



Managing Asian attractions, Generation Y and face



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ABSTRACT

In view of the growth, dynamism and increasing influence of the Asian tourism industry and the contribution to be played in the future by Gen Y visitors and workforce, this study compares and contrasts the views of professionals in the visitor attractions' sector in Asia. The research explores how they acknowledge Gen Y as a unique generational cohort worthy of attention and the strategies adopted by visitor attractions to meet this cohort's combination of needs, wants and expectations. The study provides a critical reflection on the usefulness of generational theory for studies of this nature and the contribution of "face" and "face consumption" as explanatory variables in the Asian context. The articles ends with a recommendation for a deeper, longitudinal approach to the further study of generational cohorts.

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1. Introduction

Although studies of generational cohorts generally, and Generation Y (Gen Y) more specifically, are commonplace in Western domains (i.e. Moscardo, Murphy, & Benckendorff, 2011; Nusair, Parsa, & Cobanoglu, 2011), this is less so in Asia (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013) and is most notable in the fields of tourism and hospitality, with some recent notable exceptions (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017). This is considered surprising in view of the multigenerational nature of visitors and workforce that span the entire industry (Barron, Leask, & Fyall, 2014; Kapoor & Solomon, 2011) and the fact that demographic change is, arguably, the strongest force for change over the next generation (McRae, 1995; von Bergner & Lohmann, 2013). Interestingly, this is despite more generic studies on workforce characteristics (Liu & Zhao, 2008; Zhao & Liu, 2008, pp. 612–616); leadership (Hagermann & Stroop, 2013; Stanat, 2005); the consumption of fast food (Padgett, 2009); sports consumption

(Johnson Morgan, Summers & Jocusen, 2006); and fashion (O'Cass & Choy, 2008). More specifically, the paucity of studies on Gen Y in the visitor attraction sector is surprising as it represents a sector where all generations visit and work together, as evidenced by studies conducted by Leask, Fyall, and Barron (2013a; 2013b) among others (see Prideaux, Yee-Sum Lee, & Tsang, 2016).

In view of the growth, dynamism and increasing influence of the Asian tourism industry, this supply-side study analyses the views of professionals in the visitor attraction sector in the Asian city states of Hong Kong, Singapore and Macau. The study focuses on how they acknowledge Gen Y as a unique generational cohort worthy of attention, and on the strategies they adopt to meet the cohort's combination of needs, wants and expectations. In response to criticisms evident in the literature on generational theory, this paper also critically explores the extent to which cultural distinctions and/or traits are as, or more, important in the context of Asia, with Gen Y being viewed by some as a purely Anglophone phenomenon (Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010).

This study thus provides a critical review of the literature on generational theory and Gen Y; patterns of Asian consumption; and the concepts of "face" and "face consumption" in the specific

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context of Asia. The paper then clarifies the qualitative nature of the research methodology before introducing the research framework that informed our collection of data. The study then provides an analysis of the views of visitor attraction professionals on Gen Y and those strategies deemed suitable to capture their attention. The study concludes with a critical reflection on the usefulness of generational theory for studies of this nature and the contribution of “Face” and “Face Consumption” as explanatory variables in the context of Asia, before recommending a deeper, longitudinal approach to the further study of generational cohorts.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Generational theory and Gen Y

Many studies have demonstrated that various traits vary across the generations and generational cohort theory explains these changes across generations (D’Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008). According to this theory, important historical events and social changes in society affect the values, attitudes, beliefs, and inclinations of individuals. Such events that unfold during the formative rather than later years of individuals are especially consequential and therefore, individuals born during a particular time, and thus corresponding to the same cohort, will often share specific inclinations and cognitive styles (Moss, 2016). Recent studies by Leask et al. (2013a; 2013b) provide a detailed critique of generational theory in general, and Gen Y more specifically, with the vast majority of studies originating from advanced Western economies. Underpinned by the initial study by Mannheim (1952) generational theory provides a broader, more dynamic, socio-cultural context within which to understand behaviour, as compared to the more individualistic approach advocated by Pendergast (2010). Although far from criticism free, this broad approach to the study of generational behaviour is separated into three core tenets. The first, “location”, relates to the chronological span of years for the birth of a generational cohort (Pendergast, 2010), while the second, “actuality”, identifies those major forces in the wider environment and how they impact on the persona of a generational cohort (Donnison, 2007). The third and final tenet provides the theory with an additional sub-division or sub-cohorts into smaller segments within the broader generational cohort, as advocated by Kupperschmidt (2000).

