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Gen Z Mannerisms: A comparative analysis of perceptions and attributions across generations

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Abstract
This study examines the generational shift in values and mannerisms among Generation Z (Gen Z) in Malaysia, focusing on concerns over declining respect and traditional social norms. Using a quantitative approach, it explores views of Gen Z, parents, and teachers regarding the impact of parenting styles, education, digital technology, and Western culture on Gen Z's attitudes. Findings highlight the shared recognition of parenting and Western influence, while Gen Z also cites social media as a key factor. The study offers insights into generational differences and ways to promote understanding across age groups.

Keywords: Generation Z; Mannerisms; Parenting styles; Digital literacy

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1.0 Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s (Eldridge, 2024), constitutes a critical demographic group in Malaysia with the potential to shape the nation's future. It is no doubt a cohort that represents a seismic cultural shift. One notable concern is the perceived erosion of respect and values among this demographic, particularly in their interactions with elders, peers and societal norms. This shift in behaviour is especially concerning in countries like Malaysia, where cultural values such as respect, kindness, and compassion towards older generations are highly valued. Malaysia, striving to be a leader in upholding societal values across Asia, places a strong emphasis on maintaining proper conduct and civility, especially among its youth. This aligns with the principles of the Ministry of Education Malaysia's Thinking Process Model (2001), which highlights the importance of knowledge, attitudes/values, and cognitive skills in developing responsible and learned citizens. However, many from the baby boomer and Generation X generations believe that Gen Zs, who represent the future of the nation, are increasingly deficient in these critical values.

Despite the importance of this issue, there is a noticeable lack of research on how Gen Z is perceived for their manners and respect within Malaysian society. Dass, Subramaniam, Muzlia, and Hasan (2021) emphasise this research gap, underscoring the need to examine the behaviour of the younger generation from various perspectives. Some of the factors that shape the characteristics and mannerisms of Gen Zs, in particular, will be discussed here, including parenting style and guidance, the influence of digital technologies, and Western culture. This study seeks to gather perspectives from two key groups: parents, teachers, and guardians who play essential

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roles in shaping Gen Z behaviours, and the Gen Zs themselves, to explore their self-perceptions. Utilising a quantitative-method approach, this research aims to identify the factors influencing their attitudes and behaviours, based on the hypothesis that promoting civility among Gen Z is essential for national development. The outcomes of this study will provide valuable insights into the current state of youth manners in Malaysia and offer practical recommendations for fostering a well-mannered workforce, which is vital for Malaysia's aspirations of becoming a developed nation, as outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2015-2025).

1.1 Problem Statement

The mannerisms of Generation Z (Gen Z) have increasingly become a subject of debate among older generations, particularly Generation X and Baby Boomers, across cultural and social contexts. Gen Z is often perceived as lacking values and respect toward parents, educators, elders, and peers. However, such perceptions are frequently based on assumptions rather than systematic evidence. There remains limited empirical research that compares how Gen Z perceives its own mannerisms with how these behaviours are viewed by older generations, as well as the factors contributing to these perceptions. This study seeks to address this gap by examining Gen Z's mannerisms from both generational perspectives and identifying the underlying factors influencing these behaviours, including technology use, social values, communication styles, and globalisation. By comparing viewpoints across generations, the research aims to provide a balanced understanding of behavioural differences and similarities. The findings are expected to contribute to strategies that promote intergenerational understanding and reduce generational misconceptions. The hypotheses formulated for this study are:

H1: There is a significant difference between Gen Z and older generations in their perceptions of Gen Z's mannerisms.
H2: There is a similarity between Gen Z and older generations in the reasons attributed to Gen Z's mannerisms.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Gen Z

