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An exploration into Gen Ys' attitudes and behaviour towards volunteering whilst backpacking

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Abstract

This study focuses on Generation Ys' attitudes and behaviour towards engaging in volunteer tourism whilst backpacking. To that end, we first examine Gen Ys' generational characteristics and the predominant attitudes and behaviours displayed by this generational cohort. Then the focus is shifted to understanding Generation Y as backpackers and their internal and external motivations. These motivations are queried under the prism of volunteer tourism; being seen as factors determining the level of engagement with volunteer tourism and overall backpacking behaviour while travelling. This chapter provides insights into the themes described above by examining the relevant tourism literature. Finally, it summarises the theoretical gaps in the extant literature and sets objectives for future research, whilst signposting authors to key literature sources.

Keywords:

Generation Y, millennials, backpacking, volunteering, tourism, motivation

Introduction

Generation Y has been the last labelled and thoroughly explored generation (Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2010), and leisure and tourism appear to be of particular significance to them (Halliday & Astafyeva, 2014). Jennings et al. (2010) provided insights on backpackers within Generation Y, highlighting their nonchalant desire for relaxation and avid appetite in terms of new experiences. However, travel and tourism behaviour of Generation Ys has still not been adequately explored and is therefore faced with many contradictory claims (Benckendorf & Moscardo, 2010; Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Hence, there is a need for further research within this field in order to consolidate present knowledge and provide new insights into the behaviours and attitudes of Generation Y backpackers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ong & du Cros, 2012). The aim of this study is to explore Generation Ys' attitudes and behaviour towards engaging in volunteer tourism whilst backpacking by setting and answering the following objectives:

- 1 Establish generation Ys' characteristics as backpackers and their motivations and attitudes towards volunteering,
- 2 Identify their motivators and attitudes for their involvement in volunteering whilst travelling and
- 3 Evaluate the extent to which motivators and attitudes towards volunteering whilst travelling affect Generation Ys' backpacking behaviour. This study contributes to theory by identifying gaps in the extant literature and providing recommendations for future research.

Theoretical background

Generational theory originates from the United States of America but is widely relevant for anglophones (i.e. English speakers), whether native or non-native, with a cultural background related to the English language (Fields et al., 2008). Generations or generational cohorts are usually defined as: *'proposed groups of individuals who are born during the same time period and who experienced similar external events during their formative or coming-of-age years (i.e. late adolescent and early adulthood years).'* (Noble & Schewe, 2003: 979). Researchers whose field covers population influences

on society use the term '*generation*' as a common denominator for people born within the same general timeframe and experience the same social or historical key events (Gursoy et al., 2008). The term has also been used to define behaviours and attitudes of a group of people different from the generations before or after it (Beirne, 2008).

What makes Generation Y so interesting, according to Salt (2006), is the potential to be a positive and hopeful generation, more community-minded, focused on modesty, achievement, teamwork, and good conduct (Beirne, 2008) unlike the two previous generations, which have usually been defined by negative trends. As a group, it is different from any other in history, wealthier, more numerous, better educated, more ethnically diverse and interested in positive social skills. Several key defining events, social conditions and distinguishing features have been suggested as responsible for the Y generation's characteristics (Corvi et al; 2007; Mitchell, 2005; Eisner, 2005; Donnison, 2007; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Lyons et al., 2005; Jorgenson, 2003; McCrindle, 2009; Clemmons, 2008; Walker et al., 2006; Krayewski, 2009; Saltzman, 2007).

Key influences

Canavan (2011) groups shaping influences into three key themes: *technology, globalisation and parenting*.

In terms of technology, the last 30 years has been a period of unique alteration from an industrial to a digital economy and culture, followed by the appearance of the 'digital native'. The Information Age has caused one of the most influential shifts in our society to date (Pendergast, 2007). Generation Y was the first generation born into the Information Age, consequently known as digital natives (Prensky, 2006). The rise of the internet and the emergence of globalisation has affected global popular culture, made the world easier to travel and introduced digital media. As a result of those events Generation Y is technology savvy, seeking constant change, flexible, interested in creativity and innovation, multi-cultural and tolerant of diversity.

With regards to globalisation, it had significant impact on the overall Generation Y personality, making them so far, the best educated and most culturally diverse generation, open-minded and flexible towards diversity and change (Pew Research Centre, 2010; Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001) thus transcending geography and ethnicity (Donnison, 2007;