

# **The New Generation Z in Asia**

# THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF MANAGING PEOPLE

**Series Editor:** Professor Emma Parry, Cranfield School of Management, Swindon, UK

The past two decades have represented a time of unprecedented social, technological and economic change that has required a transformation in human resource management (HRM). Shifts in demographics, continued increases of women in the workforce and greater mobility across national borders have led to higher diversity in the workplace. Advances in technology, including social media, have enabled new ways of doing business through faster communications and vast amounts of data made available to all. Mobile technology with its ubiquitous connectivity has led to renewed concerns over work–life balance and extreme jobs. These and many other changes have seen evolving attitudes towards work and careers, leading to different expectations of the workplace and mean that existing ways of managing people may no longer be effective. This series examines in depth the changing context to identify its impact on the HRM and the workforce.

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# **The New Generation Z in Asia: Dynamics, Differences, Digitalisation**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# Dedication

Many researchers, teachers, and students who are part of the international scientific community probably once came across the name of Christian Scholz. As a university professor from Saarbrücken, Germany, his oeuvre covered various disciplines in social science, such as business-related human resource management, information management, and media management, conflating it with psychological, historical, and sociological references. Since 2014, when he started his topical journey with a seminal book (Wiley, 2014), he was one of the first international researchers profoundly focussing on the ‘Generation Z’, its characteristics, qualities, attitudes, preferences, and expectations towards employers and society. This focus on Generation Z directed his attention to Southeast Asia and its young generation ready to shape the future.

Through this book, I pay tribute to Christian Scholz who passed away 4 October 2019 at the age of 66. It would have never been written without the expertise and effort of Christian. In 2017, he brought together various researchers and young academics in a conference in Bangkok to discuss the particularities of the Generation Z in Asia. In his research, Christian pursued the idea that there is globally more than one type of Generation Z and that the cross-cultural differences could be identified. Based on our mutual interest, I made friends with Christian, and we both decided to bring our knowledge together in the first book on Generation Z in Asia. I would have very much loved to finalise it and celebrate its release together with him.

Christian Scholz was a researcher of great intellectual originality and his deep knowledge of Generation Z around the world – his research trips on this topic took him across Europe, America, Africa, and Asia that were reflected in further international publications, among them ‘Generation Z in Europe’ (Emerald, 2019) – made him a respected researcher in our academic community. Beyond that, he published far more than 20 scientific books and more than 670 journal articles.

In addition to his scientific competence which characterised him, to his great intellectual curiosity and to his immense and remarkable scholarliness, he was very sympathetic, friendly, pleasant, and generous. The academic community will always remember Christian Scholz with honour and gratitude.

Today, I dedicate this work to you, Christian!

Elodie Gentina

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# Generations Z in Asia: Foreword

Around 18 months ago I had the privilege of contributing both a chapter (on Generation Z in the UK), and the foreword, to a book on Generations Z in Europe, edited by Christian Scholz and Anne Renning. This book provided a useful and unique analysis of the characteristics of the younger generation in different European countries. For some time, I have been complaining about the tendency for both scholars and practitioners to take a universal approach to generations and to assume that the characteristics of generations are the same regardless of the country in which the generations that an author is discussing are based. It was therefore a delight to be part of a book that took a contextual approach to studying the characteristics of a particular generation. It was because of this experience that I jumped at the chance to co-edit this current text – on Generations Z in Asia – and to include this within my book series on *The Changing Context of Managing People*.

It is important to note, of course, that accepting this request was also tinged with sadness – a co-editor for this text was only needed because Professor Christian Scholz – who both conceptualised and started work on this text had been taken seriously ill, and later passed away. Having worked with Christian on the previous text, I feel compelled to recognise his passion for this topic and the enthusiasm that both got this manuscript moving and brought the first text to fruition. This book undoubtedly belongs to Christian (along with Elodie Gentina) – I see myself therefore as no more than a caretaker in seeing this book to its completion.

My personal involvement in editing this text – and the memory of Christian – means of course that I am particularly delighted to be able to introduce this new book as part of the series. The continent of Asia becomes increasingly dominant in the world landscape in relation to its economic growth, population size and growing influence on aspects such as technologies and fashion. With this in mind, it is important that we understand the characteristics of the Asian people both as consumers and employees. And yet, research in this area is still limited. In relation to generational differences, scholars have historically drawn on western models of generational groups with very few researchers exploring the attitudes and expectations of different age cohorts in Asia in particular. Not only does this book address that need, but it also goes one step further by considering the values and preferences of the younger generation in different countries and regions of Asia to examine the similarities and differences between those of different nationalities. Given the rich historical and cultural landscape within Asia, alongside

differences in religion, economic climate and tradition, this provides a fascinating discussion of Generation Z in different Asian countries and the factors that have driven their values and expectations. I hope that you will enjoy this text as much as I have enjoyed editing and reading it.

