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Generational Differences in Passenger Intentions Toward Personalized In-Flight Services: The Moderating Role of Flight Duration

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Abstract

Despite substantial airline industry investment in personalized services, limited empirical research examines how generational cohorts differ in their intentions toward personalized in-flight offerings. We investigate how Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers differ in their intentions across three service dimensions—seating, in-flight entertainment, and meal selection—while examining flight duration as a moderating variable. A survey of 476 airline travelers revealed findings that challenge conventional generational assumptions. We have found that personalized services contradict expectations that only younger passengers would embrace such innovations. However, specific preferences varied: Millennials showed strongest intentions toward customized seating, Generation X exhibited unexpectedly high preferences for entertainment and seating personalization, and Baby Boomers demonstrated stronger entertainment intentions than anticipated. Flight duration significantly influenced personalization intentions across all generations, with long-haul flights amplifying preferences regardless of age, though no interaction effect emerged between generation and flight duration, indicating contextual factors operate independently of generational characteristics

Keywords Personalization; generational cohorts; flight duration; in-flight services; passenger intentions; service customization

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Introduction

Innovations in technology have fundamentally changed the passenger experience in air travel through improvements in operational efficiency and service around all parts of the passenger journey. From improved booking systems to improved check-in systems, technology has raised passenger expectations and reset the service standards across the airline industry (Soonthodu et al., 2022). The transformation to digital has improved not only operational aspects of air travel but has also opened new ways for airlines to differentiate their service offerings and improve their competitive position in an increasingly congested market. Along with rising passenger expectations, airlines are increasingly challenged to provide more intelligent, tailored experiences to meet passenger appropriateness beyond traditional standard service delivery. The combination of advanced data analytics, artificial intelligence, and pervasive connectivity allows airlines to rethink the passenger experience from a one size fits all approach to a highly tailored experience responding to passengers' preferences, behaviors and other contextual information. Personalization has quickly become a strategic necessity for airlines as it dramatically changes how carriers think about and provide in-flight services. Personalization is described as the adaptation of services, experiences and offerings based on the individual preferences, behaviors, and needs of each passenger (Guerrini et al., 2023). Personalization allows airlines to utilize sophisticated data analytics to provide customized in-flight services such as entertainment options, preferred seat selections, and food selection (Ettl et al., 2020). Transitioning from standardized service delivery to individualized service delivery has profound implications for passenger satisfaction as the research demonstrates that individualized services led to a more enjoyable and individualized experience for the passenger, which subsequently develop loyalty and repeat business (Martins et al., 2024). In the last few years, traveler's experience expectations have shifted substantially, causing more demand for individualized experiences which also speak to individual personal preferences (Dike et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). The competition the airlines now face in the modern marketplace rewards those carriers whom are capable of anticipating it to their passenger's needs, with the use of a data-based personalization strategy. Effective personalization does require a better understanding of how the different passenger segments will interpret the value of personalized services, as different demographic segments will interpret personalized services significantly differently.

Despite the widely recognized strategic importance of in-flight personalization and the increasing industry investment in personalization technologies, a notable deficiency exists in empirical research examining passenger perspectives on personalized in-flight services across different generational cohorts. The predominant body of aviation research has concentrated on travelers' perceptions of personalized airport services, with studies examining determinants influencing perceptions of technology-based self-check-in services (Gures et al., 2018), user acceptance of personalized airport services (Hye-Yoon, 2020), and passengers' willingness to embrace airport personalization (Kamel et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2012). Additionally, substantial research has examined personalization in airlines from managerial and revenue perspectives (Buyruk & Güner, 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Guerrini et al., 2023), focusing primarily on pricing strategies, revenue optimization, and

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operational implementation. However, few empirical studies have investigated in-flight personalized services (e.g., meal options, seating preferences and entertainment options) from the perspective of passengers—especially with an eye to intergenerational differences. This is a troubling research gap because in-flight services are the principal product where passengers will spend the most significant part of their journey-time and make enduring evaluations of the service quality. The lack of methodical research on generational differences in in-flight service preferences limits airlines' ability to develop an effective service portfolio that caters for the differing needs and expectations of age cohorts - leading to wasted resources, and reduced opportunities for differentiation and customer satisfaction.