Extensive research has long portrayed each generation through positive and negative stereotypes linked to their formative years. A person's identity, attitudes, and beliefs are shaped by significant historical events, parenting approaches, and popular culture trends (Deluliis & Saylor, 2021). In essence, this study implies that our surroundings and the context in which we are raised play a crucial role in shaping who we become. This literature review aims to explore Gen Z's mannerisms in interactions with older generations and among themselves, while investigating the factors that contribute to their prevailing mannerisms. Dass, Mohan, and Subramaniam (2022) found that valuing and respecting others is crucial, as it has repeatedly been shown to be the foundation for forming successful relationships. They further posit that politeness underscores a key element of civilised conduct, embodies mutual respect and friendliness in our interactions with others. As a nation, the older generation needs to understand the traits of the younger generation, which is crucial to harnessing Gen Z's potential as catalysts for nation-building. Gen Z is a unique cohort characterised by its tech-savviness, multicultural outlook, and a strong sense of social justice (Twenge, 2014). This generation, born and raised in a world that offers the most advanced technology the world has ever seen, is native to all kinds of digital communication tools and social media (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021). Both generational experiences and environmental influences shape the Gen Zs. Smartphones and other smart gadgets have become a primary means of communication, information gathering, and entertainment (Twenge, 2017). This digital environment shapes the communication patterns and information-seeking behaviour of this generation, which views technology as its identity.

2.2 Factors Contributing to Gen Z Behaviour

2.2.1 Family and Educational Institutions

Parents and family play the most important role in moulding their children's value system, which, in turn, determines their mannerisms. The values imparted by parents, along with the guidance provided throughout the growing years, shape their sense of social responsibility and cultural awareness to a greater extent (Ng, 2002). By nurturing an atmosphere of openness to new ideas and personal opinions, and by instilling empathy, this approach has shown that Gen Z individuals display a more civil-minded attitude and socially conscious behaviour. They want their ideas to be heard and their opinions valued by managers, indicating that the workplace should prioritise ideas and contributions over age (Gaidhani, Arora & Sharma, 2019). This happens because their greatest value is individual freedom (White, 2017). To better understand Gen Z's mannerisms, it is essential to consider generational experiences, environmental influences, and peer interactions. Family upbringing continues to play a vital role in shaping Gen Z's values and behaviour. A study conducted by Mayangsari, Utomo, and Pujiati (2020) on the role of family in building social values in their Gen Zs suggests that, regardless of the activities parents engage in or the extent of their children's internet usage, as long as parents are actively involved in guiding their children, the children's values and socio-cultural behaviour will remain positive. This is supported by Purba and Retno (2023), who wrote that while technological advancements can negatively impact teenagers' character, Generation Z can avoid these effects if they receive religious education within the family to help shape their character. Parents who encourage open discussions, empathy, and respect tend to produce Gen Z individuals who exhibit civil and socially conscious behaviour (Ng, 2002).
Educational institutions, too, play a significant role in the development of Gen Zs (Hart, 2018).

2.2.2 Rapid Modernisation

The rapid modernisation and globalisation in our industrialised world have, unfortunately, contributed to the erosion of essential values, like respect for elders, and have altered the attitudes of the younger generation towards the older population (Dass, Subramaniam, Muslia & Hasan, 2021). A recent poll found that 62% of Malaysians are anxious about aging, with more than half believing that the elderly are not adequately respected (Chung, 2019). Wachege and Rugendo's (2017) study on youth morality in Kenya found that modernisation has affected family values among young people, with individualism, new attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyles becoming the norm. Šramková and Sirotiaková (2021) wrote that Gen Z is a generation fully integrated into the online world, which is its natural communication environment, often at the expense of direct personal communication.

