

# The perception of hospitality for gen X versus gen Y in Caribbean Region

La percepción de la hospitalidad para la generación X versus la generación Y en la región del Caribe

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**ABSTRACT.** In this manuscript, unique features of Millennial generation (Gen Y) in tourism and hospitality services will be discussed through Caribbean Millennials. The methodology will be literature review on generational differences in hospitality sector and evaluation of findings. First, the defining characteristics of Millennials will be examined compared to X generation (Gen X). Next, the focus will shift to hospitality services, and their development through the emerging needs of Millennials, such as integrated services with technology and exclusive benefits for personal requirements of tourists, rather than previous one-size-fits-all hospitality services of Fordist era. Finally, the paper will provide concluding remarks.

**RESUMEN.** En este manuscrito, se analizarán las características únicas de la generación Millennial (Gen Y) en los servicios de turismo y hospitalidad a través de Millennials del Caribe. La metodología será la revisión de la literatura sobre las diferencias generacionales en el sector hotelero y la evaluación de los hallazgos. Primero, se examinarán las características definitorias de los Millennials en comparación con la generación X (Gen X). A continuación, el enfoque se centrará en los servicios de hospitalidad y su desarrollo a través de las necesidades emergentes de los Millennials, como los servicios integrados con tecnología y los beneficios exclusivos para los requisitos personales de los turistas, en lugar de los servicios de hospitalidad anteriores de talla única de la era fordista. Finalmente, el documento proporcionará observaciones finales.

**KEYWORDS:** Millennials, Hospitality, Caribbean, Gen X, Gen Y.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Millennials, Hospitalidad, Caribe, Generación X, Generación Y.

## 1. Introduction

An earlier conceptualization of generational theory by Strauss and Howe (1997) define generation as a group of people who born roughly same span of a phase of life, standing on a common location in history and therefore sharing a common collective persona. The differences among generations have long been investigated under various branches in the field of academics, including sociology, economics, business management, as well as in professional domain. For instance, the theory and practice of multi-generational marketing, which address the organization of strategies according to differentiated needs of generations, has emerged as an effective marketing approach (Williams & Page 2011: 2). As an interdisciplinary field within the academia and business, tourism studies also require to harmonize the available knowledge with differentiated needs and perceptions of new generations both in theory as well as in practice, in order to maximize the benefits of tourism consumers and increase the tourism revenues across the globe, in particular for hotel and accommodation services. In the light of this need, tourism practitioners and academicians have acknowledged the importance of studying travel behavior of generations (Li et al., 2013: 148). However, previous studies in the literature on the generational differences in tourism and hospitality sector generally focus on the labor supply aspect of the issue, such as work values (Chen & Choi, 2008), attitudes towards authority (Gursoy et al., 2008), workplace diversity (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011), workplace engagement (Schullery, 2013), employee retention and commitment or organizations' turnover (Rosa & Hastings, 2016). On the other hand, generational aspects of tourist motivations and development of hospitality services related to generational differences have remained rather uninvestigated.

As travel become more accessible throughout the decades parallel to the evolution of society and developments in technology, hospitality industry has constantly required the improvement of practices to keep up with the progress of the society and technology (Szende & Holcombe, 2016: 1). This is particularly because the traditional, mass-marketing approaches have been proven to be ineffective for younger generations (Williams & Page, 2011: 8). The scope of activities in the tourism also rapidly increased following the particular global developments which have altered social and economic relations to a large extent. For instance, growing involvement of women to labor force in post- World War II era along with the changes in commercialization and commodification of tourism throughout the years paved the road for sophisticated, more specialized and hedonistic holiday options other than "sun and sand" activities of previous times, such as wellness spas, green tourism resorts, volunteer tourist experiences as well as synthetic, syndicated yet dependable tourist experiences as in the case of Disney theme parks (Gardiner et al., 2014: 705-706). Besides that, although there are common characteristics within one generation at a global scale, the impact of geographical distances continue to play an important role pertaining to culture and heritage, which in turn lead to emergence of different requirements from one society to the other. In other terms, the generational characteristics might be specific to certain cultures or countries (Fountain & Lamb, 2011: 109). For example, classification of generations such as Pre-depression, Depression, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z is a Western-centric categorization stemming from the important events in the history of the United States (Williams & Page, 2011: 2), but the categorizations can be extended or eliminated with respect to the social, economic or political dynamics in other destinations. Understanding these differences is crucial, since the role of people at every level, both as the customer and as the employee matter in the tourism and hotel services (Genç, 2011).