Recognizing distinctions between generations concerning their adoption of technologies, as well as their service preferences, is essential to service design and strategic positioning in the airline industry. The transition to digital services has transformed engagement with technology, affecting many aspects of our day-to-day lives including larger decisions (Novakova, 2020). That adopted technologies and how they are used differs by age group (Shin & Baek, 2023), as each generation possesses a unique perspective on digital services, established by prior exposure to technology, experiences with technology, and comfort level with a service. Many researchers have also investigated how different aged people interact with technology in various contexts, especially in airports. For illustration, Pant (2022) utilized observations to inform their study how Millennials and Gen Z use a range of technologies in airport departure areas, covering operational technologies such as self-service kiosks or boarding pass scanners, and optional technologies such as airport apps or digital lounges. Gures et al. (2018) also looked at the adoption of self-service technology in airline processes as it relates to Generation Y in airline self-service situations. Despite, researchers have suggested (albeit younger) more robust research focused on understanding service value based on generational differences, and understanding selected in-flight service differences (Lei et al., 2022). This is important because preference in-use at the airport may not translate preference to service hopsitality and or speed make change the context established beforehand. This study addresses this critical research gap by investigating how passengers across four generational cohorts—Generation Z (born 1997-2012), Generation Y/Millennials (born 1981-1996), Generation X (born 1965-1980), and Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)—differ in their intentions to use personalized in-flight services. The study examines three core dimensions of in-flight personalization: seating preferences, in-flight entertainment systems, and meal selection. This investigation is guided by two primary research questions: RQ1: How do generational cohorts differ in their intentions to use personalized in-flight services across seating preferences, in-flight entertainment systems, and meal selection RQ2: Does flight duration moderate the relationship between generational cohort and intentions to use personalized in-flight services? Realizing that contextual specifics may cause an impact on service preferences and travelers' priorities, the second research question evaluates if long-haul flights, involving longer durations and more physical demands, change the priorities of passengers among different service attributes from short-haul flights, where passengers may just prefer time efficiency and minimal comfort. This study focuses on in-flight services only that are part of the in-flight experience rather than personalization aspects based in airports or pre-flight personalization to be conceptually focused to allow a more targeted investigation. This study will add value to in theory about generational use of technology in the service space, and provide practical knowledge for airlines about strategic insight on whether personalization across service design and/or segmentation is worth the potential investment.

Literature review

Generational cohorts and technology behavior

Generation Z

Generation Z, individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation to have never known a world outside the digital age, having grown up fully engaged with internet connectivity, social media, and mobile technologies throughout their childhood. Members of Generation Z uniquely possess a high level of technological literacy and quickly acquire new skills and learn new platforms; they also adapt to new and emerging technologies more easily than previous generations (Chang & Chang, 2023; Chillakuri, 2020; Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021). Generation Z preferences for technological innovations are driven by convenience and connectedness, and they consider wearables, smart home appliances, and Internet of Things devices to be extensions of their daily lives. Unlike older generations, Generation Z relationship with technology is unique and exclusive since they have never lived in a world without being digitally connected; they expect services to provide effortless, intuitive and highly responsive, digitally supported experiences across contexts. In consumption contexts, Generation Z has established an unforgettable affinity for personalizing their experiences, discovering and utilizing authentic consumer experiences, and engaging with services that allow or support interaction—affording them an opportunity to communicate their identity, self-expression, and social engagement in meaningful ways. Generation Z are digital producers, as much as consumers of content, and they expected all platforms and services to create space for customization, sharing, and social engagement (not as features that required upgrades).

Generation Y

Generation Y, often called Millennials, was born between 1981 and 1996 and is differentiated by the considerable integration of technology into their daily lives. In particular, they grew up during the rise of the internet, mobile technology, and social networks, and adapted quickly to the digital transition in their youth. This generation experienced and played an active role in the digital revolution, where they transitioned from using analog to digital media, desktop to mobile computing, and one-way communication to interactive communication platforms, leading them to be highly skilled and comfortable in using digital tools and platforms (Oksa et al., 2021; Weber, 2015). Millennials are characterized by their rapid adaptation cycle of new and emerging technologies, and value speed, connectivity, and personalization when assessing digital products and services.

Generation Y are avid consumers and producers of digital content and communicate and exchange information in entertainment and professional networks primarily through mobile devices and social networks. In service contexts, Millennials have high expectations for digital connectivity and integration; they expect seamless omnichannel experiences, mobile-first designs, and personalization based on their preferences and behavior patterns. However, this generation also values authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility ("Millennial Expectations" Publishing Universe, 2022); they expect organizations to demonstrate a genuine commitment to customer interests beyond the mere exploitation of personal data for profit.

Generation X

Generation X, the cohort born between 1965 and 1980, is a transitional generation who did not grow up using the internet to connect but adapted to digital technologies as adults, witnessing the shift from dial up to broadband internet, basic to smart cell phones, and physical to digital media while they matured into adulthood. Generation X's use of technology is pragmatic. They adopt a new technology when they believe there is an obvious benefit or utility, and choose to combine traditional methods and digital alternatives instead of abandoning all analog options (Berkup, 2014; Calvo-Porral & Pesqueira-Sanchez, 2019; Lissitsa & Laor, 2021). Generation X generally shows an ability to adapt and be proficient with technology but typically does not engage new technology at the same pace as younger generations. The developmental position of Generation X individuals appears to require a utility-for-value ratio, but once new technology is deemed practical, reliable, and effective they are likely to engage it into their lives regardless of the age of the child using it. Here, Generation X appears to be much more sceptical about technology-for-technology-sake in consumer settings as they expect value and utility to be illustrated before using new technology or digital services. Generation X, however, enjoys using digital technology but also values the human interaction and traditional service experiences when appropriate. Therefore, if organizations wish to leverage strategies that incorporate personalization for Generation X, those strategies should blend digital utility with human touchpoints along with opportunities to demonstrate benefit and utility.