Advances in technology may lead children to prefer interacting with their devices, rather than humans, making them less likely to engage with the real world and more likely to ignore their surroundings and relationships (Gunaidi, 2016). There is also widespread concern about the decline in morality and humility among Gen Z. Meng (2019) emphasises that the moral decline in developed nations worldwide is deeply concerning. There is a widespread decline in interaction between the young and the old within families. Dass, Subramaniam, and Rahmat (2021) argue that the younger generation incurs a substantial loss when they fail to humble themselves to learn from life's experiences and the wisdom of their elders. The knowledge on the factors that make Gen Zs who they are and how they conduct themselves is essential for educators, policymakers, and parents to leverage their potential and empower them to meet the increasingly unpredictable future.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to address the two research objectives: (1) to examine Gen Z mannerisms in daily life as perceived by Gen Z and older generations, and (2) to identify factors influencing these mannerisms. Data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed to two purposively selected respondent groups in Malaysia. Group A consisted of Gen Z respondents born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, identified through an age filter question. Group B comprised adults (parents, guardians, and teachers), identified through marital status without age restrictions. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed in January 2024, with 200 usable responses obtained from each group. The questionnaire was adapted from established sources and comprised five sections, focusing on three categories of mannerisms adapted from Kerrigan (2020): manners at home, manners when having guests, and manners in public places. Responses in Sections B to D were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), while Section E included a combination of 5-point and 10-point scale items. Data were analysed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied, with an independent samples t-test used to address Objective 1 and multiple regression analysis conducted to address Objective 2.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The demographic profile of both groups of respondents in the study is shown below. Table 1 presents the profile of the older generation, while Table 2 presents the profile of Gen Z.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Older Generation

No.	Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency(n)	Percentage(%)
1	Age	30 - 39 years	58	29
		40 - 49 years	50	25
		50 - 59 years	58	29
		60 - 69 years	28	14
		>70 years	6	3
2	Gender	Male	46	23
		Female	154	77
3	Ethnicity	Malay	102	51
		Chinese	14	7
		Indian	72	36
		Others	12	6
4	Marital Status	Single	42	21
		Married	146	73
		Separated/Widow	12	6
5	No of children	None	46	23
		1	34	17
		2	51	26
		3	44	22
		> 3	25	12
6	No of children of Gen Z	None	92	46
		1	37	19
		2	32	16
		3	27	13
		> 3	12	6

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Gen Z

No.	Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency(n)	Percentage(%)
1	Age	12 – 17 years	0	0
		18 - 23 years	186	93
		24 - 27 years	12	6
		19 - 24 years	2	1
2	Gender	Male	42	21
		Female	158	79
3	Programme	Science programme	52	26
		Social Science programme	43	22
		Others	105	52
4	Ethnicity	Malay	164	82
		Chinese	11	5
		Indian	12	6
		Others	13	7
5	Marital Status	Single	199	99
		Married	1	1
6	Single Parent Family	Yes	23	12
		No	177	88
7	Only Child in Family	Yes	18	9
		No	182	91

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the older generation. Most of the respondents (29%) are young, aged 30-39 years, while 17 per cent are aged 60 or older. Most respondents are female (77%) and currently married (73%). As for the number of children, 60 per cent of respondents have at least two children, while 23 per cent have none. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of Gen Z. It is noted that a majority (93%) of the respondents are between 18 and 23 years old, with 79% being female. 26% of respondents are enrolled in a science programme, while 22% are enrolled in a social science programme. A majority (99%) of the respondents are single. 12 per cent are from single-parent families, and 9 per cent are from one-child families. Accordingly, the hypothesis tested in this section is:

H1: There is a difference in the perception of the mannerisms of Gen Z by the Gen Z generation in comparison to the older generation.

To determine whether there is a difference in the perception of Gen Z's mannerisms between the Gen Z generation and the older generation, an independent t-test was conducted in SPSS 26 to compare the means of the two independent groups. The test results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Results Showing Perception of the Mannerism of Gen Z by Two Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
mean_MGZ	Equal variances assumed	32.449	.000	-13.315	398	.000	-1.076	.081	-1.235	-.917
	Equal variances not assumed.			-13.315	336.724	.000	-1.076	.081	-1.235	-.917

As shown in Table 3, the p-value is < 0.05, indicating a significant difference in the perception of Gen Z's mannerisms between the older generation group and the Gen Z group. Therefore, hypothesis H1 is accepted, which is:

There is a difference in how Gen Z perceives the mannerisms of the Gen Z generation compared to the older generation.