One of the significant tourist attracting destinations, Caribbean islands are composed of 25 independent countries and other territories, located in the region of the Caribbean Sea<sup>1</sup>. The development of tourism for Caribbean is considered as the most important compared to any other regions in the world, with respect to the share of tourism sector in GDP and economic growth (Lorde et al., 2016: 946). The marketing campaigns in Caribbean tourism destinations contribute to the welfare of local population through tourism activities, yet the activity itself is regarded as a form of neo-imperialism, resembling to the past slavery days where the black bodies were forced to be in servitude to the interests of whites (Spencer, 2019: 75). However, throughout the generations, these negative attitudes will be changing into a more globalized point of view. In addition to this,

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved online from <https://www.caribbeanislands.com/> on 19.01.2019.

previous studies have shown that the tourism demand for the Caribbean region is fundamentally dependent on several aspects including destination and origin income, destination population and prices (Lorde et al., 2016: 953).

In this study, the role of generational differences in shaping hospitality services will be investigated in the context of Caribbean Millennials. The following sections will provide a detailed discussion on generations and their impacts on the development of hospitality sector. Baby Boomers, the generation which born after the hardships of Second World War, until the beginning of 1960s (Fishman, 2016: 255), and its predecessor generations will not be taken into consideration throughout this analysis, as the intention of this study is to measure the impact of Millennials on the hospitality sector, which has already shaped by the needs and expectations of their previous generation: Gen X. Furthermore, the paper will not be dealing with the newly emerging successor generation of Millennials, Generation Z (Gen Z, i.e. Post Millennials), since they are not old enough to take part in the economy to shape the hospitality sector with their individual needs and expectations.

## 2. Defining Characteristics of Gen X and Millennials

Before providing a discussion regarding to comparison of generations based on some aspect, one should clearly state what makes generations different from each other. According to Fishman (2016), each generation is shaped by the historic events which occur during their formative years. These events, or “defining moments” may stem from economic changes, political situation, technological improvements or other general lifestyle changes at a regional or global scale (Fountain & Lamb, 2011: 109). For example, the oil crisis of 1973, the end of the Cold War and the HIV-AIDS epidemic can be considered some important historical events which shaped the Gen X individuals, whereas the fall of Soviet Union, the first Gulf War and the wide-spread use of internet parallel to the rise of Information Age can be named as historical milestones that have a significant influence on the Millennials (Strauss & Howe, 1997; Li et al., 2013: 149). Such historic events forge the unique properties of generations which will stay throughout its lifespan, hence effecting the values, attitudes, lifestyles and priorities, unless the influence of these events are moderated in other respects, such as emergence of another event, or endowments of individuals to cope with the impact of these macro-scale experiences (Fishman, 2016: 250). For that reason, these generational cohorts underline the commonalities between in-groups and differences from out-groups, hence offering more meaningful market segmentation compared to, for example, segmentation of market with respect to age (Fountain & Lamb, 2011: 109).

