Chapter 13

# Promoting America:
## How Do College-Age Millennial Travelers Perceive Terms for Branding the USA?

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to illustrate how college student perspectives with regard to promoting the United States as an international tourism destination can be fruitful for destination communication managers. This chapter presents the results of a survey of 691 foreign and domestic college students and identifies categories of terms to describe America that these students reported. The term categories are also examined to see if the respondents' year in school, gender or foreign/domestic student status impacts their identification of terms. The findings offer suggestions for campaign themes that support or run contrary to images currently held by the respondents.*

## INTRODUCTION

Millennials. Generation Y. Boomerang Generation. Echo Boomers, IGeneration. Net Generation. Call them what you will. Even Millennials themselves resist identifying with these labels (Pew, 2015a). Regardless of distinction, they are a dominant part of the United States population. Millennials (born between 1982 and 2000) now number 83.1 million and represent more than one quarter of the nation's population. Their size exceeds that of the 75.4 million Baby Boomers, according to new United States Census Bureau estimates (June, 2015). Millennials are projected to attain an even larger population gap at 78 million compared to the Boomers' 58 million by 2030, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Though society is aware of the robustness of the Millennial generation and the fact that they are tech-savvy, there has not been significant research about how this generation will impact the travel/tourism industry. The purpose of this investigation is to determine what branding terms used to describe the United States will resonate with college-age Millennial travelers, a group that has the potential to impact the travel/tourism industry for many future decades. We begin the analysis with a brief discussion of the economic impacts of tourism.

## Tourism's Contribution to the Economy

Travel and tourism plays a significant role in contributing to the economy. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) increased by 4.7% in 2014, reaching a total 1.138 billion; this is 51 million more than in 2013. This is the fifth consecutive year of above average growth since the 2009 economic crisis. International tourism receipts reached $1245 billion worldwide in 2014, up from $1197 billion in 2013, corresponding to an increase of 3.7% in real terms (taking into account exchange rate fluctuations and inflation). Forecasts prepared by UNWTO in January 2015 point to a 3% to 4% growth in international tourist arrivals in 2015. International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) hit a record 1.138 billion worldwide in 2014, up from 1.087 billion in 2013 and the forecast for 2030 predicts 1.8 billion international tourists. With 46 million more tourists traveling the world (+4.3%), 2014 marked the fifth consecutive year of robust growth above the long-term average (+3.3% a year) since the financial crisis of 2009. World tourism accounts for 9% of the gross domestic product (direct, indirect and induced impact), $1.5 trillion in exports, 6% of the world's exports, and 1 in 11 jobs.

In the United States, direct spending on leisure travel by domestic and international travelers totaled $621.4 billion in 2013, according to United States Travel Association (USTA). A total of $2.1 trillion was generated in economic output by domestic and international visitors, which includes $887.9 billion in direct travel expenditures that spurred an additional $1.2 trillion in other industries. A total of $133.9 billion in tax revenue for federal, state and local governments was generated by travel spending while 2.7% percent of the nation's gross domestic product is attributed to travel and tourism. The United States received 69.8 million international arrivals in 2013, to include 31.9 million from overseas markets. Direct spending by resident and international travelers in the United States averaged $2.4 billion a day, $101.4 million an hour, $1.7 million a minute and $28,154 a second.

As noted earlier, the purpose of this investigation is to determine what branding terms used to describe the United States will resonate with college-age Millennial travelers, a group that has the potential to impact the travel/tourism industry for many future decades. To achieve this purpose, the current investigation will review the literature related to destination branding and competitive identity. Additionally, previous research on the role of public relations in public diplomacy will also be reviewed, as will literature on the Millennial consumer.

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