

## **10. Understanding Generation Z: Challenges and Resilience**

*Dr. (Fr.) Mukl Clarence, S. J.*

### **Introduction:**

Generation Z, defined as individuals born between the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2010s, represents a cohort distinct from previous generations due to their unique formative experiences in an era of rapid technological advancement and social change. As the first true digital natives, they have grown up with smartphones, social media, and instant access to information, profoundly shaping their worldview and daily interactions. This generation has also been influenced by significant global events and trends, including the economic repercussions of the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of social media and influencer culture, increasing awareness of climate change, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have contributed to their pragmatic and socially conscious outlook on life.

Generation Z's diversity is another defining characteristic. They are the most ethnically and culturally diverse generation in history, which has fostered an inclusive mindset and a strong commitment to social justice. This diversity is reflected in their social networks, media consumption, and political attitudes, making them champions of equality and inclusivity.

Understanding Generation Z is crucial for several reasons. As they enter adulthood, their behaviors, values, and preferences are beginning to shape various sectors, from the workforce and education systems to marketing strategies and political landscapes. Businesses, educators, policymakers, and researchers need to comprehend the unique attributes and challenges of this generation to effectively engage with and support them. This article aims to explore the sociology of Generation Z by examining their identity, social behaviors, values, and the sociocultural influences that shape their experiences. By delving into these aspects, we can gain insights into how this generation is poised to impact the future and what strategies can be employed to harness their potential.

### **Digital Natives:**

Generation Z is often referred to as digital natives due to their inherent familiarity with technology from a young age. According to Twenge (2017), this generation's seamless integration of technology into daily life distinguishes them from previous cohorts. They have never known a world without the internet, and their earliest memories likely include playing with a tablet or watching videos on a smartphone. This constant exposure to digital media has not only shaped their social interactions but also influenced their cognitive development and learning styles.

From an early age, Generation Z has been using technology not just as a tool, but as an extension of themselves. They are adept at navigating multiple devices and platforms simultaneously, often referred to as "media multitasking." This ability to juggle various forms of media and information sources has led to the development of unique cognitive skills, such as enhanced visual-spatial abilities and faster information processing. However, it also raises concerns about attention span and the depth of their engagement with content (Twenge, 2017). Social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok play a central role in the lives of Gen Z, serving as primary venues for social interaction, self-expression, and entertainment. These platforms have created new forms of socialization and community-building that transcend geographical boundaries. However, they also come with challenges, such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and privacy issues. The constant need to be online and present on social media can lead to stress and anxiety, contributing to the mental health issues prevalent among this generation (Twenge, 2017). Education for Generation Z has been heavily influenced by digital technology. They are accustomed to using digital tools for learning, from educational apps and online resources to virtual classrooms. This digital integration has made learning more accessible and personalized, allowing students to learn at their own pace and access a wealth of information beyond traditional textbooks. However, the reliance on digital media for learning also poses challenges, such as ensuring equitable access to technology and maintaining students' attention in a virtual environment. Generation Z's digital nativity also extends to their consumer behavior. They are more likely to engage in online shopping and use digital payment methods. Their purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by online reviews, social media endorsements, and digital advertising. Brands that successfully engage Gen Z do so by leveraging social media influencers and creating interactive and immersive online experiences. In summary, being digital natives' shapes Generation Z's social interactions, cognitive development, learning styles, and consumer behaviors. Their adeptness with technology provides them with unique skills and opportunities, but it also presents challenges that need to be addressed by educators, parents, and policymakers.

### **Diverse and Inclusive:**

Cultural diversity is not merely tolerated but celebrated by Generation Z. Raised in an era of globalization and multiculturalism, Gen Zers exhibit a profound appreciation for the richness of human cultures and traditions. Their exposure to diverse cultural influences, facilitated by the internet and social media, has fostered a cosmopolitan outlook and a spirit of cultural curiosity (Manca & Ranieri, 2017). This cultural pluralism permeates their interactions, consumption choices, and worldview. Generation Z is at the vanguard of challenging traditional gender norms and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights. With greater visibility and acceptance of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, Gen Zers champion inclusivity and equality for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. This commitment to gender and sexual inclusivity is reflected in their language, social interactions, and activism efforts.