Despite shaped by several epochal events or trends, there are no common dates in the previous literature to differentiate one generation from the other, but rather there are time intervals, which more or less overlap with each other. Gen X consists of individuals who born in 1960s and 1970s (Fishman, 2016: 253). Yet, some other studies restrict the time interval to a period between mid-60s and mid-70s (Chen & Choi, 2008: 596; Williams & Page, 2011: 6; Gardiner et al., 2014: 706). In their formative times, in other terms, when they reached to adulthood, there was a global crisis in terms of economy and politics (Williams & Page, 2011: 6). As a result, Gen Xers are generally characterized as self-reliant, independent and skeptical of authority (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011: 309).

On the other hand, Millennials, also known as Gen Y or Echo-Boomers, are generally accepted as a generation who born during 1977-1994 (Fountain & Lamb, 2011: 109; Williams & Page, 2011: 8; Gardiner et al., 2014: 706). In some sources, the emergence of Millennials is postponed up to beginning of 1980s (Hahm et al., 2008: 194) and goes until the year of 2000 (Fishman, 2016: 250). Pendergast (2009) differentiated three consecutive generation units in her definition of Generation Y, such that “Generation Why” born in 1982-1985, Millennials born in 1985-1999 and iGeneration, born in 1999-2002 period. Nevertheless, this paper will not be dealing with further categorization of generation units and their possible influences on hospitality service development; rather the discussion focuses on differences across generations. Born into an era defined with radical technological developments such as emergence internet and proliferation of computers, Millennials are the first generation raised in digital world (Fishman, 2016: 253). Besides that, growing up in a rich media environment characterized by prominent technology and media gadgets including

cellular phones, instant messenger systems, Podcasts, MP3 players, Bluetooth, RSS systems, along with Internet-based platforms such as social media accounts, personal web pages, blogs and wikis, Millennials are tend to be reflective, cautious and ready to challenge traditional value systems (Hahm et al., 2008: 194). For that reason, they are the most globally oriented generation with a smart, optimistic and achievement-oriented profile, who may also adapt rapidly, strive for change and challenge, and create constantly (Strauss & Howe, 1997; Li et al., 2013: 149).

Given the absence of strict time frames for making a clear distinction among generations, Kapoor and Solomon (2011) emphasize that individuals born during the transition periods between generations may adopt the characteristics of either generations or they may develop a unique mixture out of these aspects.

Considering the view of leisure, Gen Xers perceive the leisure as a goal, for which they work and have money (Chen & Choi, 2008: 600). Based on their urge for pursuing a simple life, Gen Xers value personal time and they are, for instance, more likely to accept lower salaries as long as the job ensures them necessary amount of time that would be used for their personal needs (Fishman, 2016: 254). On the other hand, millennials appreciate work-life balance as they regard their lives as a harmonized whole composed of work and leisure times (Chen & Choi, 2008: 600).

Previous studies intended to measure the impact of generational differences also indicate a complex interrelationship between the effects of generation, age and environment, as behaviors of individuals might change with respect to their age or the environment in which they have grown up, other than the cohort influences (Fountain & Lamb, 2011: 110).

### 3. Development of Hospitality Sector throughout Generations

Following the transition of Baby Boomers to older age, the Millennials were predicted to be the most significant emerging market (Chhabra, 2010: 793).

Previous investigation on the mobility differences between generations suggested that Millennials tend to travel less with automobiles compared to Gen Xers and earlier generations (Tiedemann et al., 2017) not because they prefer to travel with other means of transportation, but rather they make fewer trips (McDonald, 2015: 9).

Since the value of family is more than anything for Gen X (Williams & Page, 2011: 6), they have been more likely to travel with their families and their needs for accommodation have been shaped accordingly, such as different needs of children, adult women and adult men.

On the contrary, strong sense of independence of autonomy for Millennials decrease the likelihood for travelling as families, hence hospitality sector needs to provide tourism opportunities, which are capable of meeting personalized need of Millennials (Williams & Page, 2011: 8).