The breadth and flexibility of generational theory, however, provide the basis for some criticisms of its use. These criticisms include determining the specific “location” of a cohort which can lead to much supposition and speculation in the field (Huntly, 2006); disagreement regarding periods of time that relate to a particular generation (see, for example, Kupperschmidt, 2000); and the extent to which generational characteristics transcend national boundaries (see for example Josefowicz, 2003; Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010; Sweeney, 2008). In their analysis of Gen Y festival attendees, Kruger and Saayman (2015) contribute to the discourse regarding the creation of generational cohorts and neatly identify the complexity of generational theory through further identification and segmentation of this complex generational group. They conclude that significant differences in socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics can be observed within Gen Y as a whole, but further argue the importance of understanding generation theory for organisations interested in attracting this particular segment.

One of the key defining traits of Gen Y is that they are the most sheltered and parentally - protected generation to date (Howe, 2006). A further defining trait is their immersive online experience and the consequent importance of online social interaction (Nusair, Bilgihan, & Okumus, 2013). Studies by Daniel-Dreyfuss

(2007) and Wolburg and Pokrywczynski (2001) further highlight the high levels of cultural diversity and levels of acceptance of Gen Y, encouraged by the growth of educational opportunities and higher levels of achievement that have resulted in more tolerant patterns of social and cultural behaviour. Taylor and Cosenza (2002) argue that this may in turn lead to greater “intra-generational” heterogeneity and further sub divisions or “waves” of Gen Y (Kruger & Saayman, 2015).

Consistent across a number of studies is Gen Y’s strong orientation toward friends and family that, in turn, has generated a longer period of adolescence than was evident in previous generations (see for example Jennings et al., 2010). In addition, although in part driven by the technologies available, the need for social approval by Gen Y continues to feed the online social networks and Web 2.0 technologies (Bausch & McGiboney, 2009; Richardson, 2009). Alongside the observed trait of online immersion, are those of a need for instant gratification and an overall shortening of attention spans (Fountain & Charters, 2010; Moss, Parfitt, & Skinner, 2009).

Another trait that is frequently debated, and disputed, is the degree to which Gen Y have significant financial sources at their disposal (see Morton, 2002; Valentine & Powers, 2013). That said, Gen Y have been found to demonstrate a particularly “spend now” and “save later” culture (Martin & Turley, 2004), while they demonstrate a particular liking for brands at the same time seeking value for money (Kim & Kim, 2005). Running parallel to the wider experiential paradigm, Gen Y seek experiential consumption experiences with a preference for listening less and doing more in a co-creative manner (Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2010; Jennings et al., 2010) with implications for those responsible for the pre-, during and post-visit consumption experience. However, it has been suggested that, whilst the debate regarding level of disposable income continues, scholars such as Gardiner, Grace, and King (2014) identify the importance of emerging generational cohorts to destinations, and conclude that the development of products and experiences need to be cognisant of the needs and wants of the consumer of the future.

2.2. The Asian consumer and Asian Gen Y

With the above discussion relating predominantly to Western Gen Y consumers, in recent years the English language literature has begun to feature a number of studies on the consumption patterns of the Asian consumer. For example, a study by St-Maurice, Sussman-Dyckerhoff, and Tsai (2008) highlights a number of key generic consumer trends evident in China, with Chinese consumers tending to be less adventurous than others and very wary of untried products, which impacts directly on their choice of brands. St-Maurice et al. (2008) also highlight the very sensitive “value for money” nature of Chinese consumers, with recommendations from family and friends and word-of-mouth being far more influential than more traditional television advertising. With a particular focus on younger consumers, Fan and Xiao (1998) provided a consumer typology with a specific focus on decision-making, containing five dimensions; brand consciousness; quality consciousness; price consciousness; time consciousness; and; information utilization. Although their study found that young adult consumers in the US, Korea and China demonstrated all five dimensions, young Chinese consumers differed from the US and Korean consumers, who demonstrated further dimensions of novelty-fashion consciousness; impulsiveness; and habitual brand loyalty, all of which were missing from Chinese respondents to this study. Gardiner and Kwek (2017) in their study of Chinese Generation Y’s perceptions of adventure tourism found they have a unique generational socio-cultural perception of taking part in adventure activities, and

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