what is received in relation to what is given (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). The Theory of Consumption Value (TCV) explains that five dimensions of perceived consumption values, namely functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional value, affect consumers' choice (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991, pp. 160-162). Sweeney and Soutar developed the 19-item PERVAL scale, which incorporates four distinct dimensions of consumer perceived value, specifically emotional, social, price and quality dimensions (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 211). The scale was found to explain

consumer choice validly and reliably in both pre-purchase and post-purchase situations (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, pp. 211-216).

Sweeney and Soutar (2001, p. 211) described emotional value as "the utility derived from the feelings or affective states that a product generates"; social value as "the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self-concept"; price value as "the utility derived from the product due to the reduction of its perceived short term and longer term costs"; and quality value as "the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product".

Providing exceptional customer value has increasingly become a continuous focus for creating and maintaining competitive advantage by enhancing customer relationship management (CRM) effectiveness (Wang, et al., 2004, p. 169).

8. Word of Mouth Marketing

Word of mouth refers to the informal communication about products and services between individuals who experienced these products or services and those who are interested in consuming (Jalilvand, et al., 2017, p. 81). Word of mouth communication provides customers with several benefits, compared to other sources of marketing information. For instance, word of mouth is perceived as more credible and trustworthy compared to paid advertising media (Sivadas and Jindal, 2017, p. 120). Word of mouth marketing is also beneficial for firms in several ways. For example, positive word of mouth signals customers' brand loyalty and enhances the chances that they will purchase the firm's products and services



(Sivadas and Jindal, 2017, p. 121).

Based on literature review, the researchers have developed six manifestations

of promotions to be investigated in the current study as illustrated in Figure 1.

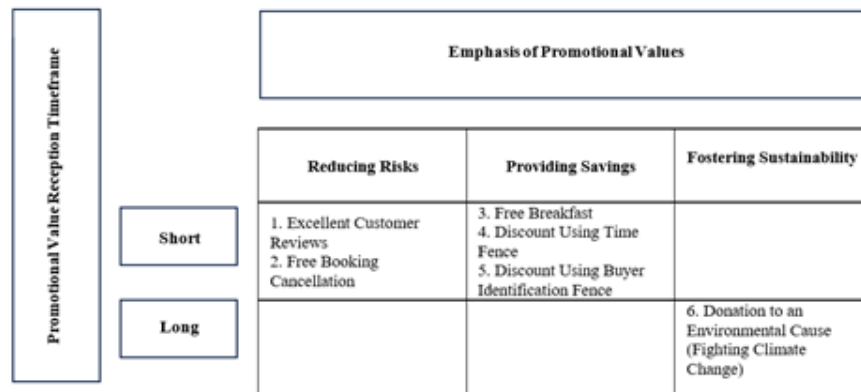


Figure 1 Manifestations of OTAs' Promotions

9. The Relationship between Marketing Promotions, Perceived Value, and Word of Mouth Marketing

Various promotions are used by marketers to differentiate their market offering from competitors and to attract customers. The growing frequency of promotions by retailers in recent years has made it more important to study how consumers perceive the promotional framing of prices (Li, Sun and Wang, 2007, p. 418). The manner in which the information is presented notably influences consumer preferences for deals, even when the unit cost or total costs of the deals are identical (Smith and Sinha, 2000, p. 83).

Regarding the relationship between perceived value and word of mouth, customers' value perception has a strong impact on their word of mouth intentions (Mayr and Zins, 2012, p. 372.)

Based on the literature review, for the current study, the researchers posit the following hypotheses to be tested:

H1: There is a difference in Generation Z's perceived value towards different promotions.

H2: There is a difference in Generation Z's likelihood of recommending different promotions to others.

