



The effect of consumer confusion on decision postponement in online tourism purchases: The moderating role of online trust

İrem YILDIRIM^{1*} (orcid.org/ 0000-0002-5977-2123)

Mehmet TEKELİ² (orcid.org/ 0000-0002-6069-4740)

¹Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Ürgüp Sebahat and Erol Toksöz Vocational School of Tourism, Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services, Nevşehir, Türkiye

²Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Department of Tourism Guidance, Karaman, Türkiye

Abstract

Purpose: Rapid digitalisation and the widespread use of online platforms have made information more accessible; however, the abundance of alternatives and information overload have also made online decision-making more complex. This study examines the effect of consumer confusion on decision postponement in online tourism purchasing and investigates the moderating role of online trust in this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach: Data were collected from 417 Generation Z individuals residing in Nevşehir, Türkiye, using convenience sampling. The measurement model was validated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and the hypotheses were tested using moderation analysis via the PROCESS Macro (Model 1).

Results: The results indicate that consumer confusion has a significant positive effect on decision postponement ($\beta = .736$, $p < .001$). Moreover, online trust significantly moderates this relationship ($\beta = -.146$, $p < .001$), such that the positive effect of consumer confusion on decision postponement weakens as online trust increases. The model explains 53.7% of the variance in decision postponement ($R^2 = .537$).

Discussion: These findings suggest that trust functions as a key mechanism that mitigates the negative consequences of cognitive overload in digital tourism contexts, even among a digitally native generation. The results contribute to the literature on consumer behaviour in digital tourism contexts and provide practical implications for tourism businesses seeking to reduce decision delays by fostering online trust.

Keywords: Consumer Confusion, Decision Postponement, Online Trust, Generation Z, Online Tourism Purchasing

Introduction

The advent of technological innovations has precipitated a paradigm shift in managerial practices within the tourism industry, compelling numerous tourism enterprises to adopt online platforms to achieve cost efficiency and expedite the dissemination of information to prospective customers (Ampountolas, Shaw and James, 2019). Consequently, consumers have greater access to information and activities such as comparing tour packages, making hotel reservations, and booking flights have become faster and more practical. Indeed, in the contemporary era, a significant proportion of tourism related activities including, but not limited to, hotel reservations, transportation services, and package tour purchases are facilitated through a plethora of online platforms that offer a wide range of features and price alternatives (Pappas, 2017). While this situation provides consumers with a broad spectrum of choices, it simultaneously renders their decision-making processes more complex (Chauhan and Sagar, 2021).

The proliferation of information in online environments, the market saturation of similar products and alternatives, and the often ambiguous or conflicting nature of content may lead consumers to experience confusion. This predicament is regarded as a persistent issue, particularly due to information overload, abundance of choices, and complex content structures (Hall-Phillips and Shah, 2017). As indicated by the extant literature, consumer confusion has been demonstrated to engender complications in decision-making processes, result in protracted decision-making times, and exert a detrimental effect on purchasing behaviour.

*Corresponding author: irembozkurt@nevsehir.edu.tr
DOI: 10.33083/joghat.2026.674

Specifically, Anninou and Foxall (2019) posit that consumers grapple with evaluating all available alternatives due to their limited cognitive capacities, consequently encountering difficulties in reaching a final decision within a stipulated time frame. Consequently, this situation increases consumers' perceptions of uncertainty and risk in the decision-making process, potentially leading them to postpone their decisions (Park, 2014).

Decision postponement is defined as consumers' tendency to postpone their decisions to a later time rather than making an immediate choice among available alternatives (Xue, Jo and Bonn, 2020). Shiu (2021) observes that the rapid dissemination of information and the plethora of alternatives encountered, particularly on online tourism platforms, can impede consumers' decision-making processes. In a similar vein, Kim (2021) asserts that the presence of ambiguous information and analogous alternatives engenders cognitive confusion among consumers, thereby augmenting their propensity to postpone decision-making. Recent studies also reveal that choice overload, similar alternatives, and information uncertainty trigger decision postponement behaviour (Sharma, Pandher and Prakash, 2023). In this context, Generation Z, defined as the cohort born between 1997 and 2010 has emerged as a consumer group that has grown up interacting with digital technologies and predominantly uses online platforms as a primary source of information and a purchasing channel (Pew Research Center, 2020). As is emphasised in the extant literature, Generation Z is highly active in digital environments and capable of accessing information rapidly. However, they are also exposed to a higher cognitive load due to intense information flow and the abundance of choices (Başer and Kantarcıoğlu, 2022). This suggests that Generation Z consumers may experience greater confusion in online tourism purchasing processes and, consequently, exhibit stronger tendencies toward decision postponement (Song, 2021). Consequently, it is imperative to examine Generation Z's decision-making processes as a distinct area of inquiry within the context of cognitive load and information complexity.