*Emma Parry*  
*Series Editor*



Part I

## **Generation Z in Asia: A Research Agenda**

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## Chapter 1

# Generation Z in Asia: A Research Agenda

*Elodie Gentina*

### Abstract

Generation Z, including individuals born from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s, is said to be different from other generations before. Generation Z is said to be the generation of digital natives, with multiple identities; a worried and creative generation who value collaborative consumption; and a generation looking forward. The authors present here tentative observations of Generation Z in Asia using theoretical approaches and scientific backgrounds: the authors show how socialisation theory (parents and peer group) and technology (relationship with smartphones) offer meaningful perspectives to understand Generation Z behaviours in Asia. Finally, the authors ask some key questions about dealing with Generation Z in Asia in the field of smartphone use, consumer behaviour (shopping orientation), collaborative consumption (sharing), and work context.

*Keywords:* Generation Z; digital natives, Asia; consumers; workers; research

### Introduction

For several years, Millennials, digital natives, and other names for ‘Generation Y’ have been the focus of academic research (e.g. Business Administration, Behavioural Management, Sociology, Psychology, etc.) and even more of practitioners in companies, politicians, teachers, parents, and of course of the media. However, over the past few years, a new generation slowly has moved into focus: Generation Z, including individuals born from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s. This generation of digital natives has grown up in a digital, technology-saturated world. We cannot understand Generation Z without understanding the context in which they have grown up. Then we can examine their characteristics, their behaviour as consumers, and their behaviour at work.

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Worldwide, young people from ‘Generation Z’ are characterised by similar consumption practices with respect to clothing, music, and media use, pointing to the evidence of a ‘global youth culture’. This presumed uniformity, however, might be inaccurate. Recent research suggests that ‘Generation Z’ adapts global consumption practices and meanings to fit local contexts (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Consistent with this finding is a handful of cross-cultural studies that reports significant differences in consumer behaviour between highly individualistic cultures (e.g. Western cultures) and strongly collectivist cultures (e.g. Eastern cultures). This leaves open questions: How does the Generation Z look in other regions of the world? Are there specific patterns? Unique questions? Global questions? Much remains unknown, in particular about the behaviours of Generation Z especially in Asia.

### ***The Concept of Generation***

The concept of generation is a cross-disciplinary concept with different meanings, linked to age, genealogy or the filiation, and historical period. We focus here on the definition of generation proposed by Attias-Donfut (1988) in Sociology which relies on four different meanings:

1. generation in the demographic sense, gathering all people belonging to the same age range;
2. generation in the genealogical and family sense, making the distinction between the older generation (e.g. parents and grandparents) and younger generation (children) with a normalised hierarchical relation of the domination of the former over the latter;
3. generation in the historical sense, as the length of time required to renew individuals in public life, estimated as the time needed for a child to become independent and integrated in public life (estimated at 30 years on average);
4. generation in the socio-cognitive or sociological sense, gathering a group of individuals born in the same time period, during which they have shared unique events created by their common age situation within history (referring to generational cohort). For instance, Baby Boomers had the Vietnam War. *Millennials* had 9/11 and the financial crisis. For *Generation Z*, their life-altering world event might be the *Coronavirus* crisis, and the accompanying slew of school closings, quarantines, and high unemployment rates.

There exist different generational cohorts ‘whose members are linked to each other through shared life experiences during their formative years, including macroeconomic conditions’ (Pekerti & Arli, 2017, p. 390):

- Baby Boomers born approximately between 1950 and 1964.
- Generation X born approximately between 1965 and 1979.
- Generation Y born approximately between 1984 and 1988.
- Generation Z or digital natives born after 1995.

Prior studies in consumer behaviour refer to generational cohorts to explain similarities related to their consumption behaviours inside the same age cohort and differences between different age cohorts (Pekerti & Denni, 2017). For instance, consumers in younger Generation Y are more impulsive (Hsiao & Chang, 2007) and are more permissive of questionable consumer behaviours (Freestone & Mitchell, 2004). Other studies in the management have shown some differences between age cohorts concerning their working relationships. For instance, members of Generation X are more intrinsic in their work motivation than Generation Y. Generation Z is more realistic than Generations Y and Z with regard to perceiving ethicality of work situation (Boyd, 2010).

Given that sharing life experiences related to consumption behaviour and working relationships is concerned, we naturally favour generation in its socio-cognitive or sociological sense. However, we do not focus on this exclusive sociological dimension of generation here, we also take into consideration the genealogical/family and historical perspectives present in socio-cognitive and historical approaches of generation.