H3: Generation Z's perceived value towards the promotions has a positive effect on their likelihood of recommending the promotions to others.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

The current study employed a quantitative research methodology. An experiment, using 6 promotion treatments in a between-subject setting, was designed. An experimental design is useful in consumer research in investigating the relationship between cause and effect (Royne, 2008, p. 482). An online cross-sectional self-administered structured survey was developed to evaluate Generation Z's value perception and

likelihood of recommending six different promotions offered by OTAs.

To test the value perception and likelihood of recommending each of the six promotions, a hypothetical OTA selling hotel accommodation was developed, describing the product offered along with the promotion. Experiments using scenarios can reduce biases resulting from memory retrieval, tendencies to rationalize, and consistency factors (Grewal, Hardesty and Iyer, 2004, p. 90). All promotions presented to Generation Z respondents were similar in terms of the total price that the customer had to finally pay, after receiving the promotion.

First screening questions were used to obtain only Generation Z respondents, who had experience booking accommodations through OTAs in the past 12 months. Then, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the six scenarios, which described the promotion offered by an OTA. Then, they were asked questions about their value perception towards the promotion, their likelihood of recommending the promotion to others, and their demographic data. The six scenarios describing different promotions were as follows:

Scenario 1: Regular price with excellent customer reviews

Imagine you are going on a trip with your family to another province. You visit the online travel agency website and look for a hotel to stay in that province. The price you find is THB 1,500 THB per night. The room can accommodate up to 2 adults and 2 children below 12 years old. The average customer rating of the room is 8.8/10.

Scenario 2: Regular price with free booking cancellation

Imagine you are going on a trip with your family to another province. You visit the online travel agency website and look for a hotel to stay in that province. The price you find is THB 1,500 per night. The room can accommodate up to 2 adults and 2 children below 12 years old. The online travel agency allows free cancellation of your booking until one day before the date of the arrival/check-in. For example, if you book to check in on 2nd April, you can cancel your booking until 1st April 23.59 hours.

Scenario 3: Regular price with free breakfast

Imagine you are going on a trip with your family to another province. You visit the online travel agency website and look for a hotel to stay in that province. The price you find is THB 1,500 per night. The room can accommodate up to 2 adults and 2 children below 12 years old. The hotel offers free breakfast for two adults and 2 children below 12 years old.

Scenario 4: Discounted price using time fence

Imagine you are going on a trip with your family to another province. You visit the online travel agency website and look for a hotel to stay in that province. The price you find is THB 2,000 per night. The room can accommodate up to 2 adults and 2 children below 12 years. You will receive 25% discount if you book within 72 hours (3 days) after seeing this promotion.



Scenario 5: Discounted price using buyer identification fence

Imagine you are going on a trip with your family to another province. You visit the online travel agency website and look for a hotel to stay in that province. The price you find is THB 2,000 per night. The room can accommodate up to 2 adults and 2 children below 12 years. You will receive 25% discount, if you are a student and present your student card when you check-in.

Scenario 6: Regular price with the OTA's donation to a charity that supports an environmental cause - fighting climate change

Imagine you are going on a trip with your family to another province. You visit the online travel agency website and look for a hotel to stay in that province. The price you find is THB 1,500 per night. The room can accommodate up to 2 adults and 2 children below 12 years old. For every booking made, the online travel agency donates THB 100 to a charity that supports an environmental cause - fighting climate change.

2. Sample

Purposive sampling method, which depends on the researchers' judgment that the sample would represent the target population, was used (Tunsakul, 2020, p. 10). During April-May 2024, data was collected from 420 Generation Z respondents, who had experience using OTAs to book accommodations in the past 12 months. In total, 70 respondents were randomly assigned to each of the six promotion scenarios. Research designs with a minimum of 30 samples assigned to each experimental condition is recommended (Hernandez, Basso and Brandão, 2014, p. 111).

3. Survey Instrument

Since the respondents were Thais, the scenarios and questionnaire had to be translated into Thai language. To measure value perception, the constructs of perceived price value, perceived social value, and perceived emotional value were adapted from a prior study (Okur, et al., 2023, p. 836), as illustrated in Table 1. 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the extent to which respondents agreed with the statements.