From the perspective of tourism businesses, consumers' postponement of purchase decisions has been shown to result in prolonged sales processes and render demand more unpredictable (Smith, 2023). Furthermore, the tendency to postpone decisions has been shown to increase the likelihood that consumers will turn to alternative platforms, thereby creating a significant disadvantage for firms operating in the highly competitive tourism industry (Pappas et al., 2021). It is therefore vital for strategic marketing to understand the effect of consumer confusion on decision postponement. Moreover, from the perspective of trust theory, individuals tend to rely on trust mechanisms to facilitate decision-making processes and reduce perceived risk in digital environments characterised by uncertainty. In this context, online trust refers to the consumer's belief in a digital platform, information source, or vendor, and plays a crucial role as a mechanism that reduces uncertainty and simplifies the cognitive evaluation process (Gefen, 2000). A high level of online trust has been demonstrated to facilitate individuals' information processing, thereby rendering the decision-making process more efficient and, consequently, reducing the propensity to postpone decisions.

Although prior research has examined consumer confusion and decision postponement separately, the relationship between the two constructs has received limited attention, particularly within the tourism context (An et al., 2026; Sharma et al., 2023). Moreover, no known study to date has examined the moderating role of online trust in this relationship among Generation Z consumers, despite this cohort's distinct digital consumption patterns and heightened exposure to information overload. This gap is notable given that Generation Z represents a growing share of online tourism consumers, yet the mechanisms through which trust mitigates their confusion driven postponement behaviour remain unexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study integrates cognitive (consumer confusion) and relational (online trust) perspectives within a single moderation model to explain decision postponement in online tourism purchasing among Generation Z. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by clarifying the boundary conditions under which consumer confusion translates into decision delay and offers tourism businesses actionable insight into how trust-building strategies can be used to counteract the negative effects of information overload on purchase decisions.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

One of the most widely used approaches in explaining consumer behaviour is the Information Overload Theory, which posits that individuals have limited cognitive capacity and that their decision-making processes become more difficult when they are exposed to excessive amounts of information (Jacoby, Speller and Kohn, 1974). As postulated by this theory, consumers encounter a surfeit of alternative pieces of information, which they are unable to process effectively. This, in turn, engenders an increasingly complex decision-making process. In the marketing literature, the concept of consumer confusion has been addressed in a variety of ways. Chauhan and Sagar (2021) define confusion as consumers' inability to understand product attributes during the decision-making process, whereas Dang (2020) suggests that this condition stems from insufficient

communication and inadequate positioning strategies. In contrast, Shiu (2021) proposes a different theoretical framework, positing confusion as a negative state involving both cognitive and emotional elements. This state, according to Shiu (2021), is characterised by consumers' struggles to interpret the stimuli presented by firms.

In the extant literature, consumer confusion is examined under four main dimensions: similarity, overload, ambiguity, and over-choice (Dang, 2020; Yang et al., 2021). As Anninou and Foxall (2019) and Walsh and Mitchell (2010) have demonstrated, similarity confusion arises when consumers encounter difficulty distinguishing between products within the same category in terms of visual and functional attributes. The phenomenon of overload confusion occurs when consumers are exposed to an excess of information that exceeds their evaluative capacities (Hall-Phillips and Shah, 2017). Conflicting or unclear information and messages can lead to a lack of trust among consumers (Chauhan and Sagar, 2021; Mathur, 2020), whereas over-choice confusion is associated with the difficulty of making decisions due to the presence of many alternatives (Anninou and Foxall, 2019).

These dimensions become more pronounced in online tourism purchasing processes (Sharma et al., 2023). When seeking information about tourism products, consumers encounter similar content and packages across different websites, which may lead to similarity confusion (Lu, Gursoy and Lu, 2016). Furthermore, the sheer volume of information provided through online reservation systems and digital platforms engenders a state of overload and confusion, thereby hindering consumers' ability to evaluate available alternatives (Xue et al., 2020). The intricate nature of websites, the low credibility they are perceived to possess, and the absence of clarity in the information they present can further trigger ambiguity and confusion (Tu and Wu, 2019). Furthermore, the absence of transparent and comprehensible pricing has been identified as a contributing factor to consumers' heightened sense of uncertainty (Thai and Yuksel, 2017). The aforementioned sources of confusion, which have emerged in online environments, have a direct impact on consumers' decision-making processes (Xue et al., 2020; Shiu, 2017). The plethora of information, the presence of similar alternatives, and the ambiguity surrounding the options available to consumers can make it challenging for them to make a decision. The prevailing literature in this field has sought to elucidate this phenomenon through the conceptual framework of decision postponement. Decision postponement is defined as consumers' tendency to postpone their decisions to a later time rather than making an immediate choice among available alternatives (Xue et al., 2020).