Baby boomers

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were initially slower to adopt digital technology but have increasingly incorporated digital functionality into their daily and professional lives, which has demonstrated an overall generational change in technology use. Many Baby Boomers began using computers, the internet, and mobile devices in their lives first for work and then as technology became incorporated into daily activities such as communication, banking, shopping, and even health care (Lissitsa et al., 2022; Mahmoud et al., 2020). Baby Boomers have gained a wealth of technological skills in work life and have often engaged in an educational component to sustain their digital literacy skills, indicating a significant intergenerational change regarding technology use and adoption despite not having exposure to technology early in life like their younger counterparts. Nevertheless, Baby Boomers may exhibit lower confidence when approaching a complex digital interface, perhaps requiring a more intuitive design, prior instructions, and desire greater customer service and support when technology stops working or becomes confusing. This generation often values personalization in the service context, although their value does not require much elaborate interaction with technology or complicated decision-making process, whether in a local shop or online, thus suggesting that effective personalization for Baby Boomers should emphasize simplicity, clarity, and wear-based comfort.

In-flight personalization concept

Personalization utilizes data analytics, machine learning algorithms, and customer relationship management systems to identify patterns in passenger behaviors, predict preferences, and provide personalized recommendations and service configurations to enhance satisfaction and perceived value. The strategic significance of personalization goes beyond immediate customer satisfaction and includes longer-term benefits such as increased loyalty, enhanced willingness to pay premium price, positive word-of-mouth, and differentiation in industries where core service offerings have become increasingly commoditized (Jin & Kim, 2022). Personalized in-flight entertainment (IFE) systems are one of the most prominent and technologically advanced applications of in-flight personalization. Personalized IFE applies sophisticated data analysis to recommend movies, music, games, and other content based on passenger characteristics, past behavior, and indicated preferences. Some advanced IFE systems allow passengers to create personalized profiles across multiple flights, potentially across airline alliances, and can follow the passenger through a continuous, seamless entertainment experience that retains the viewing history, preferences, and bookmarks (Alamdari, 1999; Trygve & Gunnarsson, 2020). The scope of personalized IFE continues to expand from just watching content to active listening to personalized music, interactivity, social connectivity to allow passengers to share recommendations, or view together and combination with passengers' personal devices or external streaming to allow continuation from content started before or during the flight. For digitally native generations conditioned to anticipate sophisticated recommendation algorithms to curate personalized entertainment options (e.g. Netflix, Spotify, and YouTube), the baseline expectation of personalized IFE is more common than a premium feature, a passenger can expect an airline to personalize to the same quality as consumer entertainment platforms.

Customized seating arrangements are an integral part of inflight choices, as they affect passenger comfort, satisfaction, and willingness to pay for premium seating products. This aspect of service allows passengers to choose and customize their seating arrangements during booking or check-in. Passengers can select which type of seating alignment they want: window, aisle, extra-legroom, or bulkhead seating, based on their individual preferences, body measurements, and unique travel needs (Ren et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). However, personalization can extend beyond seating alignment,

allowing passengers to adjust features like recline angles, lumbar support, and armrest alignment, regularly supported by interactive seat maps and mobile apps providing seat details, passenger reviews, and pricing comparisons. These options allow passengers to construct their experience with respect to their physical surroundings during their journey. This is a notable factor for long-haul flights, as passenger comfort is a significant predictor of overall satisfaction, quality of sleep, and well-being after reach their destination. For airlines, customized seating alignment is beneficial from the perspective of a service offer and, from the standpoint of firm revenue maximization, as a passenger's willingness to pay for seating alignment/choose from preferred seating arrangements varies depending on the duration of flight, purpose of travel, and individual preferences.

During the booking process, airlines typically allow passengers to pre-order special meals such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, halal, kosher, low-salt, and other meal dietary needs, which allows the passenger to ensure the meals comply with their dietary requirements (Baláž et al., 2023; Ernits et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2024; Mortensen Ernits et al., 2022). Advanced airlines may use complex algorithms to predict meal choice among the passenger's past meal selections, specific demographic characteristics, route characteristics including duration, and time of day. Some airlines may develop meal choices that are increasingly customized and personalized to the passenger. For the passenger that does not pre-order a special meal, airlines maintain a standard meal option, with the cabin crew being prepared to address reasonable meal requests as long as the inventory and/or operational constraints allow for it. The direction of meal personalization may include real-time order customization, into the passenger diet-tracking applications, customizable dietary goals, or partnerships with celebrity chefs or popular restaurant brands, to enhance passengers' feelings of quality and give a greater perception of choice.

Hypotheses development

Due to many younger adults, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, being brought up in digital technology, they are generally more comfortable with services that use technology and are actively looking for digital experiences that provide convenience, personalization, and social connection. Since these generations frequently use smartphone applications, recommendation algorithms, and online services, they are more likely to adopt and fully use personalized in-flight experiences because they see these experiences as an extension of their normal technology consumption pattern. Similarly, the older generation cohorts, including Baby Boomers and Generation X, even though many are becoming comfortable with technology, still possess a lower baseline familiarity with sophisticated digital personalization systems. Therefore, they may programmatically prefer the traditional standardized service model and/or need much larger demonstrations of timely assistance to understand the value in the services. This might lead to a lower intention to use digital personalized service. The first hypothesis states:

> H1: Generation Z and Y have stronger intentions to use in-flight personalized services compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers.