These results are supported by previous studies, including one focused on millennials' mannerisms, which found that millennials perceive themselves as very polite in most cases. However, the older generation's views on the millennial generation's polite behaviour differ significantly. This shows that today's young people are significantly different from previous generations in terms of values (Dass, Subramaniam, Muslia & Hasan, 2021). Jayatissa (2023), in her study on the mannerisms of Gen Z, found that differences exist between Gen Z and the previous generation in terms of values, attitudes, and behaviours.

Different cultural, technological, and societal factors that affect each group's viewpoint can help explain why Gen Z perceives its own generation's mannerisms differently from older generations (Heys, 2024). Raised in a digitally connected world, Gen Z's communication, values, and behaviours reflect global perspectives, shifting trends, and social media norms. They view themselves as creative, inclusive, and adaptable—traits suited to their fast-paced environment. In contrast, older generations, shaped by more

analogue and structured upbringings, may see Gen Z as overly informal or lacking traditional decorum (Chillakuri, 2020). These differing social contexts likely underpin the generational divide in views on appropriate behaviour and communication. The second research objective in this study is to investigate the factors cited by the Gen Z and the older generation that contribute to the mannerisms of the Gen Z. Accordingly, the hypothesis tested is:

H2: There is a similarity in the factors given for the mannerisms of the Gen Z by the Gen Z and the older generation.

To achieve this research objective, multiple regression analyses were conducted for the older generation and Gen Z groups, respectively. The results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 - Factors that Contribute to the Mannerisms of the Gen Z as perceived by the Older Generation

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
Factors	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	7.807	2.928		2.667	.008	2.033	13.581					
PS	.455	.051	.527	8.888	.000	.354	.556	.532	.536	.525	.992	1.008
SMU	-.010	.048	-.013	-.208	.835	-.104	.084	-.104	-.015	-.012	.930	1.076
IWC	-.267	.092	-.178	-2.922	.004	-.448	-.087	-.191	-.204	-.173	.937	1.067

Notes - N=200, PS, parenting styles; SMU, social media use; IWC, influence of western culture

Results of the multiple regression analysis for the older generation's data are shown in Table 4 above. As shown in the table, two variables make a significant contribution to predicting the dependent variable (mannerism of Gen Z). Parenting style and the influence of Western culture make a significant contribution to the mannerisms among Gen Z. However, social media does not significantly predict Gen Z mannerisms. There is a positive relationship between parenting style and mannerism, indicating that a better parenting style is associated with better mannerism. However, a negative relationship between Western culture's influence and mannerism suggests that a stronger influence of Western culture may have a negative effect on Gen Z's mannerism.

Based on the correlation coefficient, parenting style explains more of the variance in Gen Z's mannerisms than Western culture (Pallant, 2020). A higher beta value also indicates that parenting style has a greater influence than Western culture, as perceived by the older group.

Table 5 - Factors that Contribute to the Mannerisms of the Gen Z as Perceived by Gen Z

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	8.480	1.833		4.626	.000	4.865	12.095					
PS	.212	.036	.364	5.958	.000	.142	.282	.478	.392	.344	.894	1.119
SMU	.191	.037	.315	5.191	.000	.119	.264	.438	.348	.300	.907	1.102
IWC	.153	.074	.125	2.078	.039	.008	.299	.273	.147	.120	.925	1.081

Notes - N=200, PS, parenting styles; SMU, social media use; IWC, influence of western culture