As posited by Jacoby et al. (1974), the Information Overload Theory asserts that individuals encounter challenges in decision-making when confronted with information that surpasses their cognitive capacity. This phenomenon results in delays in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the Perceived Risk Theory posits that consumers have a propensity to refrain from making decisions in circumstances characterised by uncertainty (Mitchell, 1999). The information complexity and ambiguity encountered in online tourism platforms have been demonstrated to increase consumers' perceived risk, thereby delaying the decision-making process (Pappas, 2017). Indeed, as indicated by the extant literature, consumer confusion has been demonstrated to prolong decision-making time and increase decision postponement behaviour (Sharma et al., 2023; Shiu, 2021). In line with these arguments, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Consumer confusion in online tourism purchasing positively affects decision postponement.

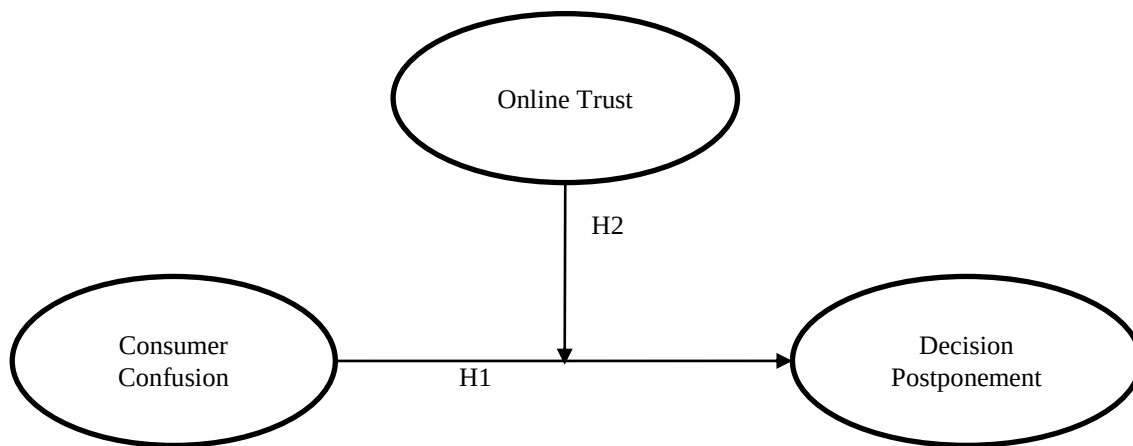
Furthermore, online trust has been identified as a pivotal factor influencing consumers' decision-making processes in online environments. Online trust is defined as a belief developed by consumers based on their perceptions of the reliability, integrity, and competence of digital platforms (Gefen, 2000). The absence of physical interaction in online contexts, in conjunction with the purchase of services without prior experience, has been demonstrated to engender an increased perception of uncertainty among consumers, thus rendering trust a more critical factor. Consequently, online trust is regarded as a pivotal mechanism that enables consumers to manage uncertainty (Pavlou, 2003).

In the tourism sector, which is predicated on the provision of intangible and experience-based services, consumers may encounter elevated levels of uncertainty and risk. This is due to the fact that, prior to purchase, they are unable to directly experience the product (Kim, Ferrin and Rao, 2008). This phenomenon can also be explained within the framework of Perceived Risk Theory. In this regard, factors such as information overload, similarity, and ambiguity encountered in online tourism platforms may increase consumer confusion, thereby elevating perceived risk (Pappas, 2017). Consequently, online trust is regarded as a means of mitigating perceived risk and facilitating expeditious and assured decision-making among consumers. Indeed, prior studies have demonstrated that consumers with higher levels of trust experience less hesitation and complete their decision-making processes more quickly in online environments (Gefen et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2008).

In this context, it is suggested that online trust may play a moderating role in the relationship between consumer confusion and decision postponement. While the phenomenon of information overload and uncertainty has been demonstrated to increase consumers' tendency to delay decisions by complicating the decision-making process, individuals with higher levels of online trust are expected to better tolerate such complex information environments. In other words, when consumers have a high level of trust in an online environment, the impact of confusion on the deferral of decisions is hypothesised to diminish. Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated. The proposed hypotheses and the research model are presented in Figure 1.

H2: In online tourism purchasing, online trust moderates the relationship between consumer confusion and decision postponement.