Table 1 Customers' Perceived Value Measures

Perceived Price Value	
1	The offer is economical.
2	The offer is reasonably priced.
3	The offer provides value for money.
4	The offer is good for the price.
Perceived Social Value	
1	Taking the offer would improve the way I am perceived.
2	Taking the offer would give me social approval.
3	Taking the offer would make other people have a good impression on me.
4	Taking the offer would help me to feel acceptable.

Perceived Emotional Value	
1	Taking the offer would make me feel good.
2	Taking the offer would make me feel relaxed.
3	Taking the offer would give me pleasure.
4	I would like to take this offer.
5	I would enjoy taking this offer.

To measure the likelihood of recommending the promotion to others, 3-item positive word of mouth intention scales employed in a prior study were adapted (Van Tonder,

et al, 2018, p. 1357), as shown in Table 2. Respondents were asked, using 5-point Likert scale, the extent to which they agreed with the statements.

Table 2 Customers' Likelihood of Recommending the Promotion Measures

Likelihood of Recommending the Promotion	
1	If asked, I would say positive things about the offer.
2	If asked, I would recommend the offer to others.
3	If asked, I would encourage other people to take the offer.

4. Data Collection

The Generation Z respondents were students studying in the universities located in Bangkok, Thailand, where the researchers work. The students were contacted through Line application groups, created for each class section, during April-May 2024. In total, 520 students were contacted, and the researchers received a total of 420 responses (80.77% response rate). The students were requested to complete the online survey created by the researchers using Google Form. Before the respondents answered the main questionnaire, two screening questions were used to ensure that they belonged to Generation Z (born from 1997 to 2012) and had experience booking accommodations via OTAs within the past 12 months. The survey of the participants would be terminated, if they failed to pass any of the two screening questions.

After random assignment to one of the promotion scenarios, respondents were requested to read the promotion description provided before answering questions about their value perception towards the promotion, their likelihood of recommending the promotion to others, and their demographic data. To reduce order bias, separate sections were created in Google Form to measure each construct, namely perceived value and likelihood of recommending the promotion. Within each construct, the items were set to shuffle automatically, so as to reduce the extent of order bias effects. All questions within the Google Form were set as mandatory, thereby ensuring the completeness of responses. In order to be able to compare the responses towards the six different promotions, the same questionnaire was used for all six groups of respondents.



5. Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the data. A one-way ANOVA test was used to assess the effectiveness of various promotions in terms of customers' value perception and likelihood of recommending the promotion to others. In addition, multiple regression was performed to measure the influence of Generation Z's perceived price value, social value, and emotional value on their likelihood of recommending the promotions to others.

Results

Most of the respondents were females, accounting for 67.4%, and the average age of the respondents was 20.84 years. The majority were singles at 98.8% with around

three-quarters studying at the undergraduate level. 87.9% of the respondents were still students, and approximately three out of four respondents had an average monthly personal income before tax deduction of less than THB 15,000.

The reliability of the constructs comprising multiple test items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α). The tests showed that all Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the constructs used in the current study had values ranging between 0.890 and 0.931, higher than the minimum threshold limit of 0.7 recommended (Torroba Diaz, et al., 2023, p. 1495), indicating an acceptable level of reliability. The values of Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the constructs are provided in Table 3.

Table 3 Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Values

Constructs (Number of Items)	Cronbach's Alpha
Overall Perceived Value (10)	0.931
Perceived Price Value (4)	0.899
Perceived Social Value (4)	0.928
Perceived Emotional Value (5)	0.905
Likelihood of Recommending the Promotion (3)	0.890

The means of the perceived value towards the six promotions range from 3.79 to 3.99, while the means of the likelihood of recommending the promotions to others vary from 4.03 to 4.15 as illustrated in Figure 2. It is

noticeable that for all promotions, the means for the tendency to recommend the promotion are higher than the means for perceived value.