When considering service preferences across generations, Generation Z is characterized by a seamless use of technology into their daily lives; they place a high value on authentic, personalized experiences that allow them to express their identities and engage with others. Entertainment in particular reflects not only leisure time experiences but also identity expression and social connection, as Generation Z are often attracted to content that aligns with their myriads of interests, values, and cultural identifications (Elareshi et al., 2022). Generation Z values interactivity in entertainment and flexibility to customize their viewing experience based on their mood, the context, and social environment because these factors increase overall satisfaction and engagement in the service. For this reason, Generation Z has an affinity for platforms that provide personalized recommendations, indicating the possibility of their strong interest in entertainment-based personalization; delivery of curated content is thoughtfully aligned with the personal preferences of the viewer. This reasoning leads to the second hypothesis:

> H2: Generation Z travelers demonstrate stronger intentions toward personalized in-flight entertainment compared to personalized seating options and customized meal selections.

In contrast, Generation Y (Millennials) tends to prioritize comfort and physical well-being in their everyday lives and consumption choices along with a significant focus on ergonomic design, adequate posture support, and simply comfort as measures of health and wellness (Pantoro & Munawaroh, 2022). When traveling, Millennials are known to actively seek airlines that provide various levels of comfort especially with respect to seating and other provisions to support relaxation, productivity, and wellness on arrival during flights. Given this explicitly stated emphasis on physical comfort and ergonomic design, it can be reasonably presumed that Millennials' preferences around personalization would be directed by opportunities to improve seating comfort in regard to their preferred location, seat type, and their other preferred configurations. This forms the basis for the third hypothesis:

> H3: Generation Y travelers demonstrate stronger intentions toward personalized seating options compared to personalized in-flight entertainment and customized meal selections.

Generation X's life cycle has experienced immense changes in food culture and increased awareness about nutrition-health links and growing dietary restrictions and preferences that arguably raise their standards for quality, choice, and customization with meals. This generation loves the food service experience catered to their own personal preferences and dietary needs; the

preference could involve specific food cultures, nutritional goals, or dietary needs including gluten-free, vegetarian or allergen-free restrictions (Casini et al., 2015). This generation is relatively health conscious, and tends to balance work, family, and personal health; thus, being able to pick meals optimized for their individual dietary needs and taste preferences is important for maintaining a dietary routine in-transition while traveling. The convenience of being able to pre-select meals therefore reduces the uncertainty and decisional burden that comes with ordering while transiting on flights; Generation X approaches service consumption with a practical stance. It is therefore hypothesized that their personalization preferences would center on meal customization:

> H4: Generation X travelers demonstrate stronger intentions toward customized meal selection compared to personalized in-flight entertainment and personalized seating options.

As it pertains to the Baby Boomer cohort, comfort becomes more important when traveling as physical age-related changes make extended sitting increasingly uncomfortable and difficult (Moschis, 2022). This generation typically looks for seats with more legroom, more lumbar support, easier access to an aisle to aid in mobility, and other comfort-inducing characteristics that alleviate physical discomfort during a flight. In addition, Baby Boomers frequently have more financial assets and disposable income than younger cohorts to consider the luxury and comfort aspects of travel, viewing travel as a part of their lifestyle, taking every opportunity to engage and enjoy travel quality experiences. The option for selection and the ability to change their seat selection accompany the notion of maximizing comfort and simplifying decision-making. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is:

> H5: Baby Boomers prioritize personalized seating options over personalized in-flight entertainment and customized meal selection.

Beyond generational characteristics, the contextual circumstances of the flight itself represent a critical factor potentially influencing personalization intentions across all passenger segments. Flight duration is theorized as a significant moderator of passenger intentions, as longer flights fundamentally alter passenger needs, priorities, and the relative importance of various service attributes. Long-haul flights involve extended sitting duration, increased physical stress and discomfort, greater boredom and restlessness, and more substantial meal service opportunities, leading passengers to prioritize comfort-enhancing features and entertainment options to productively occupy time and arrive refreshed rather than exhausted (Li et al., 2017; Patel & D'Cruz, 2017). Conversely, on short-haul flights characterized by reduced journey duration, limited physical strain, and focus on transportation efficiency, passengers' attention shifts from comfort maximization to operational efficiency, potentially lowering perceived value and necessity of extensive personalization features. This reasoning leads to a general hypothesis about the main effect of flight duration:

> H6: Travelers demonstrate stronger intentions to use in-flight personalized services on long-haul flights compared to short-haul flights.