Figure 1. Research model



Methodology

Measures

The primary data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire in order to test the effect of consumer confusion experienced in online tourism purchasing processes on decision postponement behaviour, as well as the role of online trust in this relationship. In this context, measurement scales that had been previously validated and found to be reliable in the relevant literature were adopted. In order to measure consumer confusion in online purchasing contexts, a 15-item scale developed by Sharma et al. (2023) was utilised, which captures information, similarity, overload, and ambiguity confusion dimensions. The measurement of decision postponement behaviour was conducted utilising a four-item scale that was developed by Walsh, Hennig-Thurau and Mitchell (2007). Furthermore, online trust towards tourism platforms was measured using a five-item scale developed by Kim and Park (2013). The structured items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “1 = Strongly disagree” to “5 = Strongly agree.” Given that the original scales were in English, a translation-back translation procedure was applied to ensure linguistic validity. Initially, the scales were translated into Turkish, and subsequently underwent a second translation back into English by a language expert. This process was implemented to ensure semantic equivalence and to preserve the conceptual meaning of the items.

Sample and Procedure

The population of the present study consists of Generation Z individuals residing in Nevşehir who have prior experience of purchasing through online tourism platforms. As the objective was to engage participants with experience in online tourism purchasing, convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was utilised. The selection of participants was governed by two distinct inclusion criteria. Initially, participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, a legal requirement that denotes full adulthood. Secondly, participants were required to have at least one prior experience of booking or purchasing through online tourism platforms. These criteria were established to ensure that participants were legally capable consumers and to maintain compliance with ethical research principles. Following the acquisition of ethical approval from the institution of the first author, the data collection process was initiated. Participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study (including the eligibility criteria), and it was emphasised that participation was voluntary, that there were no right or wrong answers, that the data would be used solely for scientific purposes in aggregate form, and that confidentiality and anonymity would be strictly protected. Data were collected via online surveys between 5th and 25th March 2026. A total of 417 usable questionnaires were

obtained. As the exact size of the target population was unknown, convenience sampling was considered the most appropriate sampling method. The demographic characteristics of the sample indicate that 241 participants were female and 176 were male; 350 were single and 67 were married. With regard to age distribution, 204 participants were between 18-20 years, 106 were 21-23 years, 69 were 24-26 years, and 38 were 27-29 years old. With respect to educational attainment, the majority of participants held an associate degree ($n = 259$), while most participants ($n = 265$) belonged to the low-income group. Furthermore, the sample comprised 285 students, 105 private sector employees, and 27 public sector employees.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was conducted utilising the SPSS, AMOS, and the PROCESS Macro software programs. Initially, the normality of the data distribution was assessed by examining skewness and kurtosis values. In this particular context, the range of skewness and kurtosis values was found to be between 0.303 and -1.231. The values in question fall within the ± 1.5 threshold, indicating that the data are normally distributed (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). In order to ascertain the validity of the research, a measurement model was constructed and examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Furthermore, convergent and discriminant validity were assessed in accordance with the criteria proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The reliability of the constructs was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients. The hypotheses were tested using the PROCESS Macro. In this particular context, analyses were conducted using Model 1, as recommended by Hayes (2018) for the purpose of testing basic moderation effects. The significance of effects was determined based on confidence interval values.

Results

Prior to the statistical analysis of the proposed model, a measurement model was established, and the construct validity and factor structures of the variables were tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). In this context, the explanatory power of observed variables on latent constructs was examined, and the model-data fit was evaluated. The results of this analysis provide important evidence regarding the alignment of the measurement model with the theoretical framework, and the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. CFA, reliability, mean, and standard deviation values

Factors	Items	Factor Loadings ^a	C.R.	α	Mean	S.D.
Consumer Confusion (CC)	CC1	.85	-	.97	2.73	.94
	CC2	.87	24.04			
	CC3	.87	24.34			
	CC4	.77	19.58			
	CC5	.86	23.80			
	CC6	.88	24.72			
	CC7	.84	22.80			
	CC8	.84	22.44			
	CC9	.86	23.72			
	CC10	.87	23.98			
	CC11	.85	23.32			
	CC12	.85	23.16			
	CC13	.85	23.33			
	CC14	.82	21.86			
	CC15	.80	20.76			
Decision Postponement (DP)	DP1	.87	-	.92	2.89	.94
	DP2	.90	25.95			
	DP3	.84	22.68			
	DP4	.85	23.18			
Online Trust (OT)	OT1	.86	-	.92	3.52	.81
	OT2	.81	20.18			
	OT3	.85	21.93			
	OT4	.85	22.11			

Factors	Items	Factor Loadings ^a	C.R.	α	Mean	S.D.
	OT5	.84	21.39			

Goodness of Fit (GoF) statistics for measurement model: $\chi^2=689,025$, $df=249$, $\chi^2/df=2.767$, $IFI=.956$, $TLI=.951$, $CFI=.956$, $RMSEA=.065$, $SRMR=.034$.