Results of the multiple regression analysis for Gen Z are shown in Table 5. It is interesting to note that parenting style, social media use, and influence of western culture significantly contribute towards the mannerisms of Gen Z ($p < 0.05$). This shows that Gen Z perceive that all three variables contribute towards Gen Z's mannerisms as perceived by Gen Z. The parenting style has a partial correlation coefficient of 0.364, and the square value is 0.118. This means that parenting style explains 11.8% of the variance in total mannerism of Gen Z scores. For social media use, the part correlation coefficient is 0.3, and the square value is 0.09. This means that social media use explains 9% of the variance in total mannerism of Gen Z scores. For the influence of Western culture, the part correlation coefficient is 0.12, and the square value is 0.014, indicating a unique contribution of 1.4% to the explanation of variance in the mannerism of Gen Z. The parenting style explains more of the variance in the mannerism of Gen Z than social media use and the influence of western culture, but all of them make a unique contribution to the understanding of the mannerism of Gen Z (Pallant, 2020). Based on the beta value, Gen Z also perceive that parenting style is the most important factor that contributes towards the Gen Z's mannerisms. This is followed by social media use and the influence of Western culture. Hence, Hypothesis H2 is accepted:

There is a similarity in the factors given for the mannerisms of the Gen Z by the Gen Z and the older generation.

Results show that for the older generation, parenting style and the influence of Western culture are significant in predicting the mannerisms of Gen Z. However, for Gen Z, parenting style, social media use, and influence of Western culture are all significant factors for predicting the mannerisms of Gen Z. Findings from both Gen Z and older generations highlight parenting styles and Western cultural

influence as key factors shaping Gen Z's behaviour. For Gen Z, social media is also influential. Prior studies support this: Oerther (2021) noted that parenting approaches vary by culture and social context, shaping Gen Z as "digital natives." Gentina (2020) emphasised the need to examine cultural and psychological factors influencing parenting, given their role in shaping Gen Z's values.

Western cultural influence also differentiates generational values. Studies show that Millennials and Gen Z differ markedly from older generations in views on egalitarianism, fate, and individualism (Farrell & Phungsoonthorn, 2020; Heys, 2024), leading to distinct communication styles. Social media further distinguishes Gen Z. Immersed in digital life, they use platforms to express opinions, make choices, and interact (Wynne & Alvermann, 2021). For instance, Burhanudin and Dewi (2024) found that children mimic behaviours seen on platforms like YouTube. In sum, Gen Z's mannerisms are shaped by parenting, Western culture, and social media, thus projecting consistency with prior research and providing vital perspectives for understanding this generation's behaviour.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Two major conclusions can be drawn from this study. Firstly, the perception of the mannerisms of Gen Z by the Gen Z generation in comparison to the older generation varies significantly. Secondly, parenting styles and Western culture influence the mannerisms of Gen Z as perceived by the older generation. This slightly differs from the factors which contribute to how Gen Z perceive their mannerism. In addition to parenting style and Western culture, the younger generation also believes that social media use affects their mannerisms. Both generations agree that parenting styles and Western cultural influences play a major role in shaping the behaviour of Gen Z. However, Gen Z also acknowledges the strong influence of social media on their interactions and communication. These findings emphasise the importance of supporting the younger generation through guidance that promotes a balance between technological engagement and cultural awareness.

This study highlights a clear divide in how Gen Z and older generations perceive the mannerisms of the younger generation. The differences in perception stem from broader social and cultural changes, including the rapid advancement of technology, shifting values, and the increasing influence of globalisation. While older generations may see Gen Z's behaviour as less formal or traditional, Gen Z views their own actions as creative, adaptive, and aligned with the digital age. In conclusion, addressing the generational divide in perceptions requires a collective effort to promote understanding and cooperation. Finally, further research into the factors that shape generational mannerisms is necessary. Future studies should explore how different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds influence the behaviours and perceptions of Gen Z. Additionally, longitudinal research examining how these perceptions change over time will provide valuable insights into the evolving social norms and behaviours of future generations.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study contributes to generational and social value research by empirically comparing perceptions of Generation Z, parents, and teachers in Malaysia, highlighting the roles of parenting, education, digital media, and Western influence in shaping contemporary youth attitudes.

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