Moreover, the effect of generational cohort on personalization intentions is proposed to be non-uniform but instead conditioned by flight duration, with contextual factors interacting with demographic characteristics to shape service preferences. The specific preferences characterizing each generation are expected to be amplified on long-haul flights where extended duration magnifies the importance of comfort, entertainment, and meal quality. This establishes the overarching moderating hypothesis:

> H7: Flight duration moderates the relationship between traveler generations and their intentions to use in-flight personalized services.

This moderating effect is expected to manifest with generation-specific patterns across different service dimensions. For digitally native Generation Z, the extended timeframe of long-haul flights likely increases reliance on interactive and digital entertainment services to occupy time, maintain engagement, and avoid boredom during extended journeys. Therefore, a sub-hypothesis proposes:

> H7a: Generation Z demonstrates stronger preferences for personalized in-flight entertainment on long-haul flights compared to short-haul flights.

For Generation Y, whose primary preference centers on seating comfort, the prolonged duration characteristic of long-haul journeys would logically intensify focus on securing comfortable seating arrangements that minimize physical discomfort, support proper posture, and enable rest or productive work throughout extended flights. This reasoning leads to the sub-hypothesis:

> H7b: Generation Y demonstrates stronger preferences for personalized seating options on long-haul flights compared to short-haul flights.

For Generation X, who are hypothesized to value meal personalization, the enhanced experience of customized, high-quality meals becomes more valued on long flights where multiple meal services occur and where standard, repetitive meal options might become monotonous or fail to meet specific dietary needs across extended journey duration. Consequently, a sub-hypothesis proposes:

> H7c: Generation X demonstrates stronger preferences for customized meal selection on long-haul flights compared to short-haul flights.

Finally, for Baby Boomers who prioritize comfortable seating due to age-related physical considerations, the substantial physical demands and discomfort associated with long-haul flights would make the ability to select superior seating options even more critical for journey comfort, satisfaction, and post-arrival well-being. This reasoning forms the final sub-hypothesis:

> H7d: Baby Boomers demonstrate stronger preferences for personalized seating options on long-haul flights compared to short-haul flights.

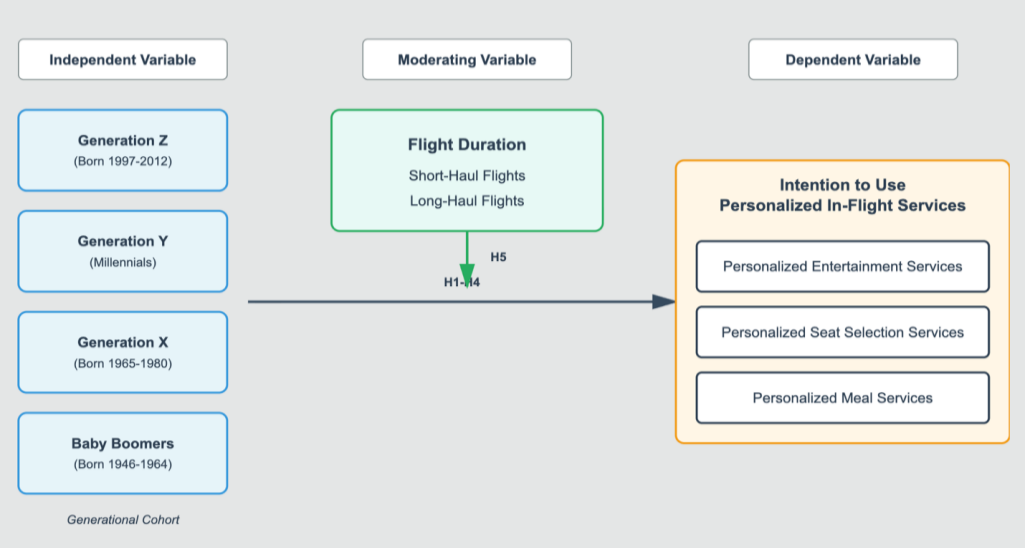

Figure 1: Conceptual model diagram

Methodology

To capture only airline travellers that had past experiences traveling and were able to provide informed decisions inclusive of their experiences, a purposive sampling strategy was utilized. Participants were sampled and recruited through two distribution methods which included an online distribution method utilizing email invitations or social media, and a face-to-face distribution at travel-related locations (airports, lounges). This mixed-mode method provided unique opportunities for ways to access participants which increased representation of demographics. The sample was purposively selected to provide balance across four-age groups and to mitigate bias from participants solely from one generation, and overall strengthen the validity of comparisons across generations. After cleaning and validating responses, 476 valid responses were included for analysis. Sample demographics and other characteristics included gender and frequencies of travel to represent sample diversity, and strengthen findings reliability and generalizability.