Note: ^a All factor loadings are significant at $p<.001$

In order to evaluate the measurement scales used in the study collectively, the scales were combined within a single measurement model and CFA was conducted. The goodness-of-fit statistics obtained from the CFA ($\chi^2/df = 2.767$, $IFI = .956$, $TLI = .951$, $CFI = .956$, $RMSEA = .065$, $SRMR = .034$) indicate an overall good model fit (Gürbüz, 2019). With regard to factor loadings, all items exhibited high factor loadings (minimum = .77). These factor loadings exceed the minimum threshold of .50 recommended by Hair et al. (2014), thereby confirming that the items adequately represent their respective constructs.

Another key aspect of the study's validity is the assessment of convergent and discriminant validity proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), and the corresponding results are presented in Table 2. The findings indicate that all Composite Reliability (CR) values exceed the .70 threshold, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values surpass the .50 threshold, and the condition $CR > AVE$ is satisfied, thereby confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, the square roots of the AVE values are higher than the inter-construct correlations, and the Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) values are lower than the corresponding AVE values. This demonstrates that discriminant validity has been established. In conclusion, the statistical results obtained demonstrate that the requirements for convergent and discriminant validity have been fulfilled (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scales were found to be high (minimum = .81), thus exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2014), thereby providing further evidence for the reliability of the measurement instruments.

Table 2. Convergent-discriminant validity and correlations among variables

Factors	CR	AVE	MSV	CC	DP	OT
Consumer Confusion (CC)	.97	.72	.58	.847*		
Decision Postponement (DP)	.92	.75	.58	.761	.868*	
Online Trust (OT)	.92	.70	.11	-.334	-.236	.839*

Significance of All Correlations: $p < .001$

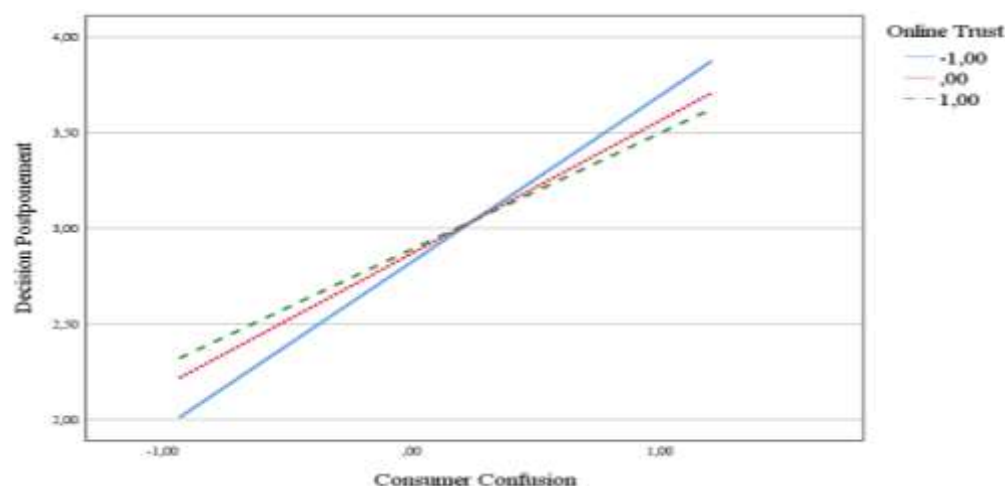
*The square root of the AVE

In order to test the hypotheses that had been developed and to validate the research model, Model 1 of the PROCESS Macro was employed, as recommended by Hayes (2018) for moderation analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Path coefficients of the theoretical model

Hypotheses	Impacts	β	S.E.	t	p	95% of Confidence Intervals	
						LLCI	ULCI
H1	CC→DP	.736	.036	20.807	.000	.6670	.8062
H2	CC*OT→DP	-.146	.039	-3.767	.000	-.2214	-.0696

Analyses conducted at the 95% confidence interval revealed both direct and moderating effects. In this context, consumer confusion was found to have a significant positive effect on behaviour related to the postponement of decisions ($\beta = .736$; $CI = 95\%$; $[LLCI = .6670, ULCI = .8062]$; $p < .001$). This result provides support for H1. In relation to the moderating effect, it was determined that consumers' perceived trust in online tourism platforms significantly moderates the relationship between consumer confusion and decision postponement ($\beta = -.146$; $CI = 95\%$; $[LLCI = -.2214, ULCI = -.0696]$; $p < .001$). Consequently, H2 was also supported. Furthermore, the model elucidated 53.7% of the variance in decision postponement behaviour ($R^2 = .537$). This indicates that the proposed model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in decision postponement behaviour, underscoring the combined explanatory power of consumer confusion and online trust in this context.