## **Characteristics of Generation Z**

### *A Generation of Digital Natives*

The new generation of digital natives, who were born around the end of the first decade, can be considered as a new breed of digital citizens. They have unprecedented access to technology. Unlike Generation X or Y, who are 'digital immigrants', Generation Z gathers the first true digital natives who have abandoned traditional computers for mobile devices. Members of Generation Z do not need to familiarise themselves with technology by comparing it to something else. On the contrary, they propose new ways of thinking about how technology can be effectively used. Generation Z perceives the world through different eyes: what is a novelty for digital immigrants is something ordinary, for digital natives as it is an integral part of their lives. For instance, 55% of parents estimate that their children under the age of 12 are more technologically knowledgeable than themselves (Dingli & Seychell, 2015).

A survey by Project Tomorrow (tomorrow.org) found that Generation Z is digitally literate, connected, experiential, social, and demanding of instant gratification. A 2017 Pew Research Center report showed that 92% of American teens go online daily and 91% of them are connected to the Internet through mobile devices. By age 20, these young adults will have spent around 20,000 hours online exploring their place and identity in the world. Many adolescents consider smartphones as integral parts of their lives and can hardly imagine living without them (Roberts, Yala, & Manolis, 2014). For example, in South Korea (the country with the highest smartphone penetration rate worldwide), almost 75% of tweens (aged between 10 and 15) spend more than 5 hours per day using a smartphone (Roberts et al., 2014). Adolescents spend on average more than 3 hours per day on their smartphone, suggesting that smartphone addiction among adolescents is a prevalent problem among members of Generation Z (Gentina & Delécluse,

2018). Smartphone addiction is ‘the excessive use of smartphones in a way that is difficult to control’ (Gökçearsan, Mumcu, Haşlaman, & Çevik., 2016, p. 640). More specifically, nomophobia, defined as a fear of having to go without mobile devices (Roberts et al., 2014), is emerging as a common phenomenon among Generation Z.

Generation Z loves their online audience but also value their anonymity. They know how to manage their digital privacy because they have grown up with a keen understanding of the line between public and private in online settings, and, thus, preserve their privacy. This can explain why Generation Z has less interest in Facebook, preferring social media. Generation Z can more easily keep their interactions restricted to their intimate friends or present a carefully curated image. Generation Z tries to keep communication private, and, thus, prefers private social networks such as Snapchat.

### *A Generation with Multiple Identities*

Members of Generation Z express themselves through their personal characteristics, appearance, clothes, hobbies, and interests. At the same time, members of Generation Z, who spend most of their time online, express themselves in the real world while also extending and complementing their offline social life by using the digital environment. Thus, they manage their identity online and offline.

The way of expressing oneself is the main difference between Generation Z (digital natives) and Generation Y (digital immigrants). Digital natives are able to change many aspects of their personal identities much quicker and easier than it was before, thanks to online applications or online social networks (e.g. Facebook, My Space, Snapchat). They create their identity online thanks to a new profile in a social network, where they present themselves in a way that could be strikingly different from the way they present or express themselves in real space. Thus, members of Generation Z usually change aspects of their personal and social identities almost constantly and experiment with multiple identities online thanks to their profile pictures and avatars (as they change their clothes or hairstyle).

Friendships are important in Generation Z’s lives. Adolescence is marked by transformational intrapersonal changes in identity and increased need to belong to a peer group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). If digital immigrants (Generation Y) still prefer to make friends in person, Generation Z (digital natives) is open for friendship with people from around the world, thanks to their constant access to online social networks. Members of Generation Z flocked to social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to continue their social interactions with people who are already a part of their extended social network (Ellison, 2007). Facebook provides opportunities for young people to make new friends (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009). Moreover, Twitter attracts Generation Z who is interested in engaging in short conversations with other teens to receive and share information with others, a way to develop more social interactions (Kwon, Park, & Kim, 2014).

Another major shift between Generation Z and other generations (Generations Y, X, and Baby Boomers) is related to the method of watching television. Among

American adults, 59% of them cite cable or satellite as their primary method of watching television, according to a 2017 Pew Research study. On the contrary, the majority of Generation Z use their smartphone as their primary medium to watch videos. In a recent [Business Insider survey \(2018\)](#) conducted among 104 teens nationwide, only 2% of Generation Z said that cable was their most-used choice for video content. Nearly a third said YouTube was their most-used source for video content, and 62% said streaming including Netflix or Hulu. They watch YouTube as a niche for hobby-driven content, such as beauty or cooking show.