Table 1. Demographic profile (N=476)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	238	49.6%
	Female	238	50.4%
Generation	Gen Z (12-27)	120	25.0%
	Gen Y (28-43)	119	24.8%
	Gen X (44-59)	120	25.0%
	Baby Boomers (60+)	117	24.6%
Travel Frequency	1-2 times/year	258	53.8%
	3-4 times/year	125	26.0%
	5+ times/year	97	20.2%

The survey instrument was adapted from established scales in customization and consumer behavior literature, modified for the airline service context through expert review and pilot testing. The instrument underwent content validity evaluation by three academic experts in aviation management and consumer behavior, followed by pilot testing with 30 airline passengers to enhance item clarity and confirm face validity. Based on pilot feedback, minor wording adjustments were implemented to improve comprehension. The final survey comprised three sections: demographic variables (age, gender, travel frequency), passenger intentions for personalized services (in-flight entertainment, seating preferences, meal customization), and flight duration scenarios (short-haul vs. long-haul). All intention items employed five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 ("Strongly

Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding acceptable reliability (α = .886 for the 33-item scale). The analysis of the data was performed with SPSS software, version 28. Means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were used to report descriptive statistics to characterize the sample and responses according to generations. To test the hypotheses, several different inferential statistical procedures were used. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analyzed the generational differences in overall personalization intentions (H1). Repeated-measures MANOVA evaluated within-subject differences in intentions among the three service types for the different generations (H2-H5). Repeated measures ANOVA evaluated the main effect of flight time duration (H6), and the interaction with generational cohort (H7). Paired-samples t-tests using difference scores evaluated sub hypotheses H7a-H7d. All significance tests used α = .05, and effect sizes (partial eta-squared) were reported to provide context for practical significance with statistical significance.

Results

Generational intentions for personalized services

Hypothesis H1 proposed that Generations Z and Y would demonstrate stronger intentions to use in-flight personalized services compared to Generations X and Baby Boomers. Descriptive statistics revealed that Generation Z exhibited the highest mean intention (M = 0.93, SD = 0.256), closely followed by Baby Boomers (M = 0.91, SD = 0.291), while Generations Y and X demonstrated marginally lower means (M = 0.89 for both groups). However, one-way ANOVA indicated these differences were not statistically significant, F(3, 463) = 0.431, p = .731. Therefore, H1 was rejected, indicating that intention to use personalized in-flight services does not differ significantly across generations. Subsequent analyses examined specific service preferences within each generation. For Generation Z, descriptive statistics suggested stronger preferences for in-flight entertainment (M = 0.97) and seat selection (M = 0.96) compared to meal choice (M = 0.89). However, repeated-measures analysis revealed the main effect of service type was not statistically significant, F(2, 117) = 1.256, p = .289, partial η^2 = .021. Thus, H2 was rejected.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results Summary

Hypothesis	Generation/Group	Service Type	Mean (M)	SD	F-statistic	p-value	Partial η^2	Result	Key Finding
H1	Generation Z	Overall Intention	0.93	0.256	F(3, 463) = 0.431	.731	-	**Rejected**	No significant generational differences in intention to use personalized in-flight services
	Baby Boomers		0.91	0.291					
	Generation Y		0.89	-					
	Generation X		0.89	-					
H2	Generation Z	In-flight Entertainment	0.97	-	F(2, 117) = 1.256	.289	.021	**Rejected**	No significant differences among service preferences
	Generation Z	Seat Selection	0.96	-					
	Generation Z	Meal Choice	0.89	-					
H3	Generation Y	Seat Preference	0.96	0.241	F(2, 116) = 8.069	.001	.122	**Supported**	Seat preference significantly highest among Gen Y
	Generation Y	In-flight Entertainment	0.84	0.392					
	Generation Y	Meal Pre-ordering	0.78	0.541					
H4	Generation X	Seat Preference	1.00	0.260	F(2, 117) = 10.941	< .001	.158	**Rejected**	Seat preference highest (contradicts predictions)
	Generation X	Entertainment	0.92	0.381					
	Generation X	Meal Selection	0.79	0.502					
H5	Baby Boomers	In-flight Entertainment	1.28	0.663	F(2, 118) = 15.179	< .001	.205	**Rejected**	Entertainment highest (contradicts predictions)
	Baby Boomers	Customized Meals	1.02	0.224					
	Baby Boomers	Seat Selection	0.98	0.224					

For Generation Y, repeated-measures analysis revealed a statistically significant effect of service type, F(2, 116) = 8.069, p = .001, partial η^2 = .122. Seat preference attained the highest mean (M = 0.96, SD = 0.241), significantly exceeding in-flight entertainment (M = 0.84, SD = 0.392) and meal pre-ordering (M = 0.78, SD = 0.541). Therefore, H3 was supported, confirming Generation Y's stronger intention toward personalized seating. For Generation X, a statistically significant main effect of service type emerged, F(2, 117) = 10.941, p < .001, partial η^2 = .158. Contrary to predictions, participants indicated strongest intention for seat preference (M = 1.00, SD = 0.260), followed by entertainment (M = 0.92, SD = 0.381), with meal selection lowest (M = 0.79, SD = 0.502). This directly contradicts H4; thus, H4 was rejected. For Baby Boomers, repeated-measures analysis revealed a significant effect of service type, F(2, 118) = 15.179, p < .001, partial η^2 = .205. Mean intention for in-flight entertainment (M = 1.28, SD = 0.663) exceeded customized meals (M = 1.02, SD = 0.224) and seat selection (M = 0.98, SD = 0.224). This finding contradicts predictions; therefore, H5 was rejected (see Table 2).