Figure 2. Slope analysis results for the moderating effect of online trust

Online Trust	β	P	LLCI-ULCI
-1 SD	.871	.000	7672, 9750
0 SD	.697	.000	6260, 7670
+1 SD	.609	.000	5182, 7002

A slope analysis was finally conducted to examine the moderating effect of online trust in greater detail. In this context, the impact of consumer confusion on decision postponement behaviour was assessed at low (-1), medium (0), and high (1) levels of online trust, and the corresponding graphical representation and statistical values are presented in Figure 2. The findings suggest that the impact of consumer uncertainty on the deferral of decisions varies according to varying degrees of online trust. Specifically, when online trust is low, the effect is .871 ($p < .001$); at a moderate level of trust, it is .697 ($p < .001$); and when trust is high, it decreases to .609 ($p < .001$). The findings demonstrate that as online trust increases, the effect of consumer confusion on decision postponement weakens.

Conclusion and Discussion

The present study examined the effect of consumer confusion on decision postponement in online tourism purchasing processes, and the moderating role of online trust in this relationship. The findings reveal that consumer confusion exerts a significant and positive effect on decision postponement, thereby confirming H1. This result aligns with previous studies suggesting that consumers often postpone their decision-making processes when confronted with substantial information overload, analogous alternatives, and ambiguity (Sharma et al., 2023; Shiu, 2021). From the perspective of Information Overload Theory, this finding is also theoretically justified: given the limited cognitive capacity of individuals, exposure to excessive amounts of information can impede decision-making processes and frequently result in choices being postponed.

A further key conclusion of the study is that online trust plays a significant moderating role in the relationship between consumer confusion and decision postponement, confirming H2; as the level of online trust rises, the impact of consumer confusion on decision postponement diminishes. This finding is consistent with the extant literature suggesting that online trust reduces uncertainty and facilitates the decision-making process (Gefen, 2000; Pavlou, 2003). This outcome can also be interpreted within the framework of Perceived Risk Theory: consumers who exhibit higher levels of trust in online environments tend to perceive lower levels of uncertainty and risk, which in turn enables them to make faster and more decisive choices, even in complex information settings. This finding is consistent with Kim et al. (2008), who demonstrated the facilitating role of trust in online purchasing decision-making processes. It is worth noting, however, that much of the earlier literature on online trust, including Gefen (2000) and Pavlou (2003), has primarily conceptualized trust as a direct antecedent of purchase intention or acceptance of e-commerce, rather than as a mechanism that shapes the strength of other cognitive processes. By demonstrating that trust moderates the confusion postponement relationship, the present study extends this line of research from a direct effects perspective toward a more process-oriented understanding of how trust operates under conditions of high cognitive load. Notably, this result also extends the work of Sharma et al. (2023), who examined decision postponement in the same online tourism context but identified self-efficacy rather than trust as the relevant boundary condition, with confusion levels varying primarily by demographic factors such as education and gender. In contrast, An et al. (2026) found that not all contextual factors moderate the confusion-postponement relationship; specifically, time

pressure showed no significant moderating effect. Taken together, these comparisons suggest that relational factors such as trust may function as more robust moderators of decision postponement than situational pressures, underscoring the distinct explanatory value of a trust-based approach.

The findings obtained specifically for Generation Z lead to a further notable conclusion. Despite being raised in close proximity to digital technologies and utilizing online platforms extensively, this generation continues to grapple with cognitive overload stemming from the deluge of information and a plethora of alternatives, which subsequently prompts the behaviour of deferring decisions. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that, despite their digital nativity and active engagement in online environments, Generation Z consumers do not always make rational or fast decisions (Song, 2021; Başer and Kantarcıoğlu, 2022). Whereas Song (2021) primarily attributes this tendency to impulsive rational tension in word-of-mouth driven purchases, the present findings point to a more foundational cognitive mechanism: information and choice overload itself-suggesting that Generation Z's vulnerability to postponement may stem less from purchase motivation and more from the sheer volume of alternatives they must process. Consequently, digital competence does not necessarily guarantee ease of decision-making; in some cases, it may even serve to accentuate the complexity of information.

Taken together, these conclusions indicate that online tourism purchasing processes are not only related to access to information but are also closely shaped by how this information is perceived and how it is filtered through trust. This underscores the significance of a holistic approach that incorporates cognitive (consumer confusion) and relational (trust) factors to elucidate consumer behaviour and provides a comprehensive perspective on the digital tourism literature with significant implications for future research.