### ***A Worried Generation***

A generation is ‘an identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages’ ([Smola & Sutton 2002](#): 364). Members of a generation share a history and common experiences, and this collective consciousness creates their worldview. Each generation is shaped by national and international events that take place during their formative years, when their identity and world views are still in flux. Throughout the world, the younger generation has grown up with the War on Terror, the spread of violent jihadism and terrorism. The Coronavirus pandemic might be a watershed moment in the lives of Generation Z. According to survey of US teenagers (ages 13–17) from Common Sense Media taken in March–April 2020, 63% are worried about the effect that COVID-19 has on their family’s ability to make a living or earn money and 42% feel ‘more lonely than usual’. Members of Generation Z have grown up in a world that hasn’t always made them feel secure. Thus, they are pessimistic about the future – and overall seem unhappy with the state of the world that they have inherited. Overall, 37% of young people think the world is getting worse, compared to 20% who think it is getting better (39% think neither) ([Broadbent, Gougoulis, Lui, Pota, & Simons, 2017](#)). In March 2020, a Pew Research Center survey showed that half of young people from Generation Z (ages 18–23) reported that they or someone in their household had lost a job or taken a cut in pay because of the outbreak.

Their greatest sources of anxiety, experienced by around half of Generation Z throughout the world, were the age-old concerns of money and school. Despite media focus on the issue, the pressures of social media were only seen by 10% of young people as one of their main sources of anxiety. There is some variation in the level of happiness depending on cultures. The highest happiness levels tend to be in developing countries such as Indonesia (90%), Nigeria (78%), and India (72%), and the lowest happiness levels are in advanced economies such as France (57%), Australia (56%), and the United Kingdom (57%) ([Broadbent et al., 2017](#)).

### ***A Creative Generation***

Members of Generation Z seek to make, collaborate, and co-create, as they want control and preference settings ([Saettler, 2014](#)). They apply their innate talent with new technologies and social media to launch new businesses and participate in the creation of new products that appeal to their peers and others. Online social

networks function not only as socialising channels but also as means to participate in co-creation processes. Generation Z want to collaborate, interact, create, and share their ideas on social media platforms. According to [Gurtner and Soyez \(2016, p. 101\)](#), ‘young consumers can be described as “agents of changes” and thus more open to innovative technologies’. As the most connected, educated, and sophisticated generation in history, they don’t just represent the future, they are creating it ([Kingston, 2014](#)).

Growing up in the midst of a recession makes Generation Z less likely to believe in the availability and security of good jobs. Instead, they are more focussed on creating opportunities for themselves. They exhibit strongly innovative, entrepreneurial, and independent spirits, and 40% of Generation Z claim that they plan to invent something that will change the world ([Seemiller, 2016](#)). They place a lot of emphasis on being resourceful and entrepreneurial: 72% of high school students and 65% of college students want to start their own business ([Gentina & Delécluse, 2018](#)). Not only is Generation Z a group of consumers, but they are also the next generation of business owners. Generation Z will start businesses and the peer-to-peer (P2P) economy will continue expanding.

### *A Generation Who Values Collaborative Consumption*

Generation Z is often defined as a specific and unique class of materialistic consumers. Their materialistic values – and modern young consumers (adolescents, children) may be among ‘the most brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialistic generation in history’ ([Schor, 2004, p. 13](#)) – are primarily determined during their adolescent years, especially if they have sufficient material resources to achieve a specific, positive social identity through their consumption. Yet in contrast with these seemingly widespread concerns about Generation Z’s materialism, we revisit the very fundamental question about the extent to which Generation Z should be considered materialistic consumers, in the conventional sense of the term. Generation Z values experience more than material goods and aims not mainly to possess items but rather to exchange them. More specifically, the Coronavirus pandemic is likely to change Generation Z’s perspective, because it has caused Generation Z to re-think how they spend their money and what their financial goals are. Generation Z seeks consumption-based, alternative means, such as exchanging and sharing practices.

Besides possessions (sharing tangibles), sharing intangibles such as sharing online enables new sharing possibilities. Sharing with others online includes open-source code writing; sharing information on Internet bulletin boards (BBs) and chat rooms; publishing blogs (Weblogs), vlogs (video logs), and Web sites; contributing to collaborative online games; participating in P2P file sharing, maintaining listservs; and responding to e-mail requests. Those who make use of these online resources are a part of Internet sharing. Generation Z is the first digital native generation who is impacting the current P2P economy. According to [Nielsen \(2018\)](#), among 68% of global respondents who rent products from others in shared communities, 35% are Generation Z consumers.

The sharing economy is the result of living through the financial crisis and economic slump, when the concept of ownership could feel fleeting. Collaborative