Generation Z's consumption patterns are guided by their values of inclusivity and social responsibility. They are discerning consumers who prioritize brands and businesses that demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. From supporting companies with diverse representation in advertising to favoring brands with transparent supply chains and ethical business practices, Gen Zers use their purchasing power to advocate for inclusivity and social justice (Cain, 2019). Generation Z is renowned for its activism on social justice issues, ranging from racial equality and environmental sustainability to LGBTQ+ rights and gender equity. This activism is characterized by its inclusivity and intersectionality, as Gen Zers amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized communities and advocate for systemic change. Through grassroots organizing, online campaigns, and direct action, Gen Zers are driving meaningful progress towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

### **Social Behaviors and Interactions:**

One of the most notable aspects of Generation Z's communication style is the prevalence of visual language. Emojis, acronyms, and gifs have become ubiquitous in digital conversations, serving as shorthand for conveying emotions, reactions, and context. Rather than relying solely on written text, Gen Zers use these visual elements to enhance their messages and add depth to their communication. Emojis, in particular, have evolved into a sophisticated form of expression, with users selecting from a vast array of symbols to convey nuanced emotions and sentiments. This visual language transcends linguistic barriers, enabling Gen Z to communicate effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures. While digital communication offers unparalleled convenience, it also poses challenges for Generation Z. The constant connectivity afforded by smartphones and social media can lead to information overload and digital fatigue. Gen Zers must navigate a barrage of notifications, messages, and updates, often feeling overwhelmed by the constant influx of information. Moreover, the prevalence of online communication platforms raises concerns about privacy, cybersecurity, and the authenticity of online interactions. Gen Zers must remain vigilant about safeguarding their personal information and discerning between genuine connections and superficial interactions in the digital realm. Understanding Generation Z's communication style is essential for educators, employers, and policymakers seeking to engage with and support this generation effectively. In educational settings, instructors must recognize the role of technology in students' lives and incorporate digital tools and platforms into their teaching practices. In the workplace, employers must adapt their communication strategies to accommodate Gen Z's preference for digital channels and embrace collaborative technologies that facilitate remote work and virtual collaboration. Likewise, policymakers must consider the implications of digital communication on issues such as privacy, cybersecurity, and digital literacy, ensuring that Gen Z has the skills and resources to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

### **Social and Political Engagement:**

This generation holds distinctive attitudes towards values, beliefs, and social and political engagement, shaped by their unique experiences, upbringing, and exposure to global events. This cohort, often characterized by their digital fluency and multicultural outlook, exhibits a diverse range of values and beliefs, reflecting the complexities of modern society. Generation Z places a high value on inclusivity, diversity, and social justice, advocating for equality and representation across various dimensions, including race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status (Pew Research Center, 2020). They are vocal proponents of environmental sustainability, expressing concerns about climate change and advocating for policies and practices that promote ecological conservation and renewable energy (Twenge, 2017). Moreover, Generation Z is characterized by its digital activism and social consciousness, leveraging technology and social media platforms to raise awareness about social and political issues and mobilize support for causes they believe in (Twenge, 2017). This generation's engagement in social and political activism has significant implications for policymakers, businesses, and society at large. By understanding and responding to Generation Z's values, beliefs, and modes of engagement, researchers can inform efforts to address pressing social and political challenges and create a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

### **Mental Health Awareness:**

They show a distinctive attitude towards mental health awareness, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of mental well-being and destigmatization of mental health issues within this cohort. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z is more open and vocal about mental health struggles, seeking to foster a culture of acceptance and support. This generation acknowledges the prevalence of mental health disorders and the impact they can have on individuals' lives, prompting increased advocacy for mental health awareness and access to resources (O'Keeffe, 2019). Generation Z's attitudes towards mental health are shaped by their experiences with stress, academic pressure, social media, and societal expectations, leading to a greater emphasis on self-care, mindfulness, and seeking professional help when needed (Twenge, 2017).