Theoretical Contribution

This study offers three main theoretical contributions. First, it addresses a notable gap in the literature by examining the relationship between consumer confusion and decision postponement within a digital tourism context a setting characterized by experiential and intangible services that has received limited empirical attention compared to general consumption settings. Second, the study extends existing models by conceptualizing online trust not merely as a direct antecedent but as a moderating mechanism; the findings, which show that trust functions to weaken the effects of cognitive complexity on decision-making, can be interpreted through the lens of Information Overload Theory and Perceived Risk Theory, offering a more holistic theoretical account of this process. Third, by focusing on a Generation Z sample, the study challenges the prevailing assumption that this cohort's digital fluency guarantees fast, confident decision-making, demonstrating instead that Generation Z consumers remain susceptible to decision postponement when faced with excessive information and alternatives.

Practical Contribution

The findings offer three key implications for tourism businesses and online platform managers. First, given the strong link between consumer confusion and decision postponement, reducing information complexity should be a strategic priority through simplified content, improved filtering, personalized recommendations, and clearer comparison tools among alternatives. Second, because online trust weakens this effect, businesses should invest in trust-building measures such as website security, transparent pricing, verified user reviews, and certifications; this is especially critical in tourism, where high pre-purchase uncertainty makes trust a key source of competitive advantage. Third, platforms targeting Generation Z should go beyond mere digital presence, offering user-friendly interfaces and decision-facilitating content, since simplicity and trust-enhancing elements together are more likely to improve conversion among this cohort.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The present study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the present study is confined to Generation Z individuals residing in Nevşehir. This may restrict the generalizability of the findings. It is recommended that future research endeavours seek to address this limitation by collecting data from a range of cities, cultural contexts, and age groups. This would allow for a more comprehensive examination of whether the results vary across different populations. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study precludes the observation of relationships between variables over time. Consequently, subsequent studies may benefit from the implementation of longitudinal research methodologies, with the objective of elucidating the evolution of consumer behaviours over time. Additionally, as the data were collected through a self-reported, single-source questionnaire administered at a single point in time, the study may be subject to common method bias. Future research could address this concern by employing time-lagged or multi-source data collection designs.

Furthermore, the present study focuses exclusively on the moderating role of online trust. It is recommended that future research incorporate additional variables, such as perceived risk, brand loyalty, experience quality, or digital literacy, to obtain more comprehensive insights. Moreover, although the consumer confusion scale employed in this study captures four distinct dimensions: information, similarity, overload, and ambiguity confusion these dimensions were examined as a unidimensional construct in the present analysis. Future studies may benefit from investigating these dimensions separately to identify which specific type of confusion is most strongly associated with decision postponement. Finally, the study considers general online tourism platforms. It is suggested that future researchers direct their attention towards more specific contexts, including but not limited to hotel booking websites, flight platforms and mobile applications. The objective of doing so would be to conduct more in-depth analyses.

Etik Beyan: Bu çalışmada kullanılan ölçek için Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu'ndan 27/02/2026 tarihli ve 2026/05 nolu toplantısında 30 sıra sayılı kararı ile izin alınmıştır. Aksi bir durumun tespiti halinde Journal of Gastronomy Hospitality and Travel (JOGHAT) Dergisinin hiçbir sorumluluğu olmayıp, tüm sorumluluk çalışmanın yazar (lar) ına aittir.

Yazar Katkı Beyanı: 1. Yazarın katkı oranı %50, 2. Yazarın katkı oranı ise %50'dir.

Çıkar Beyanı: Yazarlar arasında çıkar çatışması yoktur.

References

- Ampountolas, A., Shaw, G., and James, S. (2019). The role of social media as a distribution channel for promoting pricing strategies, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 2(1), 75-91.
- An, Q., Ozturk, A. B., Hancer, M., Hua, N., and Berezina, K. (2026). The effects of information and individual difference factors on online travel agency consumers' confusion and decision postponement: An integration of information processing theory and stressor-strain-outcome framework, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 135, 104642.
- Anninou, I. and Foxall, G. R. (2019). The reinforcing and aversive consequences of customer experience. The role of consumer confusion. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 51, 139-151.
- Başer, G., Kantırcıoğlu, B. (2022). E-Ticaret'te müşteri güven algısı: Y ve Z kuşağı tüketiciler üzerine bir araştırma, *İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 14(1), 389-401
- Chauhan, V. and Sagar, M. (2021). Consumer confusion: a systematic review and research directions, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 38(4), 445-456.
- Dang, V. T. (2020). Information confusion and intention to stop using social networking site: a moderated mediation study of psychological distress and perceived novelty, *Information Technology & People*, 33(5), 1427-1452.
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39-50.
- Gefen, D. (2000). E-commerce: the role of familiarity and trust, *Omega*, 28(6), 725-737.
- Gürbüz, S. (2019). *AMOS ile Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi*, Ankara, Seçkin Yayıncılık.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., and Anderson, R. E. (2014). *Multivariate Data Analysis*. (7th Ed.), New York, Pearson New International Edition.
- Hall-Phillips, A. and Shah, P. (2017). Unclear confusion and expiration date labels in the United States: A consumer perspective, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 35, 118-126.
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach*, New York, The Guilford Press.
- Jacoby, J., Speller, D. E., and Kohn, C. A. (1974). Brand choice behavior as a function of information load, *Journal of marketing research*, 11(1), 63-69.
- Kim, D. J., Ferrin, D. L., & Rao, H. R. (2008). A trust-based consumer decision-making model in electronic commerce: The role of trust, perceived risk, and their antecedents, *Decision support systems*, 44(2), 544-564.