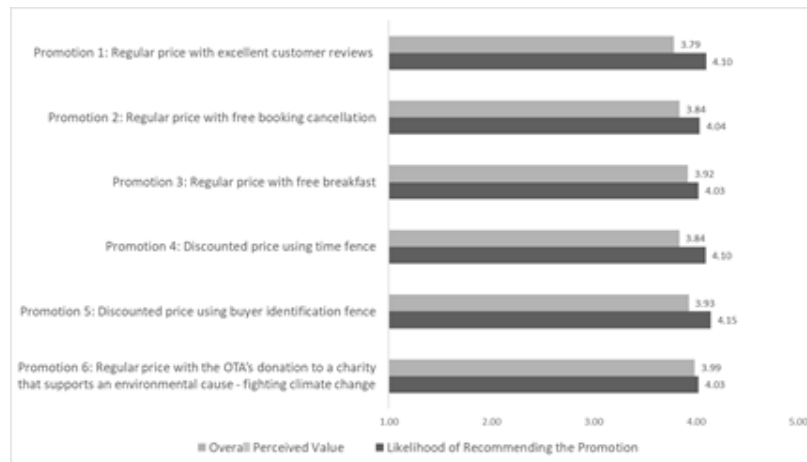


Figure 2 Means of Perceived Value and Likelihood of Recommending the Promotion

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the means of perceived value for various promotions and to compare the means

for the likelihood of recommending the various promotions. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 One-Way ANOVA Results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Overall Perceived Value	Between Groups	1.990	5	.398	.664	.651
	Within Groups	247.969	414	.599		
	Total	249.959	419			
Likelihood of Recommending the Promotion	Between Groups	.837	5	.167	.234	.947
	Within Groups	296.035	414	.715		
	Total	296.872	419			

No statistically significant differences were detected in the perceived value towards various promotional tactics and in the likelihood of recommending these promotions at 0.05 significance level, necessitating the rejection of H1 and H2.

To test whether Generation Z's perceived value towards promotions has a positive effect on their likelihood of recommending the promotions to others, multiple regression was performed. The following model was run using multiple regression analysis:

Likelihood to Recommend the Promotion = $\alpha + \beta_1$ (Perceived Price Value) + β_2 (Perceived Social Value) + β_3 (Perceived Emotional Value) + e

The result of the multiple regression analysis is provided in Table 5.

**Table 5** Multiple Regression Results

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	β			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.133	0.179		6.316	0.000*		
Perceived Price Value	0.313	0.064	0.286	4.851	0.000*	0.409	2.447
Perceived Social Value	0.027	0.04	0.035	0.673	0.502	0.537	1.861
Perceived Emotional Value	0.385	0.073	0.369	5.238	0.000*	0.287	3.478

The Durbin-Watson test was performed to examine the independence of residuals. The obtained value is 1.830; the value falls within the acceptable range (1.5 to 2.5), indicating that the residuals are relatively independent with no detected correlation (Azami, Sharifi, and Alvandpur, 2020, p. 4100). Additionally, a multicollinearity test was conducted to assess correlations among the independent variables in the regression model. It is generally accepted that any variance inflation factor (VIF) exceeding 10 and tolerance value lower than 0.10 indicate a substantial multicollinearity issue (Kyriazos and Poga, 2023, p. 409). From Table 5, it is observed that the VIF values do not exceed 10 (1.861 to 3.478), and the tolerance values are not lower than 0.10 (0.287 to 0.537). Therefore, it can be concluded that no multicollinearity issues exist.

The adjusted R^2 in the model is 0.403, indicating that about 40.3% of the variance in the dependent variable (likelihood of recommending the promotions to others) is explained by the independent variables (perceived values). The regression model is statistically significant (F -value = 95.472, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the perceived value towards the

promotions collectively have a significant relationship with the likelihood of recommending the promotions to others, confirming H3. The β coefficients explain the degree to which the independent variables (price value, social value, and emotional value) have an impact on the dependent variable (likelihood of recommending the promotions to others). The regression results show that at 95 percent confidence level, emotional value ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < 0.005$) and price value ($\beta = 0.286$, $p < 0.005$) have significant positive influences on Generation Z's likelihood of recommending the promotions, with emotional value having a stronger influence. Meanwhile, social value does not have an effect on the likelihood of recommending the promotions.