Moreover, Generation Z leverages digital platforms to share personal stories, offer support to peers, and advocate for mental health initiatives, contributing to a broader conversation about mental well-being. As researchers, understanding Generation Z's attitude towards mental health awareness is crucial for developing targeted interventions, support services, and policies that address the unique needs and challenges faced by this generation. By fostering a culture of openness, destigmatization, and proactive mental health care, researchers can empower Generation Z to prioritize their mental well-being and build resilience in the face of adversity.

***Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):***

FOMO refers to the anxiety or apprehension that one is missing out on something enjoyable or rewarding happening elsewhere, often amplified by social media. Generation Z, growing up in an era of constant connectivity and social media influence, experiences FOMO more intensely than previous generations. Social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok create a curated version of reality, showcasing only the highlights of people's lives. This constant exposure to others' seemingly perfect lives can lead to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and anxiety among Generation Z. The pressure to keep up with the latest trends, events, and experiences shared on social media can result in excessive screen time, sleep disturbances, and a diminished sense of self-worth as individuals compare their lives to others.

***Body Image Concerns:***

Generation Z is bombarded with idealized and often unrealistic images of beauty and body standards through social media, advertising, and mainstream media. This constant exposure to edited and filtered images can distort perceptions of beauty and lead to body image dissatisfaction. Body shaming and cyberbullying are prevalent on social media platforms, exacerbating body image concerns among Generation Z. Negative comments, comparisons, and unrealistic beauty standards can contribute to low self-esteem, eating disorders, and mental health issues. The pressure to attain an idealized body image can lead to unhealthy behaviors such as extreme dieting, excessive exercise, and cosmetic procedures among Generation Z, further perpetuating body image issues and insecurity.

***Decline in Face-to-Face Interaction:***

With the rise of digital communication platforms and social media, face-to-face interaction among Generation Z has declined significantly. Instead of engaging in real-life interactions, many young people prefer to communicate through text messages, social media posts, and video calls. The decline in face-to-face interaction can have negative consequences for social skills development, emotional intelligence, and relationship-building among Generation Z.

Without regular practice and exposure to real-life social situations, individuals may struggle to navigate interpersonal relationships and communication challenges. Research has shown that excessive screen time and reliance on digital communication can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection from others. Despite being more connected digitally, Generation Z may experience a lack of genuine connection and intimacy in their relationships.

### ***Low Self-Esteem:***

Generation Z faces unique pressures and challenges that can contribute to low self-esteem, including academic pressure, social media influence, and economic uncertainty. The constant comparison to others, fear of missing out, and body image concerns can erode self-confidence and self-worth. Social media platforms often promote unrealistic standards of success, beauty, and happiness, leading individuals to question their own worth and accomplishments. The pressure to curate a perfect online persona can create feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. Low self-esteem can have far-reaching effects on mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. It can manifest in symptoms such as anxiety, depression, perfectionism, and self-doubt, hindering individuals' ability to reach their full potential and thrive in various areas of life.

### **Education and Career Aspirations:**

They display distinct attitudes towards education and career aspirations, influenced by their experiences, values, and the rapidly evolving global landscape. This cohort places a high value on education, viewing it as a pathway to personal growth, professional success, and societal impact. Generation Z seeks educational experiences that are engaging, interactive, and relevant to real-world challenges, favoring experiential learning, project-based approaches, and interdisciplinary studies (Twenge, 2017). Moreover, they prioritize digital literacy and technological proficiency, recognizing the importance of digital skills in today's job market. When it comes to career aspirations, Generation Z is characterized by its entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and desire for meaningful work. They are drawn to careers that offer opportunities for innovation, flexibility, and social impact, valuing work-life balance and personal fulfillment over traditional markers of success (Twenge, 2017). Generation Z's attitudes towards education and career aspirations have significant implications for educational institutions, employers, and policymakers. Educational institutions must adapt their curricula and teaching methods to meet the evolving needs and preferences of Generation Z, incorporating technology, real-world applications, and experiential learning opportunities into the educational experience. Likewise, employers must recognize and respond to Generation Z's values, offering meaningful work, career development opportunities, and flexible work arrangements to attract and retain top talent. Policymakers must also consider the implications of Generation Z's educational and career aspirations for workforce development, economic growth, and social mobility, ensuring that educational and employment opportunities are accessible to all members of this generation, regardless of background or circumstance. As researchers, understanding Generation Z's attitudes towards education and career aspirations can inform efforts to address the challenges and opportunities presented by this cohort, facilitating the development of policies, programs, and initiatives that support their academic and professional success and contribute to a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