The moderating role of flight duration

Hypothesis H6 proposed travellers demonstrate stronger intentions to use personalized services on long-haul versus short-haul flights. Repeated measures ANOVA demonstrated a clear, statistically significant main effect of flight duration, F(1, 476) = 114.986, p < .001, partial η^2 = .195, indicating approximately 19.5% of variance in intentions attributable to flight duration. Intention scores were universally higher for long-haul flights across all generations (see Table 3). Thus, H6 was supported.

Table 3. Repeated measures ANOVA results

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial η^2
Flight Duration	172.267	1	172.267	114.986	<.001	.195
Duration × Generation	5.826	3	1.942	1.296	.275	.008
Error	713.123	476	1.498			

Hypothesis H7 proposed flight duration moderates the relationship between generation and intention. The interaction effect between flight duration and generation was not statistically significant, F(3, 476) = 1.296, p = .275, partial η^2 = .008. While descriptive patterns showed some variation, the enhancing effect of long-haul flights was consistent across age groups.

Therefore, H7 was rejected. However, sub-hypotheses concerning specific service preferences on long-haul flights were tested using paired-samples t-tests. For Generation Z, preference for personalized entertainment was significantly stronger on long-haul flights, $t(119) = 5.486$, $p < .001$, mean difference = .742, 95% CI [.47, 1.01]. Thus, H7a was supported. For Generation Y, substantial differences emerged for personalized seating on long-haul flights, $t(118) = 7.282$, $p < .001$, mean difference = .941, 95% CI [.69, 1.20], supporting H7b. For Generation X, preference for customized meals on long-haul flights did not reach significance, $t(119) = 1.289$, $p = .200$, leading to rejection of H7c. For Baby Boomers, significant differences emerged for personalized seating on long-haul flights, $t(120) = 3.158$, $p = .002$, mean difference = .446, 95% CI [.17, .73], supporting H7d.

Discussion and conclusion

This research provides important contributions to the theory, supporting and challenging existing generational technology adoption and service personalization perspectives. First, by rejecting H1, which claimed younger generations would have stronger intentions, the study contradicts previously published studies focused on generational technology dominance for Generations Z and Y. This finding challenges deterministic perspectives toward generational behavior and instead suggests personalization has become an expectation, versus a trend associated with younger generations and their consumption. As a result, even older generations are being exposed to and are embracing technology-enabled services due to increasing digital technology saturation around the world, highlighting the need to be inclusive in the theory of personalization (Mandić et al., 2024). This finding reflects a shift being observed in the literature documenting an increased convergence of generations in the engagement with technology-enabled services, implying older generations are likely engaging with services and technology previously exclusive to younger generations (Chouykaew et al., 2024). Second, the assumption that Generation Z would demonstrate greater preference for entertainment personalization (H2) was rejected. While descriptive findings showed slight preferences, statistical analysis revealed no significant differences across service types for this cohort. This contradicts research associating Generation Z with entertainment-based digital engagement. A plausible explanation is that Generation Z consumers' engagement with personalization is more evenly distributed across service dimensions, suggesting desire for comprehensive, integrated experiences rather than singular service focus. Theoretically, this extends personalization models by illustrating that digital generations cannot be conceptualized as favoring single service types in isolation, but instead seek holistic personalization across multiple touchpoints. This finding suggests that theoretical models depicting Generation Z as primarily entertainment-focused may oversimplify their actual service preferences and consumption patterns. The endorsement of Millennials' intended use of customized seating (H3) serves as further evidence of documented preferences for comfort and ergonomics (Pantoro & Munawaroh, 2022), thus showing among some demographic segments, personalization is rooted in physical health considerations and not purely digital engagement considerations. This finding offers additional support for theoretical perspectives to emphasize that personalization preferences reflect concerns of life stage or wellness based priorities and not solely digital assimilation into technology. For example, for Millennials negotiating demanding workplace and personal obligations, comfort of seating may be the priority to enable work productivity or rest on the flight, in which case personalization preferences reflect larger concerns of lifestyle aspirations.

Rejecting H4 and H5 provides particularly powerful theoretical implications regarding generational stereotypes. That Generation X preferred seating and entertainment over food and beverages, contradicts past findings relating the sample to food culture and personalization - typically food personalization (Casini et al., 2015). Instead, a standalone antecedent regarding personalization suggests preferences are not static, some individuals experience preferences evolving over time as they matured and technology and cultural norms evolved. Generation X's preference for seating and entertainment may represent their increasing tendency to prioritize comfort and management of time as that cohort aged, which speaks to the need for more frequent shifts from potential generational stereotypes rather than accepting them as permanent behavior. Similarly, the finding that Baby Boomers preferred entertainment personalization over seating again challenges assumptions established in previous work where researchers characterized Baby Boomers as preference oriented towards comfort and disengagement with technology (Moschis, 2022). These findings represent a larger social and technology trend over generations towards convergence, which speaks more to age based generalizations (Kiriwongwattana & Waiyasusri, 2024) and provides insight into using a typology to refine theory in the acknowledgement of age and technology acceptance models moving from a static demographic variable on its own to consider the evolving dynamic, contextually bounded nature of preferences rather than on elements relying on another source of knowledge (demographic).