A summary of the hypotheses tests is provided in Table 6.

Table 6 Results of Hypotheses Tests

Hypotheses	Results
H1: There is a difference in Generation Z's perceived value towards different promotions	Reject
H2: There is a difference in Generation Z's likelihood of recommending different promotions to others.	Reject
H3: Generation Z's perceived value towards the promotions has a positive effect on their likelihood of recommending the promotions to others.	Accept

Conclusion and Discussion

All six promotions have mean scores of perceived values ranging from 3.79 to 3.99, indicating that the current promotions employed by online travel agencies are only moderately appealing as the means are above the midway 2.5 Likert scale but are not in the top two box scores of 4 to 5. This suggests that all six promotions currently employed by OTAs are not very persuasive in terms of the value proposition communicated to Generation Z customers. OTAs need to understand their Generation Z customers at a deeper level to develop more effective promotions.

Moreover, the six promotions are not distinct in terms of the effectiveness in influencing Generation Z's perceived value and word of mouth intention. A possible explanation for the indistinguishable perceived value and word of mouth intention towards the six promotions could be found in a study conducted by Prasertsith and Kanthawongs, where Generation Z online shoppers did not perceive promotional discounts, in general, as a major factor for efficient online shopping because they may perceive that most items offered online already have low prices (Prasertsith and Kanthawongs, 2022, p. 438). Another explanation could be that Generation Z's online shop-

ping is primarily driven by the personal hedonic motive of fun, entertainment, and enjoyment than by utilitarian unbiased reviews and ratings by previous customers and by additional discounts/freebies/cash-back offers (Agrawal, 2022, p. 889). Therefore, they may not meticulously evaluate the promotion to locate the best deal. The implication for marketers of online travel agencies is to employ various promotions to facilitate the sale of accommodations for partners, depending upon the partners' resource availability. The availability of the OTA's promotions, rather than the manifestations of the promotions, are important for Generation Z customers.

With regards to the likelihood of recommending the promotion, all promotions receive a recommendation score ranging from 4.03 to 4.15. This is in line with prior findings, where 91.6% of Generation Z customers share their travel experiences on online platforms, such as TripAdvisor, Google Maps, and WhatsApp (Damanik, et al., 2023, p. 42). The strong word of mouth intention detected from the current study suggests that Generation Z customers demonstrate a remarkable tendency to spread the word about promotions, for which they perceive price and emotional value.



Limitations and Future Research

The current study has limitations in terms of research methodology. Since the research study was conducted with Generation Z in Thailand, there is a caveat for generalizing the results to other countries. In addition, as the data was collected from a single source, Generation Z university students in Bangkok, common method bias could possibly impact the relationship between the constructs (Podsakoff, et al., 2003, pp. 881-883). Furthermore, the study is a cross-sectional study, and Generation Z's attitudes could change over time. Lastly, the promotion framings employed in the experiments of the current study are hypothetical, thus underestimating the branding efforts of real-world OTAs that may impact Generation Z's assessment of the promotions.

Since the six promotions investigated in the current study do not provide high perceived value to Generation Z customers, further qualitative research should be conducted to gain insights into the specific needs and wants of this age cohort in order to craft promotions that offer high value to the target customers. Qualitative research on Asian markets and consumers is severely scarce, with a substantial portion of such research being conducted by Western-based researchers (Eckhardt and Dholakia, 2013, p. 5). Since perceived price and emotional value positively influence Generation Z's advocacy tendency, further experiments can be conducted to assess the effectiveness of various promotion framings that differ on price and emotional appeals.

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