### ***Education Challenges:***

**High Academic Pressure:** Generation Z often faces intense academic pressure to excel in school. This pressure stems from various sources, including parents, teachers, peers, and societal expectations. The emphasis on standardized testing, GPA, and college admissions can create a hyper-competitive environment that contributes to stress, anxiety, and burnout among students.

**Technology Distraction:** While technology offers many benefits in education, it also presents challenges for Generation Z students. The constant presence of smartphones, social media, and digital distractions can impede concentration, productivity, and academic performance. Technology addiction and multitasking can further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for students to focus on learning.

**Cost of Education:** Higher education is becoming increasingly expensive, with rising tuition costs, student loan debt, and financial barriers limiting access to quality education for many Generation Z students. The burden of student loan debt can have long-term financial implications, delaying milestones such as homeownership, marriage, and retirement savings.

**Adapting to Remote Learning:** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote learning, presenting new challenges for Generation Z students. Adapting to online classes, digital platforms, and virtual collaboration can be challenging, particularly for students who lack access to reliable internet connectivity, technology devices, or a conducive learning environment at home.

### ***Job Market Challenges:***

**Economic Uncertainty:** Generation Z is entering the job market during a period of economic uncertainty, characterized by job insecurity, wage stagnation, and volatile employment prospects. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, with widespread layoffs, business closures, and disruptions to traditional work models. **Skills Mismatch:** Despite having access to more education and training opportunities than previous generations, Generation Z often faces a skills mismatch between the skills they possess and those demanded by employers. Rapid technological advancements, automation, and globalization are reshaping the labor market, requiring new skills and competencies that traditional education systems may not adequately provide. **Gig Economy and Precarious Work:** Generation Z is increasingly drawn to non-traditional work arrangements such as gig work, freelancing, and short-term contracts. While these options offer flexibility and autonomy, they also come with challenges such as income instability, lack of benefits, and limited job security. Balancing multiple gigs or side hustles can also lead to burnout and work-life imbalance.

**Competitive Job Market:** The job market is highly competitive, with an oversupply of qualified candidates vying for limited job opportunities. Generation Z must navigate fierce competition, networking challenges, and the need to differentiate themselves from their peers to secure desirable positions. Additionally, entry-level jobs often require previous work experience, creating a catch-22 situation for recent graduates seeking to gain practical experience.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Generation Z, with its distinct characteristics, faces a multitude of challenges in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social interactions. As digital natives, they navigate a rapidly changing landscape shaped by technology, globalization, and socio-economic shifts. Challenges such as mental health issues, academic pressure, technology distraction, economic uncertainty, and job market competitiveness present formidable obstacles for Generation Z individuals as they transition from education to the workforce. However, despite these challenges, Generation Z also demonstrates resilience, adaptability, and a strong sense of social consciousness. They embrace diversity, advocate for social justice, and leverage technology to drive positive change in their communities and beyond. Their entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and commitment to making a difference offer hope for a brighter future. Moving forward, addressing the needs and aspirations of Generation Z requires a collaborative effort from educators, employers, policymakers, and society at large. Investments in education, mental health support, skills training, and economic opportunities are essential to empower Generation Z individuals to thrive in an ever-evolving world. Embracing inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability, while fostering meaningful connections and mentorship, will pave the way for Generation Z to fulfill their potential and contribute positively to society.

In essence, Generation Z represents a generation of promise and potential, poised to shape the future with their unique perspectives, values, and aspirations. By recognizing their challenges, harnessing their strengths, and providing the necessary support and opportunities, we can ensure that Generation Z emerges as leaders, innovators, and change-makers in the years to come.

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