Ultimately, the strong evidence for H6 confirming that flight duration is a significant contextual moderator with a pronounced effect size makes an important theoretical contribution by indicating that the demand for personalization is contextually dependent rather than only demographic based. The finding that flight duration shows about 19.5% of variance in passenger intentions also demonstrates that we cannot fully understand passenger behavior using only demographic understandings as contextual features clearly matter with respect to service preferences. This is an important advancement in theory as it disputes static models of demographic attributes and provides a more dynamic frame in which passenger intentions can be understood as being impacted by interaction between generational identity and specific travel contexts. Theoretically, finding supports contingency perspectives in service management by implying that to completely personalize service requires understanding not just who the passenger is, but also the context they are traveling within. However, the non-significant interaction between generation and flight duration (H7 rejection), suggests that whilst context matters a great deal, the effects are relatively uniform across generational groups rather than exacerbating differences between generations. This finding counters theoretical expectations about differences in sensitivity to context across generational groups, while at the same time,

suggests that human needs about comfort, entertainment and quality food consumption on a long journey are all fairly consistent across generations.

These findings offer several practical suggestions for managers in the airline industry who want to enhance personalization tactics and effectiveness when allocating resources. To begin, airlines should take an inclusive not youthful stance when implementing personalization. Our findings show that all generation cohorts have similarly high intentions to receive personalized services; therefore, universal design is necessary in order to address different user abilities while being sophisticated and functional for passengers of whatever age to use personalization features. Consequently, marketing communications highlighting personalization efforts should communicate the benefits to a broad range of targeted demographics instead of solely digital natives, while personalization screens or interfaces should be as user-friendly as possible, clear, and usable across user abilities. Moreover, the strong preferential support for customized seating by Millennials points to the continuing significance of physical comfort as a key differentiator a service, which suggests airlines should continue to develop options to accommodate customized seating through new and reimagined comfort economies including new ergonomically adjustable and/or personalized options such as adjustable legroom and lumbar support systems providing user options for ease and comfort. Additionally, users and/or passengers should be afforded easy pre-flight options to select custom seating, including user-friendly specifications, ideas from other travelers, and visual representations. Third, the more complex and at times less intuitive preferences revealed by Generation X and Baby Boomers require consideration in ways that undermine conventional demographic stereotypes; Generation X's unexpected preference for entertaining experiences and/or personalizing seating patterns derived from entertainment experiences points to opportunities for upgrade options to flexible seating that include catering to personal entertainment preferences, while Baby Boomers' greater-than-anticipated interest in entertainment points to a demand for intuitive, user-friendly entertainment systems in-flight that are easy to navigate on the ground through less capable controls and reliable support. Fourth, the verification of flight length as an important contextual moderating factor suggests that airlines use duration-contingent personalization strategies; offering a more efficient and streamlined option that minimizes options, while placing a greater emphasis on speed and simplicity for short-haul flights, and developing an entire portfolio of personalization plans for long-haul flights that includes seating, entertainment, meals, and comfort where the flight experience has more worthy value for customization. Finally, the changing patterns of individual preferences in personalization highlight the need for ongoing, continuous observation and on-going analysis with customers via evolving data analytics and customer relationship management systems, regular review of generational preference patterns, and a readiness of the organization to be flexible and respond quickly to changes in preferences, and, potentially a plan to strategically invest in predictive analytics capabilities to provide airlines with an ability to anticipate whether preferences are changing and subsequently adapt service offering differently as technology advances and incremental shifts are recognized in passenger preferences to maintain a competitive advantage.

This study has a number of limitations that will point to some possible areas for future research. First, the cross-sectional design captures preferences at a single time, which means we are unable to see how preferences may emerge over time as technology improves and consumer expectations change, longitudinal studies that track an individual over many years would show whether today's younger generations will maintain these preferences as they age, or whether those preferences would change as they move through different life stages. The second limitation is the geographic focus on midwest and southern states of the United States, which could limit generalizability. Personalization preferences will vary by culture as there are varying service expectations, privacy expectations, and technological infrastructure, thus cross-country studies, or studies from the east coast and west coast of the US, would inform airlines on how personalization and strategies should be tailored to different operational markets. The third limitation of this study is the examination of only three personalization dimensions (entertainment, seating, and meals), where more personalization dimensions might have been examined such as customizations in loyalty programs, recommendations regarding ancillary services, control of ambient environment, connectivity options, and AI-assisted concierge services, all of which would give a more robust understanding of types of priorities among passengers and trade-offs among competing service characteristics. Finally, a limitation of this study is the intention measure to personalize rather than the examining actual behavior when traveling on an airline, given that there can be long intention-behavior gaps that exist, future research studies could analyze patterns of actual personalization behaviors using behavioral data noting whether stated intentions volitional show up in behavior and/or identify the factors mediating the indicate behavior.

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