The study conducted by Polzin et al. (2014) on the travel behavior of Millennials suggest that several socio-demographic and economic domains can be considered to understand the difference between the motivations of Millennials and other generations, such as rural/urban residence, race/ethnicity, labor force participation/education participation, income/economic status, living arrangements, lifecycle status, licensure status, car ownership/availability, values, and technology substitution for travel. The results indicate that Millennials are more urban-centric; they have the highest level of college participation, where the educational attainment of women remarkably increased, at the expense of financial distress; they are more likely to live away from their parents, significantly delayed marriage and childbearing, have lower licensure status, substitute the use of car through the use of technology to carry out social and commercial interactions and value environmental sustainability and health (Polzin et al., 2014: 61-63).

The significant economic distress of Millennials characterized by high unemployment, college debts, limited



assets, uncertainties about job security and upward mobility is likely to moderate travel demand for Millennials (Polzin et al., 2014: 62).

Higher levels of education, workforce participation, and high income are significantly correlated with travel behavior in a positive way (Polzin et al., 2014: 62).

Millennials are also considered as less religious, less patriotic and less trusting to other (Polzin et al., 2014: 63).

Regarding to reliability of professional advice while planning a travel destination, both Gen X and Millennials differ significantly from other generations as they regard this source of information as the least useful among other information sources including word of mouth, paid advertisement, online sources, and books/movies/news (Li et al., 2013: 158). Surprisingly, Gen X individuals consider online sources of travel information more important than Millennials, although the latter are more acquainted with the use of internet (Li et al., 2013: 160).

The study conducted by Li et al. (2013) on the generational differences in the consumer behavior of American tourists revealed that Gen X individuals are more associated with traditional travel destinations outside of U.S. such as Caribbean, Western Europe, Canada and Mexico, whereas Millennials with a lower outbound travel incidence, tend to travel to Asia and Eastern Europe, indicating an urge for the alternative which have a potential to offer more meaningful experiences. Moreover, both generations are likely to travel outside the U.S. compared to previous generations, where Gen Xers have a slightly higher possibility (Li et al., 2013: 159-160).

Generations may also differ in terms of their destination evaluation criteria. These destination evaluation criteria can include quality shopping facilities, variety of cultural and historical sites, natural scenic beauty, climate, appealing local food, accommodations service quality, convention and exhibition facilities, friendliness of people, ease of getting to the country, reliable local transportation and ease of getting around in the destination, safety and security of the place, quality of nightlife and entertainment, recreational opportunities, lower difficulties for language barriers, good value for money, tourist information, cleanliness and hygiene, interesting customs, beautiful architecture, degree of restfulness and relaxation, and environmental quality (Hahm et al., 2008: 196; Li et al., 2013: 155). For Millennials, the attributes of cultural and historical sites, natural scenery and climate are less important factors, whereas both generations consider safety and security as the most important attribute while they are evaluating a destination for travel purposes (Li et al., 2013: 160).

Gen Xers and Millennials also share an interest for environmental/ecological excursions and shopping, where Gen X individuals have a particular preference for visiting National Parks and watching wild life (Li et al., 2013: 160).

In their study on the impact of movies on tourism destination preferences of Millennials, Hahm et al. (2008) showed that exposure to films and other media content may significantly alter the destination preferences of Millennial generation with respect to several destination evaluation criteria including safe place to visit, good value for the money and appealing local food.

#### 4. Hospitality Services with Millennials: Caribbean Case

By enabling cost effective strategy development which is capable of creating more widespread and powerful “electronic word of mouth” impact, the importance and effectiveness of social media marketing for destination management organizations and tourism service providers in Caribbean, especially in the age of digitalization, has been highlighted by previous studies (Lorde et al., 2016: 953).

Stemming from an urge of authenticity, many Caribbean small island developing states market their islands as destinations with idyllic and holistic characteristics, in which local populations offer a warm and inviting

attitude (Spencer, 2019: 74).

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Future consumers are expected to be better educated and more informed than many of today's travelers, therefore they will possess higher expectations about the quality of tourism experiences (Gardiner et al., 2014: 705).

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