- Kim, J. O. (2021). Consumer confusion, shopping fatigue, and negative purchasing behaviour in internet shopping environment, *북식문화연구*, 29(4), 505-521.
- Kim, S. and Park, H. (2013). Effects of various characteristics of social commerce (s-commerce) on consumers' trust and trust performance, *International Journal of Information Management*, 33(2), 318-332.
- Lu, A. C. C., Gursoy, D., and Lu, C. Y. R. (2016). Antecedents and outcomes of consumers' confusion in the online tourism domain, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 57, 76-93.
- Mathur, T. (2021). Marketing health insurance products: sources and consequences of customers' confusion, *International Journal of Healthcare Management*, 14(4), 1337-1347.
- Mitchell, V. W. (1999). Consumer perceived risk: conceptualisations and models, *European Journal of marketing*, 33(1/2), 163-195.
- Pappas, N. (2017). Effect of marketing activities, benefits, risks, confusion due to over-choice, price, quality and consumer trust on online tourism purchasing, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 23(2), 195-218.
- Pappas, N., Caputo, A., Pellegrini, M. M., Marzi, G., and Michopoulou, E. (2021). The complexity of decision-making processes and IoT adoption in accommodation SMEs, *Journal of Business Research*, 131, 573-583.
- Park, H. J. (2014). Antecedents of consumers' decision postponement on purchasing fast fashion brands, *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture*, 22(5), 743-759.
- Pavlou, P. A. (2003). Consumer acceptance of electronic commerce: Integrating trust and risk with the technology acceptance model, *International journal of electronic commerce*, 7(3), 101-134.
- Pew Research Center (2020). *On the cusp of adulthood and facing an uncertain future: What we know about Gen Z so far*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/> (Erişim Tarihi: 11 Şubat 2026)
- Sharma, A., Pandher, J. S., and Prakash, G. (2023). Consumer confusion and decision postponement in the online tourism domain: the moderating role of self-efficacy, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 6(2), 1092-1117.
- Shiu, J. Y. (2021). Risk-reduction strategies in competitive convenience retail: How brand confusion can impact choice among existing similar alternatives, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, 102547.
- Song, Y. Q. (2021). The roles of consumer confusion, education, and age between word of mouth and impulsive purchase: A mediated moderation model, in *2021 International Conference on Information Technology and Biomedical Engineering (ICITBE), December 2021*, 217-221.
- Tabachnick, B. G. and Fidell, L. S. (2013). *Using Multivariate Statistics*, Boston, Pearson Education Limited.
- Thai, N. T. and Yuksel, U. (2017). Too many destinations to visit: Tourists' dilemma?, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 62, 38-53.
- Tu, H. W. and Wu, D. D. (2019). The impact of online travel consumer confusion on negative word of mouth: From the perspective of emotional focus response, *Journal of Tourism*, 34(2), 73-84.
- Walsh, G. and Mitchell, V. W. (2010). The effect of consumer confusion proneness on word of mouth, trust, and customer satisfaction, *European Journal of marketing*, 44(6), 838-859.
- Walsh, G., Hennig-Thurau, T., and Mitchell, V. W. (2007). Consumer confusion proneness: Scale development, validation, and application, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 23(7-8), 697-721.
- Xue, P., Jo, W., and Bonn, M. A. (2020). Online hotel booking decisions based on price complexity, alternative attractiveness, and confusion, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 45, 162-171.
- Yang, S. P., Chang, S. C., Liang, T. C., Situmorang, R. O. P., and Hussain, M. (2021). Consumer confusion and green consumption intentions from the perspective of food-related lifestyles on organic infant milk formulas, *Sustainability*, 13(4), 1606.